



Beautiful Barcelona

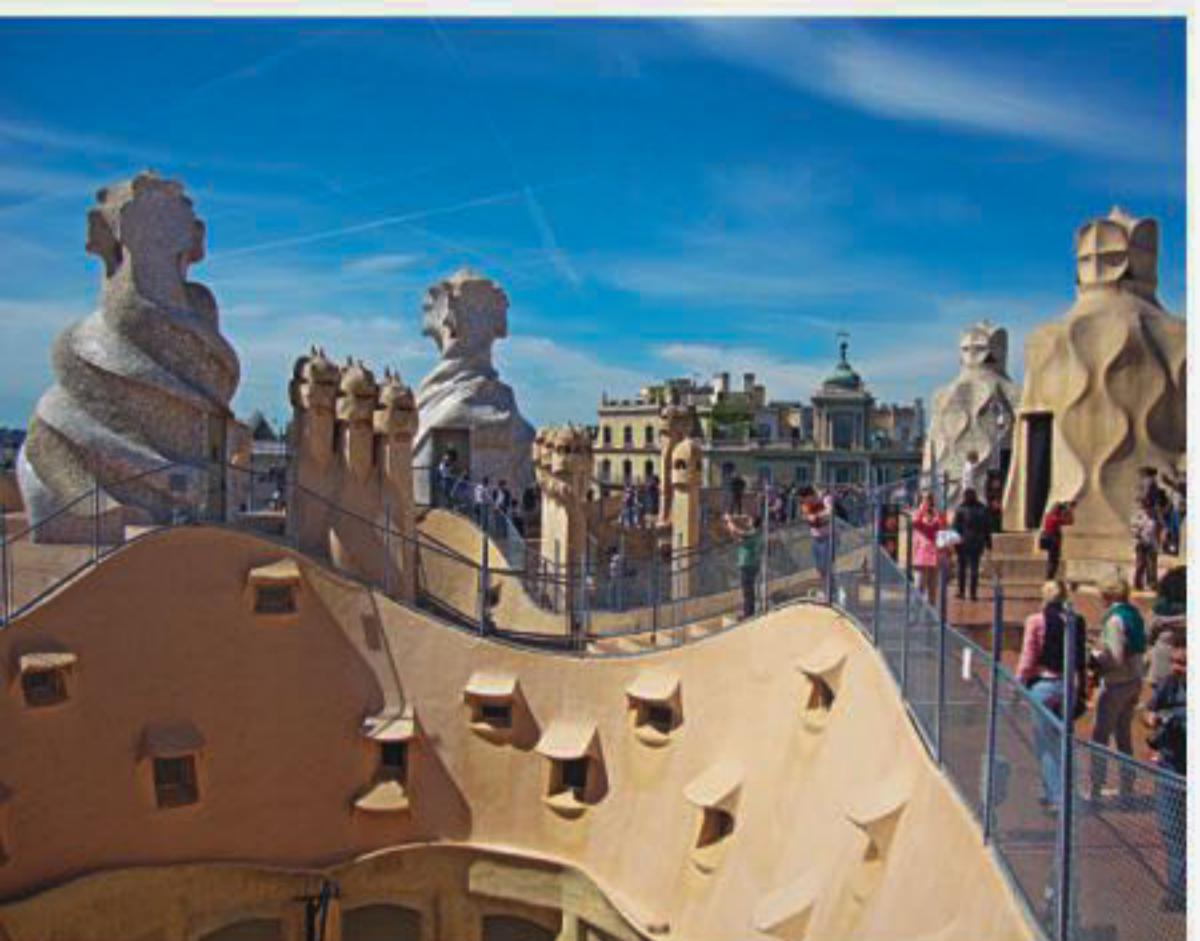
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Barcelona is hard not to fall in love with regardless of how many times I visit. With its rich cultural history and easily accessible location between the panoramic Mt Montjuic and the Mediterranean Sea, it is a haven for travelers, tourists and wanderers. The capital of Catalonia Province and the second largest city of Spain, Barcelona is where the old and the new come together and it creates a beautiful fusion.

