

LOCAL INFORMATION

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Catalonia is located in the northeast of Spain, bordering France to the north, Aragon to the west, the Valencian Community to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the east (580 km of coastline), and it is divided into four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. Catalonia is one of the 17 autonomous communities that constitute Spain. The Catalan government is known as the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Catalonia is the most populous autonomous region in Spain, with an official population of 7,210,508, of which immigrants represent an estimated 12.3% of the total population. In 1900, the population of Catalonia was 1,984,115, and in 1970, it was 5,107,606. That increase in population was produced due to large-scale internal migration during the 1960s and early 1970s from the rural interior of Spain to its industrial cities. In Catalonia, Spanish migrants arrived in large numbers from the southern regions, especially from Andalusia, Murcia, and Extremadura. During the last decade, Catalonia has undergone an unprecedented increase in international migration, and within the Mediterranean, it is considered to be one of the main reception areas for international migration.

THE CITY OF BARCELONA

The city of Barcelona is the capital and most populous city of Catalonia and is the second largest city in Spain. Barcelona was founded in the in the 3rd century B.C. by the Carthaginians. Nowadays, the Urban Region of Barcelona includes 5,327,872 people, and about 1.6 million people live in the city of Barcelona, which is divided into ten administrative districts, each one with its own district council, which allows a system of decentralized, local administration.

Barcelona is a coastal city and has over 4 kilometres of urban beaches as well as large areas of nearby forest. The city has a typically Mediterranean climate and enjoys pleasant temperatures most of the year round. Summers are hot and humid, winters mild, and most of the rainfall occurs in the spring and autumn. The weather in October and November is still pleasant but starting to get a little cooler (average temperatures from 15°C to 21°C, 59°F to 69°F). You may not find sunshine every day, though, so be prepared for days when it may be overcast with a little rain.

Click <http://www.bcn.es/turisme/english/turisme/welcome.htm> for more information about Barcelona.

LANGUAGE

Most of Barcelona's inhabitants are bilingual and speak both Catalan and Spanish; both of these are official languages in Catalonia. Some people may also speak French or English.

In the majority of shops, museums, cultural and social centres, and venues in the city, signs and information are commonly found in the two official languages and in English. In the city centre, restaurant menus are often available in English.

TRANSPORT

Aerobus

This is the bus that takes you from the airport to the centre of Barcelona (Plaça de Catalunya), and vice versa. You can buy a ticket on the bus itself or from the ticket machines at the airport bus stops. The timetable for weekdays (Monday to Friday) is from 5:30 a.m. to 12:15 a.m., and the buses run every 6 to 15 minutes.

Some advice:

- Be sure to check bus departure times, as they vary on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.
- When waiting for the bus, make sure that you put your hand out for the driver to see you well in advance, or he will not be able to stop.
- If you are accompanied by someone who is disabled, there is space reserved for people with disabilities to travel comfortably.

Click

http://www.sarbus.com/paginas/aerobus_tcc.php?id_idioma=3&PHPSESSID=5e2c7f63687299483a1b01e42862557e for more information.

Taxi

Barcelona has about 11,000 yellow-and-black cabs. You may find a taxi on any street in the city (the green light on the top of the cab indicates that it is free); at taxi stands at the airport, at hotels, and on main streets; or by calling for a taxi by phone.

Customers' rights:

- Choice of route
- A clean vehicle and a smartly-dressed driver
- Choice of sound level and interior temperature
- To receive change for payment by 20-euro notes; no tip is required

Subway and Bus

Barcelona has an extensive public transport network, which includes a large subway network and 800 buses that serve over 80 different routes. There are also several streetcar routes. Individual fares can be paid on buses. There are also 10-fare passes that can be purchased, as well as 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-day passes. Individual tickets, as well as all passes, can be purchased at ticket machines in all subway stations. Each time that you ride on the bus or subway, stamp the ticket or 10-fare pass.

Train

There are two railway lines to travel around Barcelona and from Barcelona to the rest of Catalonia, Spain, and Europe. Both lines have a central station in Plaça de Catalunya, located in the heart of the city. There are day-return passes and multiple travel cards.

Click http://w3.bcn.es/XMLServeis/XMLHomeLinkPI/0,4022,173198596_173206177_3,00.html for more detailed information on transport in Barcelona.

