



Gastronomic Catalonia

Fine food and wine, art and architecture

28 October–4 November 2024

(MK 544)

8 days • £4,540

Lecturer: Gijs van Hensbergen

Eat well, drink well: Michelin-starred meals, award-winning chefs and quality wine producers.

Sightseeing ranges from medieval to Modernist art and architecture.

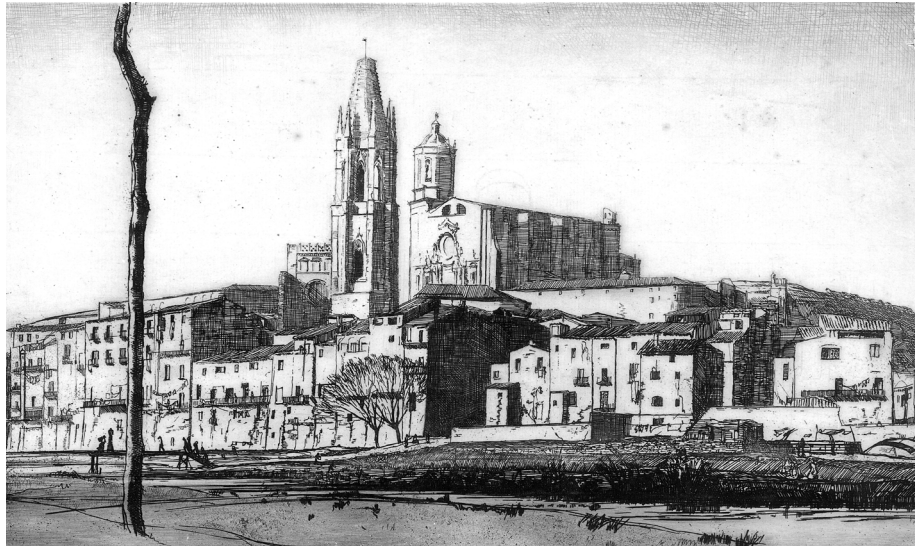
Also includes the lesser-visited city of Girona, and a day in the northernmost reaches of the region, crossing into France.

Food is the beating heart of Catalonia. The glorious variety of Catalan gastronomy reflects both an extraordinary passion for food and the singular cultural history of Catalonia. Food culture, husbandry, medical and dietary matters reach back to the period when the Greeks first settled at Empúries to worship the healing image of Asklepios. The Carthaginians followed, bringing lentils, chickpeas and fava beans; the Romans introduced the vine and olive.

For centuries Moorish domination brought a passion for sweetmeats, spices and aubergine. The Catalan larder expanded further in the Middle Ages when control over Mediterranean trade routes brought pasta from Naples and the discovery of the Americas introduced other key ingredients for the Provençal and Catalan table: tomato, potato and paprika.

The Barcelona food markets and specialist emporia are among the most beautiful and enticing in the world. Set out in cartwheels under ceilings of Art Nouveau stained glass, the stalls fan out from their fresh fish hub. Marble sinks soak the milky salt cod; cornucopia of fruit and vegetables are displayed with the subtlety of a still-life; butchers offer specialities and recipes upon request; the mushroom man has thirty varieties, fresh and dried. At the outer edges are the dealers in nuts and artisan cheeses that never find their way out of Catalonia.

In the city of exuberance and riotous colour of Antoni Gaudí's architectural confections, it is but a little way to the tour-de-force of a zarzuela fish stew, shot through with a firework display of saffron, bright red peppers and the creamy smooth burnt *alloli* sauce. The *mar i muntanya* dishes – the original surf and turf – marry together a remarkable blend of game,



Girona, etching c. 1920s.

fowl or rabbit with langouste, enriched with a subtle chocolate sauce.

On 30 July 2011, the most influential chef in history, Ferran Adrià, closed the doors of the mythic El Bulli to dedicate himself to research. His pioneering cuisine celebrated new tastes and complex techniques which migrated deep into France; even to the Élysée Palace. A disciple of Adrià, El Bulli's charming and eagle-eyed maitre d' Toni Gerez (voted in 2022 as the best in world) continues in the castle of Peralada to create a contemporary vision of Empordà cuisine. In Barcelona the charming Hermanos Torres, with 3 Michelin stars, cook in front of us with new spins, beguiling twists and astonishing flavour bombs. In a converted farmhouse near Vic the dynamic Nandu Jubany grows his own fruit and veg and herbs at the door to serve in celebration of authenticity and alluring profundity.

