

THE ARTS

top picks

- Gran Teatre del Liceu (p217)
- Palau de la Música Catalana (p217)
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What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/barcelona

Barcelona's reputation as party city is well established but the presence of wall-to-wall bars does not preclude other cultural pursuits. Indeed, the city bristles with stages that host anything from comic opera to high drama. Dance companies are thick on the ground and popular local theatre companies, when not touring the rest of Spain, keep folks strapped to their seats. Flamenco also has a place here. International acts, from orchestras to contemporary dance troupes, regularly stop by Barcelona.

Institutions as diverse as CaixaForum (p142), the Fundació Joan Miró (p143), La Casa Elizalde (p277), the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB; p80), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Macba; p79) and La Caixa's (p106) stage concerts of varying types, from world music to blues, from classical to klezmer (Jewish music).

The daily papers are good for cinema listings and the **Palau de la Virreina arts information office** (Map pp64–5; ☎ 93 301 77 75; La Rambla de Sant Josep 99; ☎ 10am–8pm; 📄 Liceu) has oodles of information on theatre, opera, classical music and more.

The easiest way to get hold of tickets (*entradas*) for most venues throughout the city is through the Caixa de Catalunya's **Tel-Entrada** (www.telentrada.com) service or **ServiCaixa** (www.servicaixa.com). With the latter service, you can pick up tickets purchased online at La Caixa bank's ServiCaixa ATMs (note that not all La Caixa's holes in the wall offer this service). Another one to try for concerts is **Tick Tack Ticket** (☎ 902 105025; www.ticktackticket.com). There's a ticket office (*venta de localidades*) on the ground floor of **El Corte Inglés** (Map pp108–9; ☎ 902 400222; www.elcorteingles.es, click on *entradas*, in Spanish; Plaça de Catalunya) and at some of its other branches around town (you can also buy tickets through El Corte Inglés by phone and online), and at the FNAC store on the same square.

You can purchase some half-price tickets at the Caixa de Catalunya desk in the tourist office (Plaça de Catalunya). To qualify, you must purchase the tickets in person no more than three hours before the start of the show you wish to see. The system is known as Tiquet-3.

For cinema bookings, see p220.

CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

Barcelona is blessed with a fine line-up of theatres for grand performances of classical music, opera and more. The two historic music houses are the Gran Teatre del Liceu and the Palau de la Música Catalana. The former is the city's opera house and the latter puts on an infinitely more eclectic programme, from choral to Portuguese *fado*. Both have been given a 21st-century remake, the Liceu because it was burned to the ground and the Palau because it so badly needed it! The modern Auditori is home to the city's orchestra.

The *Guia del Ocio* (p194) has ample listings, but the monthly *Informatiu Musical* leaflet has the best coverage of classical music (as well as other 'highbrow' genres). You can pick it up at tourist offices and the Palau de la Virreina, which also sells tickets for many events.

CONCERT DE CARILLÓ Map pp64–5

www.gencat.net/presidencia/carillo; Palau de la Generalitat, Plaça de Sant Jaume; admission free;

🕒 noon 1st Sun of month; 📄 Jaume I

Some 5000kg of bronze in 49 bells (a carillon) swings into action for monthly 'concerts' in the seat of the Catalan government, allowing spectators a rare chance to get inside. In the pretty Gothic Pati dels Tarongers, an internal terrace lined with orange trees at the heart of the building, the audience is treated to a midday performance of just about anything, from classical to especially cooked up pieces for the Carilló, all with bells on. There are no reservations – just turn up.

FUNDACIÓ MAS I MAS Map pp122–3

☎ 93 319 17 89; www.fundacionmasimas.org; Carrer de Marià Cubí 199; admission €5; 🕒 6–8.30pm Sun–Wed, 6pm–midnight Thu–Sat; 📄 FGC Muntaner

Long a point of pilgrimage for Barcelona drinkers and shut down in 2007 for breaking noise regulations, this place has been

recycled as a respectable spot for short, intense half-hour sessions of chamber music played every hour.

GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU Map pp64–5

☎ 93 485 99 00; www.liceubarcelona.com; La Rambla dels Caputxins 51–59; 🕒 box office 2–8.30pm Mon–Fri & 1hr before show Sat & Sun; 📄 Liceu

Barcelona's grand old opera house, restored after a fire in 1994, is one of the most technologically advanced theatres in the world (see p71). To take up a seat in the grand auditorium, returned to all its 19th-century glory but with the very latest in acoustic accoutrements, is to be transported to another age. Local VIPs are frequently present, in a sign that one of the social *raisons d'être* of opera – seeing and being seen – has not been lost in modern times. Red plush seating and stage curtains stand in regal contrast to the glistering gold of the five tiers of boxes. As well as opera, you can see world-class dance chamber music and recitals. Tickets can cost anything from €7.50 for a cheap seat behind a pillar to €150 for a well-positioned night at the opera.

