

Barcelona's reputation as a fun Spanish language destination with a wide variety of interesting sights is soaring. GILLIAN EVANS finds out more.

**B**arcelona is, according to Caroline Lewis at the Lewis School of Languages, a "very special place to study and enjoy your free time". It is a city with wide appeal, offering a rainbow of cultural opportunities and a lively nightlife scene, coupled with a sociable and easy-going population.

"Barcelona is well known for its nightlife and beaches, but you can also visit a lot of monuments, museums and the [old] quarter," says Maite Martínez at Escuela Parla. The city's bustling boulevards and stylish shops, lively tapas bars and cafés, museums and wonderful architecture combine to provide a great backdrop to a language travel trip. And, as its reputation as an attractive tourist destination grows, so too does its popularity among language travellers.

"Barcelona has become one of the most popular destinations in the world – if not the most popular – to study Spanish," asserts Steven Muller of Babylon Idiomas. "The reputation of the city as the 'hot metropolis of the Mediterranean' continues to grow."

Lewis adds, "Many of our students come to Barcelona because it is one of the most interesting and lively cities in Europe."



#### MACBA

The Museu de Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Macba) opened in 1995. Designed by Richard Meier, it hosts works by the most important contemporary Spanish and international artists



# Barcelona's beat

There are many sites of interest in Barcelona. The city's old centre, Barri Gòtic, is home to medieval buildings and churches in a maze of streets and alleys. Its cathedral, La Seu, is a wonderful Gothic structure, dating from 1298. Every Saturday and Sunday people take part in the sardano, Catalunya's national folk dance, in front of the cathedral.

But it is the city's wonderful collection of modernist buildings that really steals the show. "The architecture of Gaudí is among the most visited sites of the city," says Santiago Alias of UAB Barcelona. The most famous of the city's modernist architecture is Gaudí's Sagrada Família, but there are many gems throughout the city including La Casa, Mila, La Pedrera and Parque Güell,

which offers fantastic views across the city as well as being a trademark Gaudí work. Barcelona is also a haven for art lovers as it is home to the life works of Joan Miró and Antoni Tàpies, as well as a collection by Pablo Picasso. "Museums like the Picasso Museum or the Macba are very popular [among our students]," reports Alias.

Barcelona's cultural richness is just one of the many reasons students are attracted to the city, as Lewis confirms. "The city offers a wide range of cultural attractions in a friendly, laid-back and stylish atmosphere. Its streets, squares, beaches and parks are full of people enjoying the outdoor life and hospitality that the city is so famous for."

The best way to drink in the city's atmosphere is to wander through its bustling streets. "During the day, the famous venues [for students] are Café Zurich, which is located in Plaza Cataluña, and Plaza del Pí, which is sort of a French Montmartre where



## Agent viewpoint

"We send over 100 students to Barcelona each year. Students choose to study there because it is a wonderful world-renowned city with fantastic arts and architecture, a thriving nightlife, excellent language schools, beaches and shopping. It is also easy to get to with scheduled and low-cost flights. Barcelona attracts students of all ages. It is good for younger students as it offers plenty of opportunities for going out, spending days on the beach, participating in sports, etc. For older students, it is popular for these same reasons as well

as the incredible art and architecture, museums and galleries."

**Sarah Gooding, Cactus Language, UK**

"Barcelona is more European and metropolitan than other cities in Spain, in addition to its nice climate. Students like to see the Gaudí buildings, go to the beach and go out in the evenings. They are surprised that most of the tourist attractions are located very close to each other, although it is a big city. People in Barcelona are not as outgoing

as expected, but they are very helpful in situations when the student does not speak Spanish well."

**Helene Norbeck, IEC Trondheim, Norway**

"Some students' comment right from the word go is 'I want to study Spanish in Barcelona'; it seems to be a black or white reaction. If the Catalan issue is a problem, [clients] won't go, if it's not, they will. Barcelona is a fashionable city for language study, it appeals to all ages and interests."

**Katherine Brand, CESA Languages Abroad, UK**

According to Muller, these events "all offer a chance to see street entertainment, fireworks, live music and dancing as only Barcelona seems to be able to offer so often per year!"

While these events enable language travel students to sample some of Barcelona's rich Catalan culture first hand, many language schools supplement this with an interesting selection of classes. At Escuela Parla, for example, Martínez says, "We have lessons where we [give a] cultural, gastronomic and

social view about Barcelona. Also, we have tapas nights, cooking lessons, wine-tasting lessons and flamenco [dance] lessons."

At UAB, students are given the chance to mix with their Spanish contemporaries. "We organise tours, excursions and exchanges with local students," states Alias. "We believe that the best way to learn out of the classroom is by meeting local people. We have a weekly meeting in a bar in the centre of the city where visiting students meet local students for a language exchange."



### **Mercat de la Boqueria**

Said to be one of the oldest food markets in Europe, the central Mercat de la Boqueria is a bustling market selling fresh produce and tapas. It is worth a visit to see the building and enjoy the ambience

Barcelona appeals to all age groups in all seasons, says Muller. "We see our students coming to school with their bathing suits in summer and with maps and guide books in winter," he says. "There are quite a few interesting attractions worth exploring off the beaten track around the hill of Montjuic to the south, such as the Caixa Forum museum and the view from the hill itself: a great sunset almost every night."

Studying Spanish in Barcelona can be the start of a long love affair with the city for many language travellers, as Rialt points out. "For the first time, most people come to learn the language. Afterwards, students usually come back to go out in Barcelona because they like the city very much." □

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