



A long weekend in... Barcelona

Patricia Cleveland-Peck finds hidden gems aplenty on a specialist shopping tour in the Catalan capital

In a tiny, atmospherically lit boutique in the backstreets of Barcelona, I peer at the contents of some time-worn cabinets in a former draper's shop. But instead of finding fabrics and trimmings, my eye darts from intricate paper bracelets to a necklace decorated with tubular shells and another made from a roughly spun twist of sheep's wool, encased in silver wire. The shop, **Siesta** (Carrer de Ferlandina 18; siestaweb.com), is in the Raval district, a knot of narrow lanes behind the famous **Boqueria food market** (boqueria.info). Once firmly off limits to tourists, the area is now on the up with a quirky, bohemian vibe – on one road, Carrer de la Lluna (Moon Street), the shops even stay open late when there is a full moon – though I doubt I would have found it on my own.

That I did is thanks to two enterprising British women, Lisa Richardson and Niki Robinson, who launched their 'Antiques & Boutiques' tours two years ago, to introduce visitors to the city's hidden gems. Both of them work in fashion – Niki designs shoes and Lisa creates women's wear – but the remit for their tours is far wider. You



Facing page **Gaudí's Casa Batlló** in the **Eixample** district This page, clockwise from top left **Tour guides Lisa and Niki** at antiques market **Mercat Gòtic**; treat yourself in **Magnolia Antic**; the **Columbus Monument** on **La Rambla**; **Casa Maria Esclasans**, Spain's oldest antiques shop; the entrance to **La Boqueria** market



CASA CALVET

Unfortunately, it's not possible to stay in any of Gaudí's fantastical buildings. But you can do the next best thing: eat in one. Built in 1899, Casa Calvet is one of Gaudí's more conventional buildings but inside the restaurant many of the original decorative elements have been retained, including the lamps, reception room benches, door handles and, most importantly, the stained-glass bay window depicting a cypress tree, a symbol of hospitality. Miguel Alija's menu is a creative Catalan take on Mediterranean cuisine – think potatoes stuffed with asparagus and prawns, or risotto of lobster and chanterelles served with a spoonful of thyme-flavoured ice cream. The food sparkles with colour and individuality – just like Gaudí's architecture, in fact. Carrer de Casp 48 casacalvet.es

JON ARNOLD IMAGES LTD/ALAMY; PATRICIA CLEVELAND-PECK; RAFAEL VARGAS; MIKHAIL ZAHRAICHNY; LUCIANO POMPONI/REAMTIME.COM

simply let them know what you'd like to discover – from exciting vintage shops to intimate restaurants and designers' workshops – and off you go.

Having requested a mix of vintage, antiques and craft shops, our next stop is a little workshop in which **Imanol Ossa** (Carrer del Lleó 6; imanolossa.com) creates strange, covetable objects with an upcycled vibe: we see lampshades made from piano keys, a light from a bicycle fender and, most fascinating of all, a lamp fashioned from a stack of china cups and saucers that costs €500. More affordable are the scarves we see fluttering from the ceiling on invisible wires at the **Teranyina Textile School** (Notariat 10 Bajos; teresarosa.com). They are made using the nuno process of felting wool on to gossamer-light silk – we watch, transfixed, as they are woven on big old looms.

Of course, it's not only the contents of Barcelona's shops that are worth seeing. Everywhere we walk there are things to admire, from the Romanesque architecture of the **Barri Gòtic**, the best preserved medieval quarter

in Europe, to the huge Roman columns of the **Temple of Augustus** (part of the Roman city **Barcino**, founded in 15BC) and the highly decorated buildings and shop fronts displaying Barcelona's ornate signature style – a type of art nouveau known as **modernisme**.

Modernist leanings

The grid-like **Eixample** ('enlargement') district, which was created at the turn of the century as a residential area for Barcelona's bourgeoisie, is the epicentre of the city's modernisme style and contains many of the architectural gems by its three most prominent exponents: Antoni Gaudí, Lluís Domènech i Montaner and Josep Puig i Cadafalch. Enthusiasts can walk along the **Ruta de Modernisme** (details from rutadelmodernisme.com or the Barcelona tourist information centre on Plaça de Catalunya), which covers 115 buildings, including Gaudí's still-unfinished **Sagrada Família** church, hospitals, palatial residences, pharmacies and even decorative grocery stores. My favourites include Gaudí's **Casa Batlló**, a glorious edifice



‘The Palau de la Música Catalana is one of the most exuberant buildings in the world’

that features brilliantly coloured shimmering walls, skeletal balconies and an interior entirely devoid of right angles. Domènec i Montaner’s **Palau de la Música Catalana** (palaumusica.org) is another must-see. Its amazing interior, with colourful mosaic figures depicting the muses of music, winged horses and columns, decorated with vibrant floral motifs, makes it one of the most exuberant buildings in the world.

Looking for refreshment, we pop into **Caelum** (Carrer de la Palla 8), a pretty little tea shop that sells *temptacions de monestirs* (temptations from the monasteries) – cakes, jams and other sweet treats made by nuns in convents all over Spain. Many of the delicious confections have Moorish origins as, in the days of Ferdinand and Isabella, some Moors converted to Catholicism to avoid persecution and went into convents as cooks, taking their secret recipes with them.