L'AUDITORIUM Map pp102–3

☎ 93 247 93 00; www.auditori.org; Carrer de Lepant 150; admission €17–65; 🕒 box office noon–9pm Mon–Sat; 📄 Monumental

Barcelona's modern home for serious music-lovers, L'Auditori (designed by Rafael Moneo) puts on plenty of orchestral, chamber, religious and other music. L'Auditori is perhaps ugly on the outside (to the less kind-hearted it looks like a pile of rusting scrap metal) but beautifully tuned on the inside, showing that one can't judge a book by its cover. Home to the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya, the theatre (with three auditoriums) has its interesting points too, with plenty of glass surfaces and an enormous skylight. The chamber music stage, the Sala Martorell, boasts acoustics as close to perfect as imaginable.

PALAU DE LA MÚSICA CATALANA

Map pp84–5

☎ 902 475485; www.palaumusica.org; Carrer de Sant Francesc de Paula 2; 🕒 box office 10am–9pm Mon–Sat; 📄 Urquinaona

A feast for the eyes, this Modernista pudding is also the city's traditional venue for

classical and choral music. Just being here for a performance is an experience. Sip a pre-concert tippie in the foyer, its tiled pillars all a-glitter. Head up the grand stairway to the main auditorium, a whirlpool of Modernista whimsy that is seen at its best before lights are dimmed for the show. With a front row box seat, you seem projected towards the sculpture-framed stage. The Palau has a busy and wide-ranging programme that includes many groups and orchestras from abroad. You could pay €10 or less for a cheap seat in a middling concert and up to €150 or more for prestigious international performances.

PALAU ROBERT Map pp108–9

☎ 93 238 40 00; www10.gencat.net/probert; Passeig de Gràcia 107; admission €3; 📄 Diagonal

Once a month concerts are held in the peaceful gardens at the back of this fine building or its main hall. Concerts are usually held around 8pm on a Wednesday. You need to pick up a pass the afternoon before (between 5pm and 7pm) or on the morning of the performance (from 10am to noon), as places are limited.

DANCE

Some fine local contemporary dance companies (see p41), along with international visiting companies from time to time, maintain a fairly busy performance programme across town. Look for leaflets at Palau de la Virreina and watch theatre listings. For ballet and other big spectacles, you need to wait for acts to arrive from abroad.

You can see traditional dance, whether the local *sardanes* (the national dance of Catalonia) in the streets or flamenco throughout the year. The quality of flamenco performances can vary wildly but the touristy *tablaos* (restaurants featuring flamenco) should not be completely dismissed, as on occasion major names turn up in them. Several other locations also offer the chance to see this fiery dance.

FLAMENCO

Although some major flamenco artists grew up in Barcelona's *gitano* (Roma) neighbourhoods, seeing good performances of this essentially Andalusian dance and music is not always easy. A few *tablaos*, where punters see flamenco while eating dinner, are scattered about. They are touristy but occasionally host

good acts, so you need to keep a keen eye out for the names. You can also catch flamenco on Friday nights at the **Jazz Sí Club** (p202). Flamenco clubs (*penas*) are scattered about Barcelona's outer suburbs but are a rather hermetic phenomenon. If you are in Barcelona in May, try to catch **Festival de Flamenco de Ciutat Vella** (p17) or the festival in the district of Nou Barris in the same month. For other occasional concerts, check out www.barcelonaflamenco.com.

SALA TARANTOS Map pp64–5

☎ 93 319 17 89; <http://masimas.com/tarantos>; Plaça Reial 17; admission €6; 🎫 performances 8.30pm, 9.30pm & 10.30pm daily; 🏠 Liceu

Since 1963, this basement locale has been the stage for some of the best flamenco to pass through or come out of Barcelona. You have to keep your eye on the place because top-class acts are not a daily diet. For lower-grade stuff, a one-hour *tablaó* takes place three times a night. On an altogether un-flamenco note, Wednesday nights (from 11.30pm) is WTF (What the Fuck) Vocal Jams night, where some daring souls try their luck singing in a live virtual-reality show.

TABLAO CORDOBÉS Map pp64–5

☎ 93 317 57 11; www.tablaocordobes.com; La Rambla 35; show only €35, with dinner €68; 🎫 shows 8.15pm, 10pm & 11.30pm; 🏠 Liceu This *tablaó* is typical of its touristy genre and has been in business since 1970. Artists perform on a tiny hardwood stage with a vaulted backdrop that is supposed to make us think of Granada's El Alhambra. Generally people book for the dinner and show, although you can skip the food and just come along for the performance (about 1½ hours). You need to arrive about 1½ hours before the show for dinner, which is an indifferent assortment of paella, other hot dishes and salads. Some great names have come through here, so it is not always cheese.

