



A close friend advised me to try travelling without a plan, and thus I set my habits free. Before I knew what was happening, I arrived in Madrid, slightly unnerved but equally excited.

# SEVEN DAYS *in Spain*

I bought my lunch of double cake at the food market on Madrid Opera Square. I walked along and chanced upon Temple of Debod—the ancient Egyptian temple situated right at the centre of the city. This dates back to 2nd century BC, which was reinstalled in Madrid. Its original home was near the Aswan dam site in the Nile valley.

I walked along the main shopping street — Gran Via, seeking Wi-Fi signals to steal and enjoyed a treat of delirious gelato. The cheerful cafes in my evening at La Latina seem to mesmerise me even now... there are wisps of picturesque charm in the air.

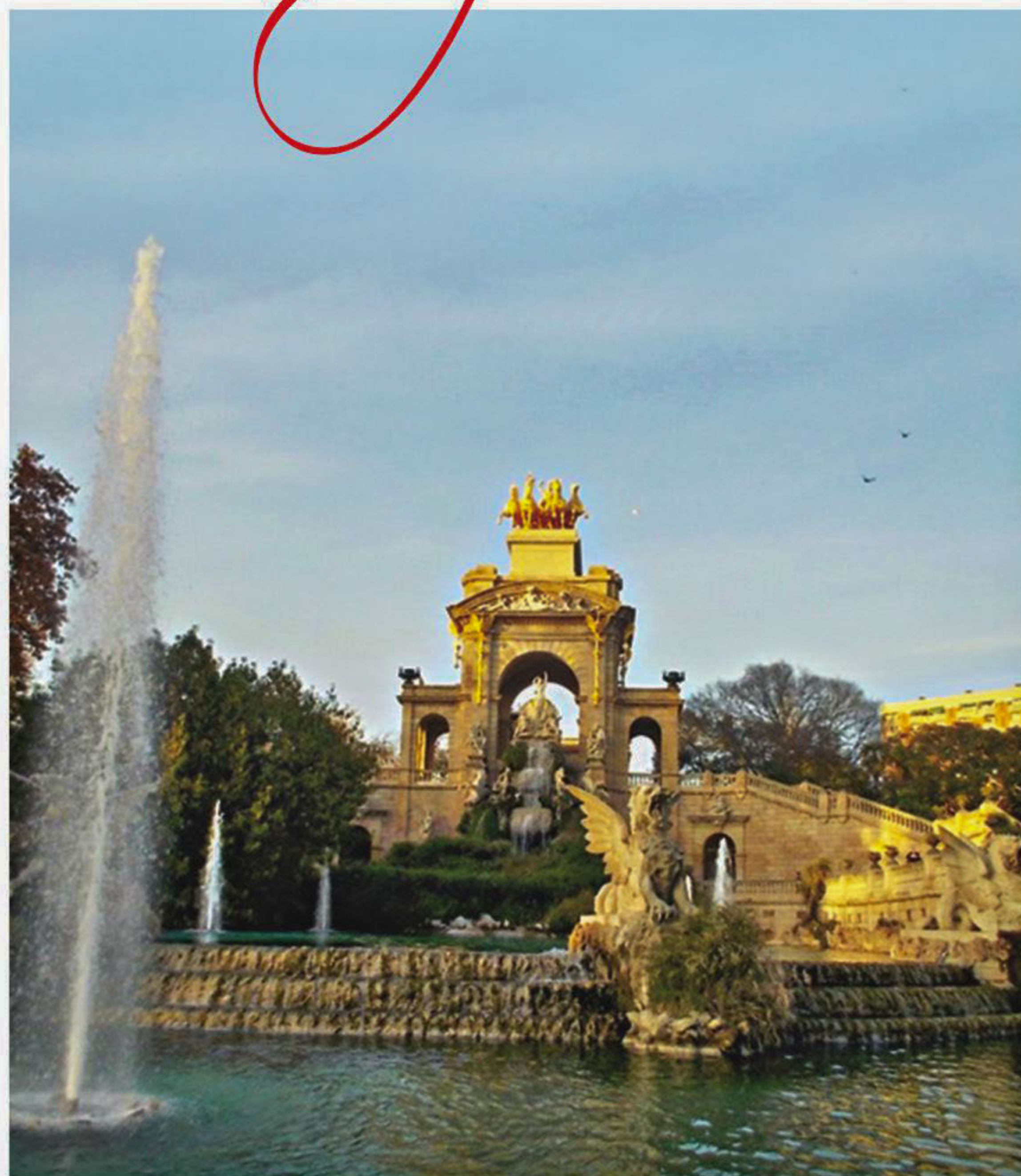
From Madrid airport, I had already purchased a bus ticket for that evening. The five-hour Alsa bus ride to Granada gave me better entertainment than the Gulf based company I flew into Europe with. I used the Internet from one screen and listened to music from the vacant one beside mine, but the night that lay ahead was anything but fun — I froze to frustration in the openness of the bus station in 10 degrees Celsius.

That was one long night!

Morning eventually came in Granada and a local boy helped me operate the bus station locker. After storing my light luggage, I ran off searching for remnants of Muslim Spain in Alhambra. I tried to reach there at dawn, fearing long ticket lines at this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In the ride uphill, the glorious architecture just made me love Andalusia at first sight. The view atop the palace was breathtaking — the flowers in the Generalife estate.

The second-best thing in Granada to me, would be the shape of the street lamps on Gran Via. They are like several cubes clumped together, which looked brilliant alongside the golden leaves along the very road. I know I must return because the hiking trails of Sierra Nevada are waiting, wishing for my curious footprints. This was missed because I chose to visit Malaga for a night to visit a friend. The streets, palm trees and the gulls in Malaga all charmed me. When I revisit, I want to stroll by the



beach and try staying in the Oasis chain of hostels.

Next stop was Seville, the capital of the Andalusian region. On a stunningly sunny morning I rushed around inside the gardens of the Moorish Alcazar Palace. The walls of the complex have lived through history

dating from the Islamic Spain period, late Middle Ages Mudéjar right through to the Renaissance, Baroque and the 19th century. More recently, the Alcázar was featured as a location for the 'Game of Thrones' TV series.

Someday I must enjoy the maze, English garden and Poet's garden as arenas of quiet

contemplation. I have not done justice to their pristine beauty in this trip, but took quick photos to serve memory and earnestly chased the peacocks!

The free walking tour I took after that ended at the grand Plaza de Espana—where dainty ceramic tiled alcoves depict each province in Spain in the semi-circular glory. Seville is also where the girls of that Oasis hostel room bonded and laughed in happy exuberance.

After night walks and dinners, the paths of my fellow solo travellers diverged, staying true to our unique individual experiences.

That led me to Barcelona sixteen hours later, with a bus change in Madrid. This is a city where Gaudi's signature work enmeshing architecture and natural philosophical ideals adorn the city like a default Daliesque wallpaper.

La Sagrada Familia is truly a special place — a remarkable cathedral and definitely worth the ticket price! I walked the hills, harbour, beach, and medieval streets alone and later with an old friend who was also randomly in Spain at the same week.

During that week in Spain I did not pretend to know the language but yes, smiled and spread positive energy in every 'hola' and 'gracias' to the strangers showing me the way. Finally, I was in a place in Europe where I could walk around without a thick coat in December.

I truly enjoyed the hostel experiences. The tapas, UNO game rounds, conversations and joyful vibes were part of my trip, although my heart broke again and again seeing those in slumber inside the ATM booths.

I love some countries for the friends who live there, friends so very close to me, but Spain does not need that excuse for a revisit. I must admit, it stands as a favourite on its own.

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