



Sitges is full of old streets lined by colourful stone houses

Sitges near Barcelona has always had the reputation for being rebellious. The town, with its bohemian outlook and tolerant attitude, is one of Europe’s most gay-friendly destinations. It is also a sun worshipper’s delight with more than 17 beaches surrounding it



Participants make flower carpets during the Corpus Christi festival



The Church of Bartholomew and Tecla dominated the city skyline

KALPANA SUNDER

SCULPTED men in swimwear strut around the beaches, bright pink bougainvilleas spill from wrought iron balconies, quaint beach bars called Chiringuitos dot the beaches, selling fried squid and sangria. Just half an hour from Barcelona, situated between the Mediterranean and the craggy Garraf mountains, on the Costa Daurada or the Golden coast, Sitges is a chillout town that has always had the reputation for being rebellious. The town with its bohemian outlook and tolerant attitude is one of Europe’s most gay-friendly destinations. Sitges started of as a small fishing village. The town has always had a rich artistic vibe: both Picasso and Dali spent some time here. With its laidback attitude and relaxed rhythm, it became a gathering place of artists, intellectuals and writers. It was Santiago Rusinol, one of the icons of Catalan literature, who was responsible for ushering in Catalan Modernism. He fell in love with the city, bought two fishermen’s cottages and transformed them into his studio called Cau Ferrat. This became a shelter for poets and other creative people of his times. In the 1880s, thousands of young men left Sitges and headed to the West Indies, trading in cotton, rum and tobacco when the phylloera plague destroyed the local vines. These locals called ‘Americanos’ made their fortunes in Cuba and returned home to show off their new-found wealth in the flamboyant homes that they commissioned to build. The town is lined with these ostentatious colonial mansions in Modernist and Art Nouveau styles flanked with palm trees, and large gardens. Many of them have even lookout towers. Wrought iron balconies, stained glass, elaborate stucco on facades, latticed window screens and decorated pillars, impress one at every turn. There’s Palacio Marisel with fountains and ceramics in an Andalu-

# Spanish rhapsody



Antique dolls at the Romantic Museum that houses a collection of more than 400 wooden, papier-mâché and porcelain dolls and puppets from different periods and countries  
PHOTOS BY THE WRITER

sian ambience, which houses American millionaire Charles Deering’s art collection. Deering fell in love with the town so much that he bought an old hospital building and some fishermen’s cottages and converted them into his palace with architectural elements from different parts of Iberia using glass, forged iron, paintings and sculptures. Casa Bartomeu with its clock tower is a stunning building in the centre of town, with its pencil thin tower covered with tiles broken into shards in a method called trencadis, which the famous artist Gaudi also employed. Carrer D’en Bosc is the oldest street of the town, lined with old stone houses with terracotta-tiled roofs, along the town’s defensive walls. Hand-painted ceramic signs show the way around the streets. In the 14th century, houses used to be built against the town walls. Lyrics from a tra-

ditional sardana (a Catalan slow dance form) adorn a tiled inlay in the walls. The fishermen’s quarter has signature white-washed homes with blue shutters and thick blue lines skirting the walls. Palau del Rei Moro, a magnificent stone house, is where the castellers, the people who build human pyramids (a Catalan tradition) practice in its open courtyard. Dominating the city’s skyline is the landmark of the town, the 17th century church of Saint Bartholomew and Tecla, dedicated to two patron saints of the town and built on a rocky promontory. Locals call it La Punta (the point) because you can see the church from wherever you are in town. Legend has it that the fishermen’s wives used to climb the bell tower to see if their husbands had returned. Facundo Bacardi Masso is the most famous son of the town — he tried his luck in Cuba in the 1830s and came up with the winning brand of white rum, Bacardi, which is now a household name internationally. Today, the Bacardi Museum is housed in the Mercat Vell, an Art Nouveau building, where besides tasting the fiery brew, you can also learn to make the perfect mojito. You can see the iconic logo of Bacardi with the bat displayed in many places through the town. “Why bats?”, one wonders till a local tells us that in Facundo’s distillery set up in Cuba there were fruit bats that lived in the rafters, and this was the origin of the logo! Facundo used a particular type of yeast which gave the drink a distinctive flavour and aged the drink in white oak barrels which mellowed the rum. Another must-see museum is the Can Llopis Romantic Museum located in a 18th

century mansion, which houses a superb collection of more than 400 wooden, papier-mâché and porcelain dolls and puppets from different periods and countries. The neo-classical house belonged to the Llopis family which made its fortunes producing the distinctive dessert wine of the region called Malvasia. With displays of old carriages and evolution of lighting over time, one gets a glimpse into how the rich families of the 19th century Sitges lived. An overload of history has to be offset with the pleasures of the palate. In the port area of Port of Aiguadolç one can have a traditional Catalan dinner with the signature dish of Sitges called Xato, consisting of an orange salad made with dried peppers, almonds garlic and hazelnuts served with salted cod, anchovy, tuna, olives and of course oranges. Another dish on the menu is Fideua — a variation of paella made with vermicelli noodles instead of rice, cooked in rich, fish stock. For a sun worshipper Sitges is the place. It has more than 17 beaches surrounding it. The beaches are dotted with couples, locals playing beach volleyball, skaters and joggers as well as sand sculptors. Come night the town comes alive. A large percentage of the night time action takes place on what the locals call the street “Carrer del Pecat” or “The Street of Sin. Sitges has a lot for culture-vultures too. There are many festivals and carnivals through the year: ranging from films, tango, wine, food, to vintage cars. At the end of August there’s more reason to party with the Fiesta Major and giant puppets and fireworks bringing the town alive! Sitges, truly has something for everyone.

## GLOBETROTTING



Balinese dancers perform at the parade during the Bali Art Festival in Denpasar, Bali.

# Bali bonhomie

Balinese artistes in the parade during the festival.



Balinese woman carry offerings in a parade during the 35th Bali Art Festival in Denpasar, on the resort island of Bali, Indonesia. A parade of traditional art teams along with other cultural displays from Bali and others Indonesia’s provinces was the highlight of the festival.  
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