TABLAO DE CARMEN Map pp140–1

☎ 93 325 68 95; www.tablaodecarmen.com; Carrer dels Arcs 9, Poble Espanyol; show only €35, with dinner €69–94; 🎫 shows 7.45pm & 10pm Tue–Sun; 🏠 Espanya

Named after the great Barcelona *bailaora* (flamenco dancer) Carmen Amaya, the set-up here is similar to that at the *Tablaó Cordobés*, although it is somewhat larger

and the pseudo-Andalucian décor has a colder, more modern look. While it is true the shows do not excite connoisseurs, the quality can at times be quite high. Not a few up-and-coming flamenco stars tread the boards here on their way up.

TABLAO NERVIÓN Map pp84–5

☎ 93 315 21 03; www.restaurantenervion.com in Spanish; Carrer de la Princesa 2; show & set dinner €35, show only with one drink €12; 🎫 shows 10pm–1am Fri; 🏠 Jaume I

For very tourist-oriented flamenco, this place has unbeatable offers. Come along to the second show at midnight and the only obligation is to have a drink for €6. If you come at 11pm, you pay €12 for the show and a drink (beer or sangria). Or you can do the whole dinner and show thing from 10pm. This place believes in participation, so you can organise stag and hen's nights where you, too, can have a twirl with the dancers.

SARDANA

In Barcelona the best chance you have of seeing people dancing the *sardana* is at noon on Sunday in front of La Catedral. Other possibilities are at 6.30pm on Saturday and 7pm on Wednesday. You can also see the dance during some of the city's festivals. For more on this traditional dance, see p42.

CONTEMPORARY

TEATRE MERCAT DE LES FLORS

Map pp140–1

☎ 93 426 18 75; www.mercatflors.org; Carrer de Lleida 59; admission €15–20; 🎫 box office 11am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon–Fri & 1hr before show; 🏠 Espanya

Next door to the Teatre Lliure (opposite) and together with it known as the Ciutat de Teatre (Theatre City), this is a key venue for top local and international contemporary dance acts. Dance companies perform all over Barcelona but this spacious modern stage is Number One.

THEATRE

Most local theatre is performed in Catalan or Spanish, although foreign companies, especially of a more avant-garde hue, are occasionally welcomed too. Some well-established Barcelona companies (see p41) provide a broad palette of drama, comedy and even

THE FURIOUS FURA DELS BAUS

Keep your eyes peeled for any of the eccentric (if not downright crazed) performances of Barcelona's La Fura dels Baus theatre group (www.lafura.com). It has won worldwide acclaim for its brand of startling, often acrobatic, theatre in which the audience is frequently dragged into the chaos. The company grew out of Barcelona's street-theatre culture in the late 1970s and, although it has grown in technical prowess, it has not abandoned the rough-and-ready edge of street performances. In 2008, the group again raised eyebrows with its Boris Gudonov show, in which the audience becomes hostage in a scene uncomfortably reminiscent of the 2002 Moscow Theatre hostage disaster, in which at least 129 civilians died when security forces retook the building from Chechen terrorists. Whatever La Fura team does, it makes sure the element of surprise is on its side.

musicals. Smaller, experimental theatre groups also have an enthusiastic local following, and dozens of often tiny repertory theatres are scattered across the city. They try their hand at anything from Shakespeare revisited to new, home-grown drama. The monthly guide *Teatre BCN* has the latest listings and can be picked up at the Palau de la Virreina.

SALA BECKETT Map p118

☎ 93 284 53 12; www.salabeckett.com; Carrer de Ca l'Alegre de Dalt 55bis; 🎫 box office 10am–2pm & 4–8pm Mon–Fri & 1hr before start of show; 🏠 Joanic

One of the city's principal alternative theatres, the Sala Beckett is a smallish space that does not shy away from challenging theatre, contemporary or otherwise and usually performs in Catalan.

TEATRE LLANTIOL Map pp76–7

☎ 93 329 90 09; www.llantiol.com; Carrer de la Riereta 7; admission €5–10; 🏠 Sant Antoni

At this curious place in El Raval all sorts of odd stuff, from concerts and ballads to magic shows, is staged. On Saturday nights at 12.30am there is a regular cabaret-variety slot, a bit of a throwback to another era. This unlikely backstreet happens to be host to a nest of artists' studios. The box office opens 15 minutes before shows start.

TEATRE LLIURE Map pp140–1

☎ 93 289 27 70; www.teatrelliure.com; Plaça Margarida Xirgu 1; admission €13–26; 🎫 box office 5–8pm; 🏠 Espanya

Housed in the magnificent former Palau de l'Agricultura building on Montjuïc (opposite the Museu d'Arqueologia) and consisting of two modern theatre spaces (Espai Lliure and Sala Fabià Puigserver), the 'Free Theatre' puts on a variety of quality drama (mostly in Catalan), contemporary dance and music.

