

Ah, summer. Finally on its way, and always around this time of year, I get a barrage of messages from friends and colleagues telling me they're off to Barcelona, and have I got any tips on what to do and where to go? Yes. Yes, I do. So, in an effort to save repeating myself, I thought I'd put together a little guide, based on the idea that most folk will be going for a long weekend, or just a few days, and they'll want to see and do and eat as much as possible in that time...

## Getting about

Barcelona is a very walkable city, but one of the first things to do when you arrive in town is to buy a '[T-10](#)' metro ticket, which—as the name suggests—allows you ten trips on Barcelona's clean and easy-to-navigate metro system. The cool thing about this ticket is that more than one person can use the same ticket: simply stick it in the machine and then pass it back to your partner or pal. (Note: that counts as two trips.) You can also use these tickets to use the buses, and there are loads of places to [hire bikes](#)—especially in the Born and Barceloneta—if you want to do it that way.

## The Barris

Barcelona is split into several large neighbourhoods, or '**barris**', to use the Catalan word. They include: the Eixample, Gracia, the Born, the Gothic Quarter, the Raval, and Barceloneta. Each one has its own feel—although it's not always easy to tell where one barri ends and another begins, especially in the old town. Regardless of where you're staying, or for how long, any one of these barris can quickly feel like home as you get to know the streets and sweet spots it contains, and it's entirely possible to stick to your immediate surroundings and have a fantastic time. However, even if you're only going to be there for a few days, you should really try and sample each one in order to get a true taste of the city.



### L'Eixample

(Key metro stations: **Passeig de Gracia**, **Diagonal** and **Verdaguer**)

Given that it's more than likely that your first port of call will be the central hub of Pl. de Catalunya, we'll start this virtual tour there, heading north into the largest of Barcelona's

barris. The Eixample (pronounced: *eh 'shamp 'luh*) is split into two parts: the left (Esquerra) and the right (Dreta). The roads are big and wide and elegant, and there is an embarrassment of riches for even the most casual admirer of apartment-block facades. **Passeig de Gracia**—the long road that stretches up from Pl. de Catalunya all the way up to the barri of Gracia—is where you'll find two of the most famous Gaudí buildings, **La Pedrera** and **La Casa Batllo**, both of which are worth a visit if you're into all that art-farty stuff. Away from the main drag, there are dozens upon dozens of great places to eat and drink in this area. Depending on which street you're on, your best bet is to switch on [Foursquare](#) and check for recommendations.

## Gracia

(Key metro stations: **Fontana**, **Lesseps** and **Joanic**)

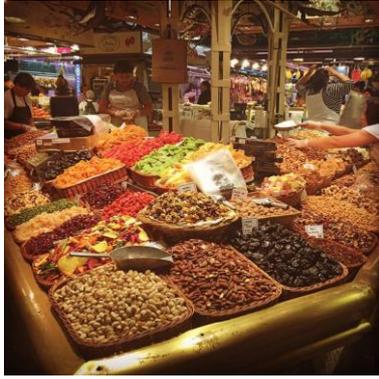
Gracia is something of a town within a town, enchanting and enclosed; home to hipsters, hippies, health food shops and a whole lot more. You can walk up from Pl de Catalunya – it'll take you a good half an hour, mind – or you can jump on the metro to Fontana (L3, green) and turn left out of the station onto Carrer d'Astúries. From there, again, it's best to just take a wander, stopping for a *café con leche* or a casual *cerveza* in one of the squares. My favourite spots here are **Café del Teatro**, **Carrer Verdi**—the whole street – and the superbly-named **Pl. de la Virreina**.



**El Raval**

(Key metro stations: **Universitat**, **Sant Antoni** and **Liceu**)

If you head back down to Pl de Catalunya and cross the road to **La Rambla**, you'll find yourself on Barcelona's most famous boulevard, which stretches all the way down to the old port. There are two metro stations along La Rambla (Liceu and Drassanes, both on L3, so you can go direct from Fontana) and if you face south, toward the port, on your right you'll have the barri of El Raval.



The Raval used to be a bit dodgy, and to a degree it probably still is, but just keep your wits about you and I'm sure you'll be fine. Besides, it's well worth a visit, in my book. There's **La Boqueria** (the big food market about halfway down La Rambla) and if you venture further in you might find your way to **El Colectivo** (a great spot for coffee and cake, on possibly my favourite street in the whole city) or **Caravelle** (brunch/lunch/hipster-watching). Up from there, you've also got the **MACBA** and the **CCCB**, two of Barcelona's main centres for modern art and cultural exhibitions.

### **Barri Gotic (Gothic Quarter)**

(Key metro stations: **Jaume I, Liceu**)

Cross La Rambla to the other side (to your left as you walk down) and you'll be in the Gothic Quarter, where the streets are narrow and teeming with tourists. It's worth a stroll through, mind, if only to stop for churros at the **Churreria** on Carrer dels Banys Nous, or an *empanada* at **La Fabrica** on Carrer del Call, which is just around the corner from Pl. Sant Jaume – itself a great spot if you want to see, um, nice administration buildings...?

### **The Born/Sant Pere**

(Key metro stations: **Jaume I, Arc de Triomf**)



If you keep walking west, weaving your way through the streets of the Gothic Quarter, you'll eventually (hopefully!) come out onto **Via Laietana**—another of Barcelona's main thoroughfares that goes all the way down to the beach, more or less. Cross Laietana, and you're in the Born, which is similar to the Gothic but less cramped. Again, the best thing to do here is just wander, find your way down to the big 'basilica' and breathe contentedly when you reach the cute cobble-stone stretch known as **Passeig del Born**. Around here you'll find cocktail bars and artisan boutiques, as well as the shortest street in the world, where there also happens to be a rather fine [wine bar](#). At the opposite end of Passeig del Born is the newly-built Cultural and Memorial Centre, and beyond that the **Parc de la Ciutadella**.

## Barceloneta

(Key metro station: **Barceloneta**)



“Little Barcelona” is the other side of Passeig del Colom, and it’s from here you’ll find your way to the beach. You can get there by taking the metro (L2, yellow) to Barceloneta station, and then walk down Passeig del Joan Borbó, which is lined with paella restaurants and Irish bars, some of which are actually pretty decent.

Keep walking and you’ll eventually see the sea, and if you’re in the mood for a burger, **Makamaka** is great. From there, you can either turn left or right to walk along the beach. Turn to the left and you’ll find your way into what used to be where the old fishing community was based, but is now home to more cocktail bars and tapas joints. Two of the best places for tapas are to be found here—namely, **La Bombeta** and **Jaica** (say: “*hy-kah*”) but expect to queue if you want to eat here, and make sure you’re able to order in Spanish.

### **Language, culture and the split with Spain**

Just a quick note here: Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia, *ergo* they speak Catalan, and although there are similarities, Catalan is a different language to Spanish. Catalan people do speak Spanish, but Spanish people (i.e. those from outside Catalunya) do not speak Catalan. In most tourist places, they’ll understand you whatever language you speak, but—as always—a bit of an effort to speak the local lingo is usually appreciated. ‘Por favor’, ‘Gracias’, ‘una cerveza grande’, and ‘la cuenta’ (the bill) are easy enough to get to grips with.

That should keep you going, but there are at least half a dozen other areas worth checking out, including Pl. d’Espanya and Mont Juic, Poble Espanyol, and a little-known church building called La Sagrada Familia... so feel free to message me with any further questions.

Enjoy!