

Catalonia Calling



Barcelona

Welcome to Catalonia, home of Dalí, Picasso and Miró, land of culture, history, art, cuisine, and stunning countryside; a wonderful amalgam of quaint fishing villages, charming coves, endless stretches of golden beaches, crystal clear blue sea, majestic mountains forming a backdrop to pretty almond groves and orchards dotted with tiny medieval villages, historic cities and towns, roman ruins and ancient churches, and the wonders and magic of Barcelona, the region's vibrant capital.

Catalonia is the region of Spain found in the northeast corner of the mainland, bordered by the Pyrenees mountains that separate Spain and France, and the Mediterranean sea. It is Spain's wealthiest region, and although quintessentially Spanish has a markedly distinctive flavour. The Catalans are fiercely proud of their heritage, and rightly so. They remain loyal to their traditions and values, lending them a special character, and even speak their own language.

What is so wonderful about Catalonia is the richness and diversity of its history. At every turn one can find a remnant of the region's past. The city of Gerona dates back to the Roman times and displays an abounding architectural heritage. *El Call*, the Jewish old quarter, is renowned for its narrow streets and architecture from the medieval and baroque eras. Gerona is a chic city offering plenty of upmarket trendy boutiques, eateries and bars.

Further south on the Costa Dorada lies Tarragona, one of Spain's most significant Roman cities, offering a wonderful combination of old and new. The old city is contained within its original Roman fortress walls and houses the Roman oval amphitheatre, still proudly standing overlooking the sea.

Barcelona, Spain's commercial and industrial center and second largest city, is a treasure trove of pleasures and surprises. Here one can find everything a city could offer and more: tree-lined avenues, world-class shopping, trendy cafes and restaurants, beautiful parks, interesting history, art and culture in abundance, character and elegance, sport and leisure, an Olympic village, mountains on one side, sea on the other, a major port, marinas, beaches - the list is endless. This is the place where Gaudí found inspiration to create his most astonishing masterpieces, culminating in the *Templo de la Sagrada Família*, the unofficial symbol of the city that rises majestically from the rooftops.

Barcelona is a traditionally bourgeois city that, whilst modern, lively and cosmopolitan, retains its history and glory. At the heart of the city lies the old quarter, characterized by a maze of charming narrow streets that lead to the *Barri Gotic*, the medieval nucleus of the city where history abounds in the form of an impressive cathedral, museums and monuments. On the far side, leading from the harbour to the grand

central square named *Plaça de Catalunya*, one can wander down the *Ramblas*, the famous bustling boulevard with a buzzing street atmosphere.



Costa Brava

The climate in Catalonia is milder than in the south of Spain, and the Costa Brava in particular is the place to be if you love the sun but not the sizzling heat of the Costa del Sol or Costa Blanca. In winter the region is protected by the mountains in the north and in summer there is always a welcome cool breeze from the sea. Inland the countryside is richer and greener than in the south due to higher levels of rainfall.

Sport forms an important part of life in Catalonia. In summer water sports are very popular, such as sailing, rowing, waterskiing, yachting and windsurfing. The crystal clear blue waters and tiny coves of the Costa Brava make swimming, snorkelling and scuba diving ideal activities. Fishing, hunting, shooting and horse riding are also popular. In winter, the region offers excellent skiing thanks to the snow-covered Pyrenees mountains, which provide miles of varied ski-slopes.

But perhaps Catalonia is more well known for its world class golf courses. The Association of Golf Tour Operators named the Costa Brava as the 'Best emerging golf destination worldwide', while the PGA European tour hold their Final Tour Qualifying School at the golf courses in Pals and Empordà. Golf World also placed five of the region's golf courses in the top fifty of Europe. The selection and variation of courses is outstanding, most surrounded by stunning backdrops thanks to the wealth of beautiful landscapes. The Catalan courses tend to be characterized by their relaxed pace of play, good tee time availability and uncrowded greens.

If you are a lover of good food and wine, you will be in culinary heaven in Catalonia, home to one third of Spain's top restaurants and to 'Best Restaurant in the World', three Michelin stars awarded, *El Bulli*. Here you may have to book a year in advance to reserve a table, but not to worry as you will find countless authentic Catalan restaurants - many with Michelin stars - throughout the region. Many are housed in beautiful old stone farmhouses, elegantly renovated. On the coast one can find good fish and seafood restaurants in abundance, serving produce so fresh you'd think it had gone straight from the sea to the pot. The Catalans are very passionate about their cuisine, placing emphasis on fresh, quality produce and sophistication.

The region also produces its own exquisite wines and olive oils thanks to its rich soil. Catalan wines are typically crisp fruity whites and Cava (the Spanish version of champagne) from the Penedès area, as well as earthy reds from Tarragona. The Catalans are actually renowned for drinking Cava like water! The region offers some good 'Cava routes' that can be explored for tasting and buying.

Catalan virgin olive oil is considered a prized delicacy, highly superior in quality. In fact, the oil produced in the area of Lérida, where cultivating techniques have been perfected over the centuries, is the most expensive in the world.

The standard of living in Catalonia is one of the highest in Europe. Gerona boasts the highest income per capita in Spain and one of the lowest rates of unemployment. Despite a rise in prices following the adoption of the Euro currency, the cost of living in Spain is still relatively low compared to many of its European counterparts, such as owning a house or a car, supermarket shopping, clothes and eating out.

If you are interested in buying a property in Catalonia, there are many beautiful properties available throughout the region, and buying in Spain is affordable, safe and straightforward. It is, however, advisable to work with a reputable English-spoken agent.



If you are a lover of history and art, the property to look for is a Catalan 'masia' (old stately home or farmhouse), some of which are beautifully restored, others ideal for renovating to your taste. Some date back to the



Palau Fonollar

In the old quarter of Barcelona one can find some remarkable properties that form a part of Barcelona's history. One in particular is this magnificent apartment housed in a classical 'palacete', in which the present owners have reproduced the grandeur and charm of the 19th century Count's residence. Through the careful restoration process part of the original walls have been preserved and some original murals recovered.



Roca Alba set in the exclusive Costa Brava Golf Club, 6 km from the coast. Fantastic views over the golf course and the Mediterranean sea.

medieval era, others to the colonial or classical periods. All contain a mark of distinction and elegance, as well as interesting and often beautiful architectural elements from the respective periods.

One company that can offer such a property is *Fincas Exclusivas S.L.*

The company has many years of experience in luxury real estate and know the region well. They offer a good selection of exclusive properties in Gerona province, the Costa Brava, Barcelona and the Costa Dorada.

If you would like to find out more you can visit the company's website at www.fincas-exclusivas.com



Mendez Vigo

This modern building, designed by the famous architect Alonso Balaguer, shows the forms and ideas inspired by architectural pioneers L.H. Sullivan of America and Europe's Le Corbusier. Comprising 3 luxury apartments, it is situated in the world famous 'Eixample', a highly privileged area of Barcelona close to *Paseo de Gracia* renowned for its aesthetically designed architecture.