TEATRE NACIONAL DE CATALUNYA

Map pp102–3

☎ 93 306 57 00; www.tnc.es; Plaça de les Arts 1; admission €12–32; 🎫 box office 3–8pm Tue–Sat & 1hr before show; Plaça de les Arts 1; 🏠 Glòries or Monumental

Ricard Bofill's ultra-neoclassical theatre, with the bright, airy foyer, hosts a wide range of performances, principally drama (anything from King Lear in Catalan to La Fura dels Baus) but occasionally dance and other performances. The cream-coloured Sala Gran is reserved for big productions, while the Sala Petita and the Sala Tallers are for smaller-scale and more intimate plays and dance.

TEATRE NOU TANTARANTANA

Map pp76–7

☎ 93 441 70 22; www.tantarantana.com; Carrer de les Flors 22; 🎫 box office 30min before show; 🏠 Paral.lel

Apart from staging all sorts of contemporary and experimental drama, this cosy theatre (room for about 150 spectators) also has a kids' programme, including pantomime and puppets. These shows tend to start at 6pm (noon on Sundays).

TEATRE PRINCIPAL Map pp64–5

☎ 902 332211; www.grupbalana.com; La Rambla 27; 🎫 box office 5–8pm Tue–Sun; 🏠 Liceu

There has been a theatre on this spot since the 16th century. Renovated in 2006, the theatre tends to concentrate on local productions of West End musicals. It also serves occasionally as a live concert stage too.

TEATRE ROMEA Map pp76–7

☎ 93 301 55 04; www.focus.es in Catalan & Spanish; Carrer de l'Hospital 51; 🎫 box office 4.30–8pm Tue–Sun; 🏠 Liceu

Deep in El Raval, this 19th-century theatre was resurrected at the end of the 1990s

and is a reference point for quality drama. It usually fills up for a broad range of interesting plays, often classics with a contemporary flavour, in Catalan and Spanish.

TEATRE TÍVOLI Map pp108–9

☎ 902 332211; www.grupbalana.com; Carrer de Casp 8-12; ☎ box office 1hr before show; **M** Catalunya A grand old theatre with three storeys of boxes and a generous stage, the Tívoli has a fairly rapid turnover of drama, with pieces often not staying on for more than a couple of weeks. Among its 2008 offerings was *Ay Carmela!*, a civil war story of a travelling comedy duo caught between the warring sides.

TEATRE VICTÒRIA Map pp140–1

☎ 93 443 29 29; www.teatrevictoria.com in Catalan & Spanish; Avinguda del Paral.lel 67-69; admission €12-45; ☎ box office 5-8pm & 1hr before show; **M** Paral.lel

This modern (and, on the street, rather nondescript-looking) theatre is on what used to be considered Barcelona's version of Broadway. It often stages ballet, contemporary dance and even flamenco, but otherwise the stage is used by well-known local companies, such as Tricicle. This trio of comic mimes has been doing the rounds with their version of 'intelligent humour' for more than 20 years.

TEATRENEU Map p118

☎ 93 285 37 12; www.teatreneu.com; Carrer de Terol 26; ☎ box office 30min before show; **M** Fontana or Joanic

This lively theatre (with a bustling, rambling downstairs bar facing the street) dares to fool around with all sorts of material, from monologues to social comedy. Occasionally it changes the pace and opts for world music, but either way it has a busy programme.

CINEMAS

Spain is proud of its dubbing industry, which could sound warning bells. The other great Mediterranean centre of dubbing, Italy, offers those who don't like it few opportunities to avoid it. In Barcelona, fortunately, there is no shortage of cinemas showing foreign films with subtitles and original soundtracks. They are marked 'vo' (*versión original*) in movie listings.

The best movie listings are in the daily *El País* newspaper. A ticket usually costs €6 to €7, but most cinemas have a weekly *día del espectador* (viewer's day), often Monday or Wednesday, when they charge around €4.80 to €5.50. In some cinemas you can book by phone or online. Otherwise, you'll need to join the queue. In addition to the following mainstream cinemas, classic movies are sometimes shown in such diverse locations as La Pedrera (p106), Sala Apolo (p213), FNAC record and book stores in the El Triangle shopping centre on Plaça de Catalunya (Map pp108–9) and the L'illa del Diagonal shopping mall (Map pp122–3), CaixaForum (p142), the CCCB (p80) and civic centres.

Outdoor cinema screens are set up in summer at the Castell de Montjuïc (p143) and in the Fòrum (p97).

BOLICHE Map pp122–3

☎ 93 218 17 88; Avinguda Diagonal 508; **M** Diagonal

With four screens, this cinema is located at a central point within walking distance of central Gràcia, a good selection of bars and restaurants in l'Eixample (eg around Carrer d'Aribau) and others in the immediate area north of Avinguda Diagonal (for this book's purposes, the beginning of La Zona Alta).