There is far more to Catalonia than Barcelona, and historically the region extends into France. There are the fishing ports and the countryside, the Pyrenees and the Vallées Orientales, and the wines: Priorat, rich and tannin-steeped; Cava and their new elite Corpinnat sparkling wines offering brilliance and clarity; sweet Moscatel, peasant foil for the great Gewürztraminer experiments of the last decade; Penedès reds, as good with meat as slightly chilled with fish. Catalan wine is enjoying an extraordinary renaissance.

Itinerary

Day 1: Barcelona. Fly at c. 9.30am from London Heathrow to Barcelona, capital of Catalonia and cosmopolitan market place. Our first visit en-route is to a Cava Corpinnat producer with views across to Montserrat. Our evening tapeo is a delicious time capsule back to the 1960's – rustic, authentic and a pure expression of 'hand into mouth' joy. First of three nights in Barcelona.

Day 2: Barcelona. Visit the extraordinary Palau de la Musica, designed by Domènec i Montaner, and then on via the gothic masterpiece Sta Maria del Mar to our first wine tasting masterclass, courtesy of Quim Vila, the God of Catalan wine merchants. This will include rarities from the Priorat and Penedès. In the late afternoon we visit Gaudí's Sagrada Família, and continue on to the Barri Gòtic, the most complete surviving Gothic quarter in Europe; still the location of some of the finest eating establishments and food suppliers in Catalonia. Dinner is in an intimate bistro – hosted by an acolyte of Ferran Adrià.

Day 3: Barcelona. On the slopes of Montjuïc the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya houses the greatest collection of Romanesque frescoes in the world. We visit the legendary Boqueria market, followed by lunch in the world heritage Fonda Espanya, a magical masterpiece of modernisme by Domènec. A late afternoon visit takes in Gaudí's equally astonishing La Pedrera building of 1906–09.

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continued

Day 4: Barcelona, Peralada. Take a morning walk in Gaudí's Parc Güell followed by the 14th-century monastic bliss of Pedralbes. An elegant lunch is prepared at the Hermanos Torres Michelin 3-star venue. Leave Barcelona and drive up the coast to the outskirts of Figueres. First of four nights in Peralada.

Day 5: Empúries and Figueres. We visit the cradle of Catalan cuisine and husbandry at the Greek and Roman ruins of Empúries. If El Bulli represented the apotheosis of Catalan cuisine – the foundation stone was surely Figueres' Motel Empordà – classic modern at its very best. The afternoon will finish at Salvador Dalí's wildly eclectic museum.

Day 6: Girona and Vic. Girona has a compact medieval Jewish quarter and Gothic cathedral towering over the river. Important illuminated manuscripts and tapestries are displayed in the chapterhouse. Lunch is inland at Michelin-starred Can Jubany, a converted farmhouse serving the very best home-grown produce.

Day 7: Collioure (France), Figueres. Drive into France to the pretty port of Collioure, a favoured retreat for Matisse and the Fauves. Return to Spain, for a visit and tasting at the award winning Peralada bodega designed by Pritzker Prize winners RCR architects – the first sustainable bodega in Europe. A final elegant dinner at Michelin-starred Castell Peralada ends with Toni Gerez's amazing cheese board.

Day 8: Barcelona. Gaudí's true masterpiece is his Cripta Güell, south of Barcelona in a late 19th-century utopian worker's colony. Fly to London Heathrow, arriving c. 5.00pm.

Lecturer

Gijs van Hensbergen. Art historian and author specialising in Spain and the USA. His books include *Gaudí, In the Kitchens of Castile, Guernica* and *La Sagrada Familia*. He studied Art History at the Courtauld and is a Fellow of the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies at the LSE.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,540 or £4,330 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £5,230 or £5,020 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach and some use of the metro in Barcelona; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 4 lunches and 4 dinners (including 1 light dinner), with wine, water and coffee; all wine and food tastings; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Condes de Barcelona (condesdebarcelona.com): a centrally-located 4-star hotel, very well placed for buildings by Gaudí. **Hotel Peralada** (hotelperalada.com): a 5-star spa and golf hotel situated in the Albera mountains with an excellent restaurant.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking in Barcelona – some of it over uneven paving – where vehicular access is restricted. A good level of fitness is necessary. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Meals can be long and large and dinners tend to start at 9.00pm, so expect some late nights. Average distance by coach per day: 69 miles.