CUSTOMS CONCERNING TIMES

Working hours

The workday generally begins at 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. and lasts until about 8:00 p.m., with a two-to three-hour break for lunch in the afternoon.

Meal times

In Barcelona, as in the rest of Spain, people normally have their meals later than in other European countries and North America. The first meal of the day is usually eaten between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. and tends to be lighter than in the rest of Europe, being similar to what hotels call a "continental" breakfast. People sit down for lunch sometime between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m. and for dinner between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m. Nevertheless, restaurant hours are adapted to the pace of working life and often open for lunch at 1:30 p.m., while dinner may be served as late as 11:30 p.m. It should also be noted that there are restaurants (especially *tapas* bars) where you can eat at any hour of the day.

Shopping hours

The city's shops have long opening hours. Shops in Barcelona open their doors between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. and generally close for lunch at 1:30 or 2:00 p.m. They open again in the afternoon between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m. and remain open until 8:00 or 8:30 p.m. Many shopping centres and larger establishments do not close at midday. Many shops and all department stores and shopping centres are open on Saturdays, while almost all shops close on Sundays. Banks are open on Monday to Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

ENTERTAINMENT AND SOCIAL HABITS

Although more and more Barcelonans like to go out during the week, Fridays and Saturdays are still the big nights out on the town. A typical evening out begins with dinner at a restaurant, followed by a show at the theatre or a concert, and from there on to a discotheque, bar, jazz club, or elsewhere.

The city centre bustles with shoppers on Saturday afternoons and evenings, and the enormous number of bars and cafés in the area fill with people looking for a break and refreshment.

Sunday mornings and afternoons find throngs of strollers all around the city. In Barcelona, going out for "tapas" is not as typical as it is in other cities in Spain, but it is customary to have an aperitif on the terrace of a bar on sunny days, or inside if the weather does not permit. Nevertheless, for many Barcelonans, the weekend also means getting out of the city.

The area around Plaça Catalunya makes up the city's historical centre and also hosts a wide variety of shops. Some of the architect Antoni Gaudí's most famous buildings are found on Paseo de Gracia, a large boulevard that runs north of Plaça Catalunya. El Corte Ingles, which borders Plaça Catalunya, is a department store (similar to The Bay in Canada) that has long

shopping hours. Barcelona also has several commercial complexes, like L'Illa and Diagonal Mar, located at opposite ends of Avinguda Diagonal; La Maquinista; Glòries; and Maremagnum, which is by the port.

Barcelona contains 68 municipal parks, divided into 12 historic parks, 5 thematic (botanical) parks, 45 urban parks, and 6 forest parks. Of Barcelona's parks, Montjuïc is the largest, located on the mountain of the same name. It is followed by Ciutadella Park (where the zoo and several museums are situated), and Park Güell (designed by architect Antoni Gaudí). The Collserolla Park is also within the city limits.

Barcelona also has seven beaches, totalling 4.5 km of coastline. The Barceloneta beach is the largest, oldest, and the most frequented beach in Barcelona. Other popular city beaches are Nova Icària, Bogatell, and Mar Bella. Barcelona's beaches are among Spain's best-quality beaches.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

Currency

The official currency is the euro (€), which is also the official currency of 13 of the 27 member states of the European Union. One euro is equivalent to 100 (euro)cents and is currently equivalent to about 1.58 Canadian dollars: 1 \$CAD = 0.63 EUR.

Credit cards are widely accepted in Barcelona by numerous hotels, restaurants, and shops. Photo ID is usually required when paying by credit card. If and which credit cards are accepted is indicated by the logos displayed outside shops and businesses (usually on the entrance door). Certain types of Canadian bank cards will also work in Barcelona automated teller machines for the purpose of withdrawing cash.

Electricity supply

Spanish appliances operate on a current of 220 volts. All sockets follow European standards. Plugs are of round two-pin type. You will need an adaptor for Canadian plugs (from three to two-pin type).

Important telephone numbers

General information for Catalonia: 012
General information for Barcelona: 010
Directory Assistance: 11811
Police: 092
Emergency: 112

Tipping

Tipping is discretionary, and usually only with hotel clerks and restaurant waiters. It is not necessary to leave 10-15%.

Tourist Information

A Tourist Information Office is located at Plaça de Catalunya. Free city and transport maps are available.