CASABLANCA KAPLAN Map p118

☎ 93 218 43 45; Passeig de Gràcia 115; **M** Diagonal A smallish local cinema (with three screens) that always shows movies in the original language.

CASABLANCA GRÀCIA Map pp108–9

☎ 93 459 03 26; Carrer de Girona 173-175; **M** Girona Often you'll find this cinema nearly empty, which in one sense is good – you should have no concerns about finding the movies here sold out!

FILMOTECA Map pp102–3

☎ 93 410 75 90; Avinguda de Sarrià 31-33; admission €3-4; **M** Hospital Clínic

Also known as Cine Aquitania, it specialises in film seasons that concentrate on particular directors, styles and eras of film.

ICÀRIA YELMO CINEPLEX Map pp98–9

☎ 93 221 75 85; www.yelmocineplex.es in Spanish; Carrer de Salvador Espriu 61; **M** Ciutadella Vila Olímpica

A vast cinema complex that always screens movies in the original language – this place always has the biggest choice of such films in town. In the complex you'll find several cheerful eateries, bars and the like to keep you occupied before and after the movies.

MALDÀ Map pp64–5

☎ 93 481 37 04; www.cinemalda.com; Carrer del Pi 5; **M** Liceu

In the heart of the Barri Gòtic, one screen turns around several movies in the course of the afternoon and evening. They occasionally put on Bollywood hits.

MÉLIÈS CINEMES Map pp108–9

☎ 93 451 00 51; Carrer de Villarroel 102; admission €3-5; **M** Urgell

A cosy cinema with two screens, the Méliès specialises in old classics from Hollywood and European cinema.

RENOIR FLORIDABLANCA Map pp102–3

☎ 93 426 33 37; www.cinesrenoir.com in Spanish; Carrer de Floridablanca 135; **M** Sant Antoni With seven screens, this is one of a small chain of art-house cinemas in Spain

showing quality flicks. It is handily located just beyond El Raval, so you can be sure that there is no shortage of post-film entertainment options nearby.

RENOIR-LES CORTS Map pp122–3

☎ 93 490 55 10; www.cinesrenoir.com in Spanish; Carrer de Eugeni d'Ors 12; **M** Maria Cristina or Les Corts

With six cinemas, this is a somewhat distant alternative from central Barcelona for original versions.

VERDI Map p118

☎ 93 238 79 90; www.cines-verdi.com in Spanish; Carrer de Verdi 32; **M** Fontana

A popular original-language movie house in the heart of Gràcia, handy to lots of local eateries and bars for pre- and post-film enjoyment.

VERDI PARK Map p118

☎ 93 238 79 90; www.cines-verdi.com in Spanish; Carrer de Torrijos 49; **M** Fontana

Sister to the Verdi, the Verdi Park is a block away and follows the same art-house philosophy.

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

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SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Barcelona offers those with a hangover every chance to eliminate toxins by getting out and flexing other muscles besides the elbow. Options abound, from swimming and sailing to marathon running. There are plenty of gyms, and for those whose feelings of guilt over the excesses of the previous night don't translate to physical exertions, the city's football and basketball teams provide class-A excitement when they play at home. Otherwise you can indulge in a massage, day spa or a spot of floating!

For information on where you can practise sports in Barcelona, try the **Servei d'Informació Esportiva** (Map pp140-1; ☎ 93 402 30 00; Avinguda de l'Estadi 30-40, Montjuïc; 🕒 8am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri), located in the same complex as the Piscines Bernat Picornell on Montjuïc.

HEALTH & FITNESS

The folks of Barcelona have become as fit and health conscious as those of any other city and the number of places to indulge in a little well-being of one sort or another is multiplying.

SPAS & MASSAGE

Many of the better hotels have wellness centres, among them Hotel Arts (p235), Hotel Omm (p236) and the Hesperia Tower in L'Hospitalet. You can also get soothing spa treatment outside Barcelona (see p246).

AQUA URBAN SPA Map p118

☎ 93 238 41 60; www.aqua-urbanspa.com; Carrer Gran de Gràcia 7; 75min session €51; 🕒 9am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8.30pm Sat; 📍 Diagonal With sessions for anything from stress to tired legs (helpful for diehard sightseers!), this spa offers smallish pool and shower areas, along with steam baths, Roman baths and a series of beauty treatment options.

FLOTARIUM Map p118

☎ 93 217 36 37; www.flotarium.com; Plaça de Narcís Oller 3; 1hr session €35; 🕒 10am-10pm daily; 📍 Diagonal

Come and float in zero gravity and feel the stress ebb away. Each flotarium, like a little space capsule with water, is in a private room, with shower, towels and shampoo, and Epsom salts that allow you to float as if in the Dead Sea. An hour of sensorial relaxation, isolated from the madding crowds outside.