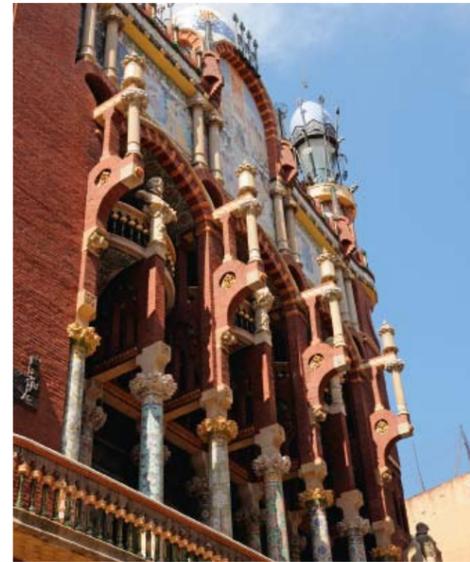
As we feast on cakes with names such as ‘saints’ bones’ and ‘angel hair’, we chat about what sets Barcelona’s shopping apart. ‘It’s the mix of young designers and traditional crafts,’ says Niki. ‘There are so many shops and small ateliers and places that still repair things – and people here seem to care so much about style and design.’



This is immediately apparent in **Gotham**, (Carrer de Cervantes 7, gotham-bcn.com), one of Lisa and Niki’s favourite shops. Quirky sideboards, leopard print-covered stools, lollipop-red Sixties phones and the odd pair of mounted antelope horns – all good quality and affordable – combine to make the sort of mid-century modern mix that sits perfectly in the houses and flats in Barcelona.

L’Arca de l’Avia (Banys Nous 20, larcadelavia.com), unearthed when one of the duo’s friends wanted an unusual wedding dress, is now another of their favourite destinations – and it’s easy to see why. Fabulous vintage garments, antique linens and lace, gorgeous Spanish shawls, crocodile handbags and shoes jostle for space with fans, hats and rails of nightdresses and corsetry, which it now sells as trendy daywear. Similarly, Lisa first discovered **Zaoum** (Carrer de l’Argenter 8) – an inviting mix of vintage and modern fashion in the narrow streets of the Ribera neighbourhood – when she was on the way to a chandelier repair shop that she likes. ‘It’s such a passion with us, we’re always on the lookout for new places,’ she smiles. ‘We love never knowing what we’ll find.’

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Lisa then leads me into **Antiguedades Casa Maria Esclasans** (Carrer de la Pietat), the oldest antiques shop in Spain. Here, beneath huge chandeliers and imposing oil paintings worth thousands of euros – some of which the dapper owner has sold to the Prado museum in Madrid – there are still finds to be had. ‘We opened a drawer in the backroom once and discovered clothing that had probably been there for 20 years,’ says Lisa.

Lisa and Niki are anxious to show me another shop they discovered, this time situated on the lower ground level of one of the buildings in Exiample. There aren’t many vintage shops in this upmarket district – more typical is the elegant **Bulevard dels Antiquaris** (Passeig de Gràcia 55; bulevarddelsantiquaris.com), an upper-floor arcade containing over 70 antiques dealers – but this one is smart. **Magnolia Antic** (Carrer de Provença 290; magnoliaantic.es) boasts linens, table settings, evening gowns, handbags and dozens of hats. ‘This hat has chosen you,’ says the owner, placing a particularly fetching little number on my head. It looks lovely but, at €110 (and thinking of British jumble sales), I hold out.



Facing page, clockwise from left Work began on the Sagrada Família in 1882; an antiques shop in the Barri Gòtic; L’Arca de l’Avia; Siesta in Raval
This page, clockwise from top left Palau de la Música Catalana; vintage dolls at Bulevard dels Antiquaris; the city is full of intriguing streets; Gaudí’s Fountain of the Three Graces; Zaoum in Ribera

To market, to market

Barcelona’s enormous **Els Encants Vells** flea market, held at the Plaça de les Glòries on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, is rough and dirty. But for those who don’t mind a good rummage (and I should think this includes most of the dealers we’d met the day before as, with a little TLC, many of the items at the market would have brushed up well), this is the place. I find old toys, including valuable-looking tin cars, books, religious items, furniture, clothing, lace, antique silver cutlery and glass – all at dirt cheap prices. There are new goods, too: on the whole they’re rather dire but I spot a stall selling real leather gloves in delicious colours for €6.50 a pair.

Bags bulging, my trip is coming to an end but Lisa and Niki’s tour has helped me to see Barcelona in a new light. Not only has it taken me to some places I’d never have found on my own, it has also given me the confidence to wander and to push open the doors of enticing-looking shops. After all, you never know what might be hiding behind.

TRAVELLER’S NOTES

- Antiques & Boutiques offers half-day tours from €160. antiquesandboutiques.com
- H&A stayed at the Gran Hotel Havana. Three nights’ bed and breakfast costs from £579 per person with Kirker holidays, including flights and private car transfers. kirkerholidays.com



Next month
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