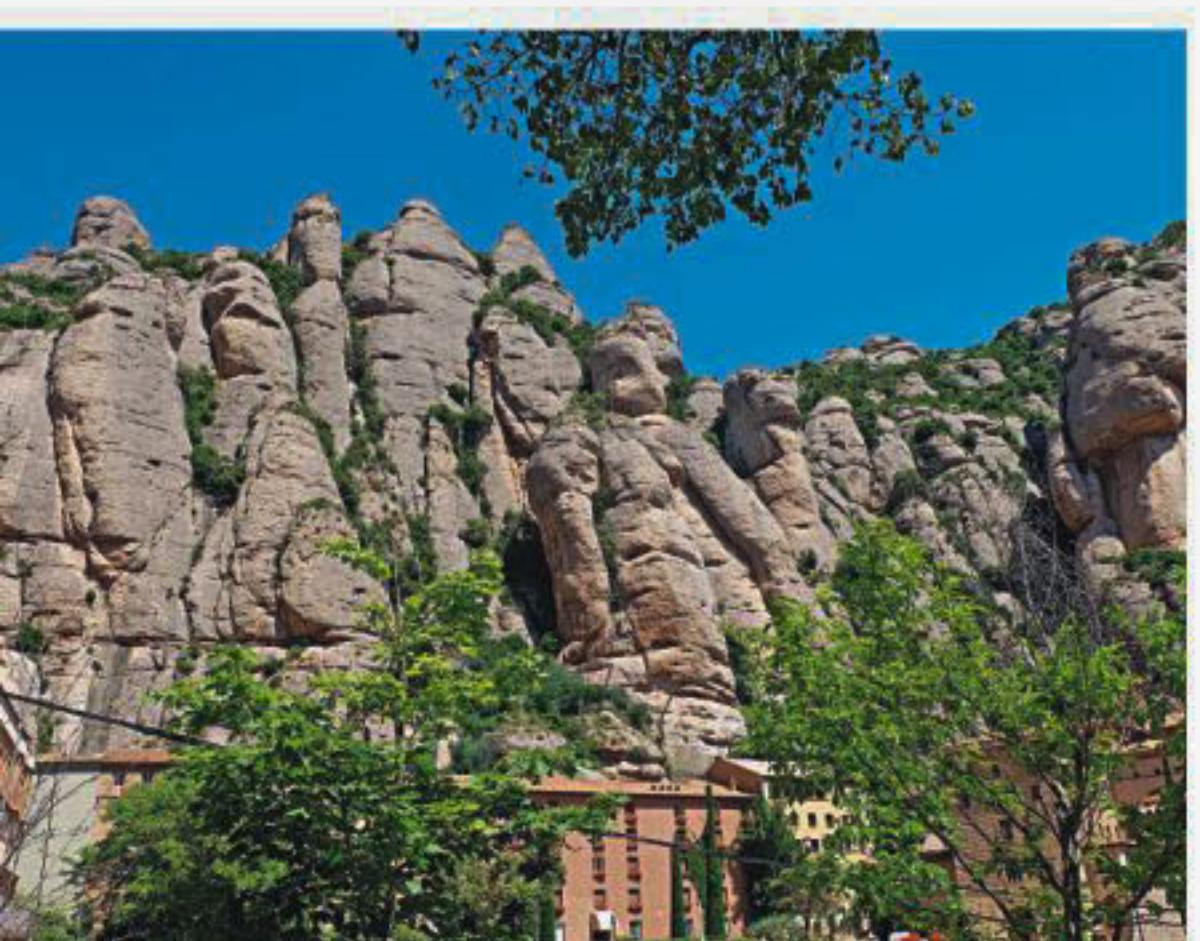
It is a city, where the towering corporate offices, malls, wide boulevards stand tall and in perfect harmony with the ancient architecture, old gothic buildings. Barcelona has somehow managed to preserve the architecture without making anything look out of place. The old buildings have been renovated with modern amenities and thus a unique combination of the new within the old exists.

In my travels around the city, I have made a mental list of a few places which I consider a must-visit.

The first morning, we had a quick breakfast before heading off quickly to Park Güell. The park was commissioned by Eusebi Guell and built by Antoni Gaudí. Park Güell reflects Gaudí's artistic wealth. The artist unleashed all his architectonic genius and put to practice much of his innovative structural solutions in the design of the park. Much like the character of Barcelona, where the new and old co-exist, Güell and Gaudí conceived this park, situated within a natural park. Constructed between 1900 and 1914, the park to this day attract tourists, architects and nature lovers. We also visited the Gaudi Museum, where the celebrated architect spent a considerable period of his life.



Casa Mila



Montserrat's rock formations

While in Barcelona, we made it a point to hop around different heritage sites. Our next stop was La Sagrada Família, a large Roman Catholic church, also designed by Antoni Gaudí, known as "God's Architect". The church is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is considered to be among his most important works. Its high towers crowned with ceramic pinnacles stand out when viewed from any angle. The Sagrada Família also happens to be one of the most-visited tourist sites in the world. Its origins go back to 1881.