MAILUNA Map pp76-7

☎ 93 301 20 02; www.mailuna.net; Carrer de Valldonzella 48; 1hr massage €45-60; 🕒 5-11.30pm Mon, 1-11.30pm Tue-Sat; 📍 Universitat

Mailuna is a bit of wellness universe. Not only do they offer all sorts of massages (Ayurvedic, Swedish, Thai and more), it's also a restaurant, aromatherapy setting, wellness goods store and more. Stop by for a tea and you'll feel better already.

MASAJES A 1000 Map pp108-9

☎ 93 215 85 85; www.masajes1000.net, in Spanish; Carrer de Mallorca 233; 5min massages €4; 🕒 7am-1am; 📍 Passeig de Gràcia

All stressed out by sightseeing in the nearby Modernista gems on Passeig de Gràcia? Pop by for a quick, invigorating massage. This is one of four outlets of this chain that are scattered around Barcelona.

GYMS

Barcelona is crawling with places for a workout, but most gyms cater to long-term members.

UBAE FRONTÓN Map pp64-5

☎ 93 302 32 95; La Rambla de Santa Mònica 18; admission €12.85; 🕒 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun & holidays; 📍 Drassanes

Smack in the heart of the old city, this gym offers a fitness room with all manner of exercise equipment, including a section with bicycles, step and other cardio machines, and a small swimming pool. There are various multiday passes too.

SWIMMING

Barcelona has several good options for those who want to get in some more serious lap swimming than is possible at the city's beaches.

SWIMMING AU NATUREL

There are a couple of options for skinny-dippers in Barcelona. In addition to the ill-defined nudists' strip at the southwest end of Platja de la Mar Bella, which provides good opportunities for sunbathing, and the predominantly gay strip at Platja de Sant Miquel, you can also get it all off year-round at the Piscines Bernat Picornell, the Olympic pool on Montjuïc. On Saturday nights, between 9pm and 11pm, the pool (with access to sauna and steam bath) is open only to nudists (adult/child & senior €4.80/3.45). On Sundays between October and May the indoor pool also opens for nudists only from 4.15pm to 6pm.

CLUB NATACIÓ ATLÈTIC-BARCELONA

Map p93

☎ 93 221 00 10; www.cnab.org; Plaça de Mar s/n; adult/under 10yr €10.10/5.85; 🕒 6.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 7am-11pm Sat, 8am-5pm Sun & holidays Oct-mid-May, 8am-8pm Sun & holidays mid-May-Sep; 📍 Barceloneta 🕒 17, 39, 57 or 64

This athletic club has one indoor and two outdoor pools. Of the latter, one is heated for lap swimming in winter. Admission includes use of the gym and private beach access. Membership costs €34 a month plus €69 joining fee.

PISCINES BERNAT PICORNELL

Map pp140-1

☎ 93 423 40 41; www.picornell.com, in Catalan; Avinguda de l'Estadi 30-38; adult/15-25yr/senior & under 15yr €9.20/5.60/5.15, outdoor pool adult/6-14yr & senior €5.10/3.55; 🕒 6.45am-midnight Mon-Fri, 7am-9pm Sat, 7.30am-4pm Sun, outdoor pool, hrs vary; 🕒 50, 61 or PM

Included in the standard entry price to Barcelona's official Olympic pool on Montjuïc is use of the gym, saunas and spa bath. Membership costs €51 to join and €34.40 a month.

POLIESPORTIU MARÍTIM Map p93

☎ 93 224 04 40; www.claror.cat, in Catalan; Passeig Marítim de la Barceloneta 33-35; Mon-Fri €14.40, Sat, Sun & holidays €17; 🕒 7am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat, 8am-4pm Sun & holidays; 📍 Ciutadella Vila Olímpica

Water babies will squeal with delight in this thalassotherapy (sea-water therapy) sports centre. In addition to the small pool, there is a labyrinth of hot, warm and freezing-cold spa pools, along with thundering waterfalls for massage relief.

ACTIVITIES CYCLING

Although cycle lanes have been laid out along many main arteries, the city centre is not the most relaxing place for a bike ride. Hillier (but less stressful) is Montjuïc, or you could head up into the Parc de Collserola (p134) with a mountain bike. For information on bicycle hire, see p265.

GOLF

Head out of town if you enjoy belting small round objects around the greenery.

CLUB DE GOLF SANT CUGAT

☎ 93 674 39 08; www.golfsantcugat.com, in Spanish; Carrer de la Villa s/n, Sant Cugat del Vallès; Mon-Thu €65, Fri-Sun & holidays €150; 🕒 8am-dusk Mon-Fri, 7am-dusk Sat & Sun; 📍 FGC Sant Cugat

This 18-hole course was designed by Scottish experts in 1917 to meet the needs of a firm of British and American engineers working on electricity projects in Catalonia.

SAILING

On sunny weekends the Med off Barcelona is alive the swollen sails of pleasure craft. You can join in.

