



# Vignette I.

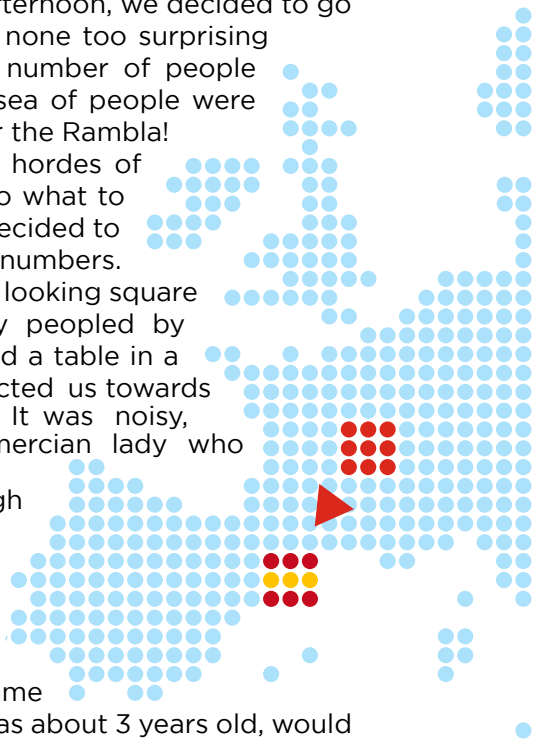
# The Barcelona

Rambla, Guëll Gardens/Park, Montjuïc, Restaurants  
May 2024



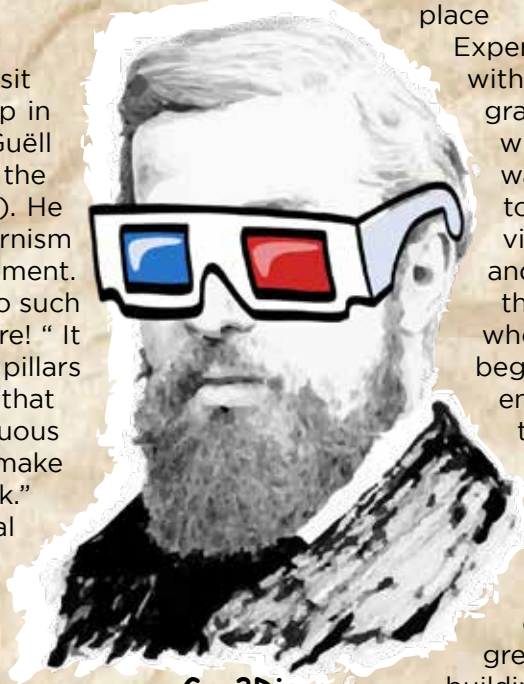
The flight from Geneva to Barcelona was uneventful and lasted about one hour and 10 or so minutes. The weather in Barcelona was better than that in Geneva when we left, which was heartening to say the least given the ghastly weather enjoyed since a few weeks in May.

A friend was accompanying me and he had never been to Spain before. For me it was my fourth visit to Barcelona in about 70 years! Luckily the first four days were pretty clear and pleasant i.e. without rain. In the late afternoon, we decided to go to the famed Rambla and the Plaza de Catalunya. A none too surprising “surprise” awaited us and that was the astounding number of people visiting the Rambla at that time. Literally, a moving sea of people were engaged in the Plaza de Catalunya, and all gunning for the Rambla! We took it in its stride, trying not to bump into the hordes of tourists that we resented, but we were tourists too, so what to say? Or think? It soon became overwhelming, so we decided to take a left on a perpendicular to hopefully loose some numbers. Soon we found ourselves in a rather nice and romantic looking square where there were a number of restaurants, mostly peopled by tourists! Chance was with us, and we were able to find a table in a nice looking place where a smiling young lady directed us towards a table inside as all the “terrace” tables were taken. It was noisy, rowdy and quite happy. The exception was an Amercian lady who was sitting near us at the bar, screaming into her smarthphone to overcome the high decibels in our sound environment. She spent at least an hour recounting her local experiences to someone thousands of miles away who must have been fascinated by the cacophony engulfing her friend’s environment. The place was called “Mono” which in Spanish means monkey. Not sure where the name came from, maybe the owner when he was young (When I was about 3 years old, would be called “Monkey” because i climbed all over the place!) We had a pleasantly tasting dinner which took a while to organise, and after about two hours departed and walked some more, finding that the numbers of tourists hadn’t really diminished by much. However, it was a nice introduction to Barcelona! In full swing and with all the energy that was in the air! We finally decided to take the metro to go back to our neighbourhood and to our stop which was called Gracia.