BASE NAUTICA MUNICIPAL Map pp98-9

☎ 93 221 04 32; www.basenautica.org, in Spanish; Avinguda de Litoral s/n; 📍 Poblenou Have you come to Barcelona to become a seadog? If so, head to this place, just back from Platja de la Mar Bella, and enrol in a course in pleasure-boat handling, kayaking or windsurfing (€179 for 10 hours tuition).

SPECTATOR SPORTS BASKETBALL

FC Barcelona's Winterthur FCB basketball team is almost as successful as the city's glamorous football outfit, with 14 premier league victories, 20 Copas del Rey and four European titles since 1946. One of its star players, local boy 2.16m Pau Gasol, has played in the NBA league in the USA since 2001 (now with the Los Angeles Lakers) but he returns home to play in the national Spanish team.

A WOMAN'S TOUCH

On FC Barcelona's official website (www.fcbarcelona.com) you'll find information not only on the champion football side, but on the club's basketball, handball and even their roller-skate hockey teams. But you'd never know that FC Barcelona has a women's football team. Indeed, you'd be hard pressed finding out that, since 2001, 14 women's teams have been fighting it out each year for the Superliga Femenina premiership. FC Barcelona's women's team is full of fight, but it's a different ball game. On average, fewer than 500 spectators come to watch FC Barcelona women's matches and in the short history of the league they have tended to hang around the bottom of the table. Indeed, since 2006 they have been playing in the 2nd division (or Liga Nacional).

The team plays (generally on Saturday afternoons) in the **Palau Blaugrana** (Map pp122–3; ☎ 902 189900; www.fcbarcelona.com; Carrer d'Aristides Maillol; M Collblanc), next door to the Camp Nou football stadium in Les Corts. Tickets can be purchased direct at Palau Blaugrana, on the phone and online. Ticket prices oscillate between €11 and €58, depending on position and match.

BULLFIGHTING

Hemingway called it death in the afternoon and, like so many things in Barcelona, it is a subject of controversy and political demagoguery. In 2004 the city council narrowly voted for a symbolic declaration that Barcelona was anti-bullfighting. Animal rights groups, who oppose *la lidia* (bullfighting), were delighted. But there was more to the vote than meets the eye. Promoted by the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC, Republican Left of Catalonia) independence party, the declaration stands in line with the common claim that bullfighting is a Spanish cultural imposition on Catalonia, largely loathed by many Catalans. During the Civil War years, vegetarian anarchists banned bullfighting in Republican Barcelona.

The Salamanca-based Matilla family, which took over Barcelona's bullfight business in 2007, remains in combative mood, showing no sign of ceding to suggestions that the ring could be used to house the Els Encants market, which will one day have to move from its present home on Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes (see p159).

The bullfight season is staged at the **Plaça de Braus Monumental** (Map pp102–3; ☎ 93 245 58 02; cnr Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes & Carrer de la Marina; ☎ ticket office 11am–2pm & 4–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–6pm Sun; M Monumental). The fight starts at around 6pm (sometimes 7pm), mostly on Sunday afternoons from Easter to late September. Tickets are available at the arena or through

ServiCaixa. You can also pick up tickets at **Toros Taquilla Oficial** (Map pp108–9; Carrer de Muntaner 26; ☎ 11am–2pm & 4–8pm Wed–Fri, 11am–2pm & 4–7pm Sat; M Universitat). Prices range from €20 to €120. The higher-priced tickets are for the front row in the shade – any closer and you'd be fighting the bulls yourself.

On an afternoon ticket there are generally six bulls and perhaps three star matadors (those bullfighters who do most of the fighting and then kill the bull at the end). The matador leads a *cuadrilla* (team) of other fighters who make up the rest of the colourful band that appears in the ring. It is a complex business, but in essence the matadors aim to impress the crowd and jury with daring and graceful moves as close to an aggressive, fighting bull as possible. While the death of the bull is generally inevitable (its meat is later sold), this in no way implies the bullfighter always gets off scot-free. It is a genuinely dangerous business, and being gored and tossed by several hundred kilos of bull is no fun.

FOOTBALL

Football in Barcelona has the aura of religion and for much of the city's population, support of FC Barcelona is an article of faith. But the city has another hardy (if less illustrious) side, Espanyol. FC Barcelona is traditionally associated with the Catalans and even Catalan nationalism, while Espanyol is often identified with Spanish immigrants from other parts of the country.

It all started on 29 November 1899, when, four years after English residents had first played the game here, Swiss Hans Gamper founded FC Barcelona (Barça). His choice of club colours, the blue and maroon of his hometown, Winterthur, have stuck. The following year, Espanyol was formed. It distinguished itself from the other sides, ironically, by being formed solely of Catalans

and other Spaniards. Most other sides, including FC Barcelona, were primarily made up of foreigners.