Can well understand that the locals are more than fed up with the hordes of tourists. But what to do? In some places they are starting to levy extra taxes to try to reduce the tourist flow which seems to span most of the year and not only “the holiday season”.

The next day we intended to visit the gardens that are higher up in Barcelona, called the Guëll Gardens/Park, created by the ubiquitous Gaudi (1852 - 1926). He was the very symbol of Modernism and he dominated the movement. According to him, there was no such thing as a straight line in nature! “ It was he who created leaning pillars like old tree trunks, grounds that undulate, tiled ceilings, sinuous benches and chimneys that make you believe you are drunk.” (From “Barcelone” National Geographic - p.46 - translated from the French). His most famous works in Barcelona are the Casa Milà (La Pedrera), the Casa Batlo, Guëll Park, the Sagrada Familia (Barcelona’s most famous symbol - equivalent to the Eiffel Tower in Paris) and the Palau Guëll among others. A great friendship linked Guëll and Gaudi, who was Gaudi’s patron for many of the creations that Gaudi built. Unfortunately, Guëll passed away in 1918 which much saddened Gaudi.



**Gau3Di**

Our endeavours to visit the Guëll Park were thwarted, as when we arrived in the area, there were masses of visitors and even more so in the park itself that seemed to be a sea of people. We thus gave up, and were thrilled to have encountered on the way up a place called “Gaudi Experiència” symbolised with a tiled creature that graces the Guëll Park and which looks like a sort of water lizard. We decided to enjoy an alternative view of Gaudi’s creations and luckily, the 3D film that was the crux of the whole setup was about to begin soon after we entered. To add realism to the effects, the seats were also moving and shaking! After a short generic introduction, the scene showed Barcelona in the 1880’s or so, and moving at great speed between the buildings which was quite an experience! This session afforded a close view of various buildings, notably the Sagrada Familia, and close ups that would have been impossible in the flesh, given the physical distances within the church and heights that were shown. It was also interesting to see how the skyline of Barcelona changed over time. All in all a very worthwhile experience devoid of crowds, as there were few people enjoying said 3D film.

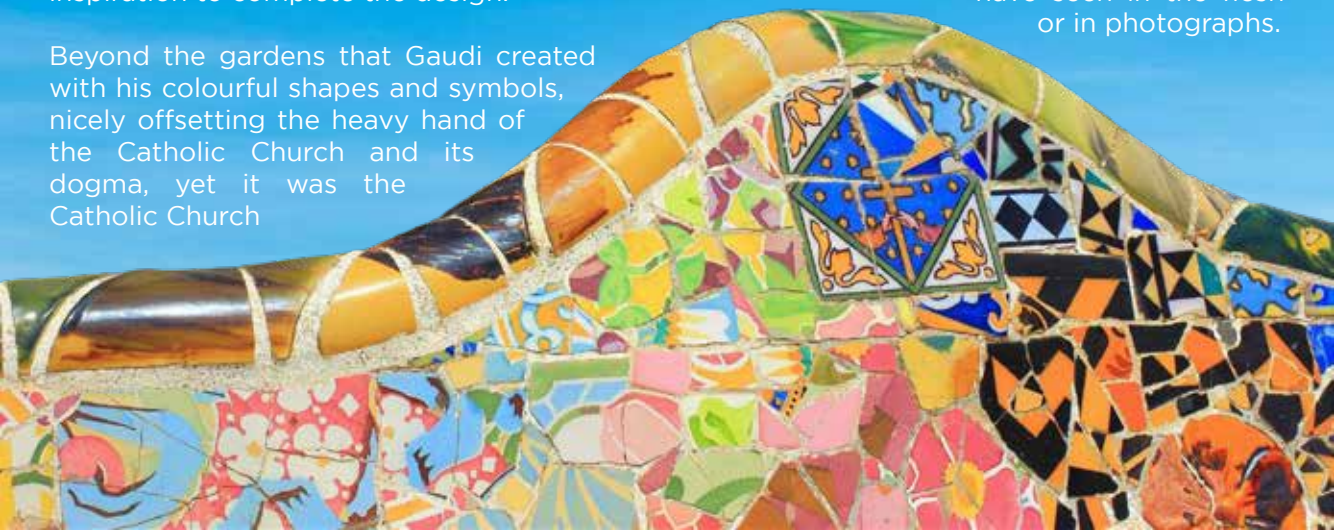


This Gaudi experience must have lasted about 20 minutes and it was very fascinating indeed, and we “saw” how his constructions looked in the Barcelona of that time as the city grew and its intellectual and cultural development raced forward, despite some very negative comments of Gaudi’s contemporaries who were either jealous or were not up to his amazing level of creativity. It should be noted that the Sagrada Familia is now practically finished after more than a century! It was consecrated in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI. It is meant to be finished in 2026, on the centenary of Gaudi’s death. It was initiated in 1880, and in 1882 Gaudi took the direction of the project. The construction only moved forwards with donations which was the rule established by Gaudi. At times such donations were lacking thus slowing down the whole process. During the Spanish Civil War, the original wooden scale model and drawings were burnt, but thanks to his existing buildings, it was possible to get the inspiration to complete the design.

Beyond the gardens that Gaudi created with his colourful shapes and symbols, nicely offsetting the heavy hand of the Catholic Church and its dogma, yet it was the Catholic Church

which authorised Gaudi to build his famed cathedral to reinvigorate the waning faith of rapidly industrialising Barcelona.

The Church wanted to attract more churchgoers. This contrast is particularly visible when visiting the Palau Guëll which almost seems Gothic in its heavy yet sensual and beautiful shapes made for the family of the same name (Gaudi’s main benefactor who supported very much of his work, notably the Guëll Park - which ended somewhat sadly because funds were lacking in the end). One is tempted to look at the heaviness in the construction and rightly or wrongly assume it represents the weight of the Church, contrasted by the childlike exuberance and colourful naive constructions on the rooftop to show a spirit of freedom and naughtily innocent creativity which is so enticing and joyful. I suspect that is what draws so many thousands of visitors to this amazing Palau. So far, I have not been disappointed by the various edifices of his I have seen in the flesh or in photographs.



Besides visiting a favourite spot for tapas not far from the Plaza de Catalunya, going by the pleasant name of “La Bodegueta”, we had to go to one of the hallowed places (supposedly!) to taste the Balearic speciality of “Horchata de Chufa” which is made from fresh tubers of the nutsedge plant. It is a very popular and refreshing drink that is mainly consumed in the hot summer months. The place we were advised to visit for this hallowed drink is called “Tio Che” and sits on the Rambla Pobleu which is rather pleasant, and located on the “Yellow Line” which on the metro map is not far from the seafront.

The address of “Tio Che” was given us by the taxi driver who drove us from the airport to our hotel. Another person advised us to go to another place that was supposed to be the very best in Barcelona, but had lost the address! “Tio Che” was certainly popular and a constant stream of aficionados and or curious first timers seemed to stop and get the fabled drink. Others (a minority), would get ice cream cones that apparently is also made on the spot by the same people or family.