By 1910 FC Barcelona was the premier club in a rapidly growing league. The first signs of professionalism emerged – paid transfers of players were recorded and Espanyol's management charged spectators. Barça, who had 560 members (compared to about 156,000 today), claimed victory at that year's national championship.

A match at **Camp Nou** (Map pp122–3; ☎ 902 189900; Carrer d'Aristides Maillol; ☎ box office 9am–1.30pm & 3.30–6pm Mon–Fri; M Collblanc) can be breathtaking. The stadium is going to get a spectacular sprucing up in coming years (see p54).

After several years in the wilderness, FC Barcelona hit its straps and won the 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 championships. The good run was interrupted the following year by a victorious Real Madrid and in 2008 the bridesmaid scenario repeated itself. Not only did the side slump in the final months of the premiership (which Madrid won easily), it failed to take any other honours. The final humiliation came when Manchester United defeated them in the Champions League semifinals.

Barça is one of only three teams (the others are Real Madrid and Athletic de Bilbao) never to have been relegated to the second division. Since the league got fully under way in 1928, Barça has emerged champion 18 times, second only to archrivals Real Madrid (with 30 victories). Between them the two have virtually

monopolised the game – only seven other teams have managed to come out on top (four of them only once or twice) in 70 years of competition.

Tickets are available at Camp Nou, as well as by phone and online. You can also purchase them through the ServiCaixa ticketing service. To purchase tickets by phone or online, nonclub members must do so at least 15 days before the match. Tickets can cost anything from €14 to €170, depending on the seat and match. The ticket windows open on Saturday morning and in the afternoon until the game starts. If the match is on Sunday, it opens Saturday morning only and then on Sunday until the match starts. Usually tickets are *not* available for matches with Real Madrid.

You will almost definitely find scalpers lurking near the ticket windows. They are often club members and can sometimes get you in at a significant reduction. Don't pay until you are safely seated.

The city's other club, Espanyol, based at the **Estadi Olímpic** (Map pp140–1; Avinguda de l'Estadi; ☎ 50, 61 or PM), traditionally plays a quiet second fiddle to Barça. The club is building a new stadium in the suburb of Cornellà.

FORMULA ONE

Every April since 1991, the dashing knights in shining motorised armour have come to the Montmeló track, about a 30-minute drive north of Barcelona. A seat for the Grand Prix race at the **Circuit de Catalunya** (☎ 93 571 97

CASTLES IN THE AIR

It's difficult to know how to classify making human castles, but to many a Catalan, the *castellers* (castle builders) are as serious in their sport as any footballer.

The 'building' of *castells* (castles) is particularly popular in central and southern Catalonia. Teams from all over the region compete during summer and you are most likely to see *castellers* in town festivals. The amateur sport began in the 1880s, and although Barcelona's home teams are not among the best, it is always fun to watch. When teams from other towns come to compete, it can be quite exciting.

Without delving too deeply into the complexities, the teams aim to erect human 'castles' of up to 10 storeys. These usually involve levels of three to five people standing on each others' shoulders. A crowd of team-mates and supporters forms a supporting scrum around the thickest lads at the base. To successfully complete the castle, a young (light!) child called the *anxaneta* must reach the top and signal with his/her hand. Sometimes the castle then falls in a heap (if it has not already done so) but successful completion also involves bringing the levels back down to earth in orderly fashion. The death of an *anxaneta*, who struck her head in a fall from the top of a *castell* in 2006, provoked calls for these children to wear helmets. In the end, nothing came of the demands, as it was pointed out that there had been just three fatal accidents in the entire history of the activity.

Home and away teams sometimes converge on Plaça de Catalunya, Plaça de Sant Jaume and other city squares for friendly competitions during the various festivals. Ask the tourist office (p279) for more details. Beyond Barcelona competition events can be seen in many towns, including Vilafranca del Penedès (p257) and Tarragona (p259).

71; www.circuitcat.com) can cost anything from €123 to €483. If you purchase before mid-March, tickets are slightly cheaper. Purchase tickets by phone, at the track, online with ServiCaixa or at advance ticket-sales desks in El Corte Inglés department stores. You can get a regular *rodalies* train to Montmeló (€1.40, 30 minutes) but will need to walk about 3km or find a local taxi (about €10) to reach the track. On race days the [Sagalés bus company](#) (☎ 902 130014; www.sagales.com) often runs buses to the track from Passeig de Sant Joan (between Carrer de la Diputació and Carrer del Consell de Cent).

SAILING

The annual [Trofeo Conde de Godó](#) (www.regatagodo.com, in Spanish) is Barcelona's prestigious yachting competition, held off the city's coast over three days at the end of May and drawing crews from around the country.

In 2007 a new round-the-world regatta, the [Barcelona World Race](#) (www.barcelonaworldrace.com) saw two-person yachts leaving the city in November. The participants, led by winners Jean-Pierre Dick and Damian Foxall, straggled back over the month of February the following year. The next one will be held in 2010.