As evening fell, we went to Placa de Catalunya. It is one of the busiest and most important squares in the city. It is especially known for its fountains, statues and some of Barcelona's most popular attractions and shops. After some light window shopping, we walked down the La Rambla, one of the most popular boulevards in Barcelona. A walk from Placa de Catalunya all the way to the beach and then a walk down the La Rambla gave us the opportunity to discover some interesting monuments and made us privy to some surreal sights. The promenade was crowded and full of kiosks that sold books, souvenirs, flowers and even birds. There were cafes and restaurants and street performers, essentially a carnival unfolded in front of our very eyes. For dinner, we gulped down risotto with mushroom at one of the many restaurants in the boulevards.

The Spanish are relatively late in having lunch and dinner compared to other European countries. Cafes and restaurants run till the wee hours of the morning. We took much pleasure in eating and sampling various meals throughout the day. Of them, the

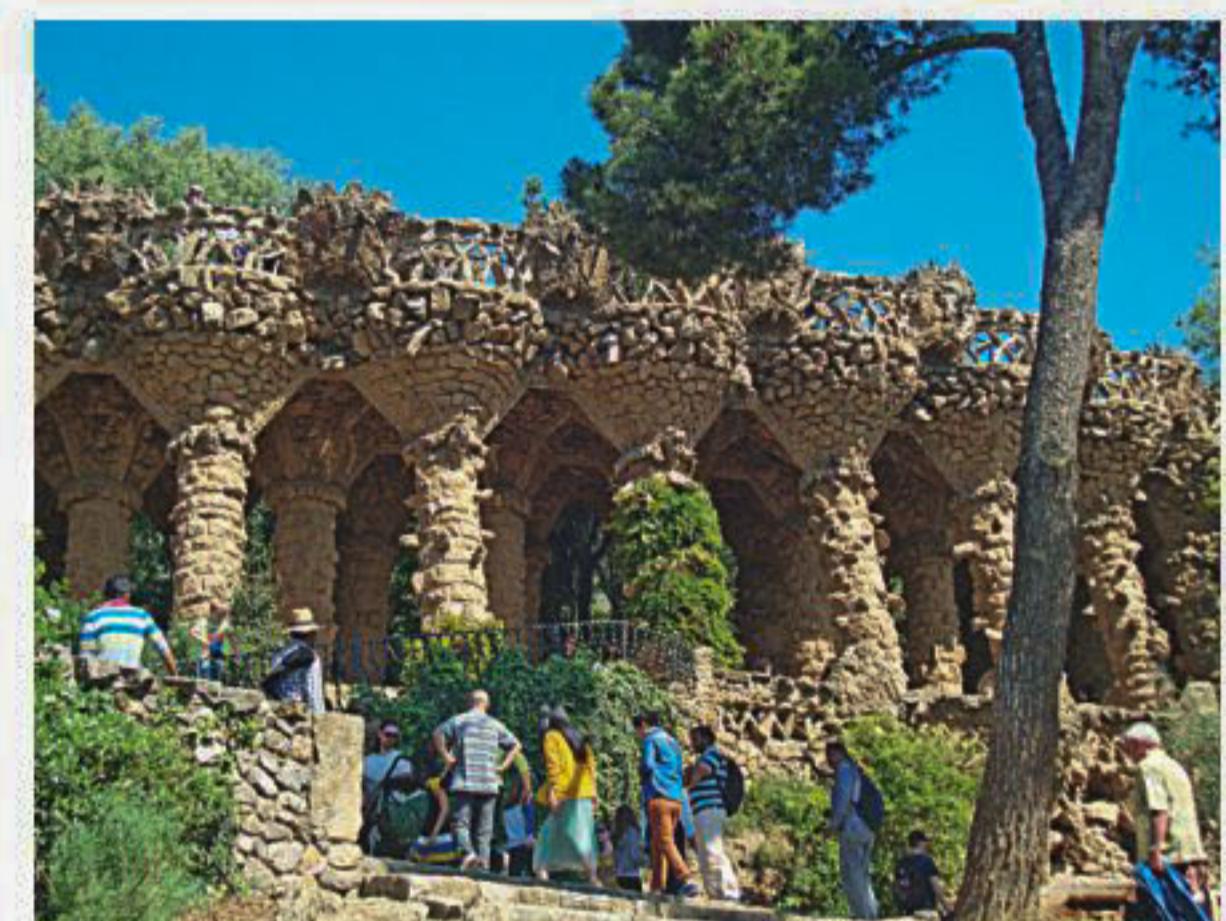
tradition of eating *tapas* was one of our most favorite. *Tapas* are essentially small plates of appetisers served, as friends and family gather to gossip. Our regular meals included *paella* and *fideua* (curry noodles).

The following day, we visited Museu Picasso in downtown La Ribera. The building houses one of the most extensive collection of artworks by Pablo Picasso who is perhaps the boldest, most innovative and influential figure in painting. We were left speechless as we paid our tribute to one of the most accomplished artists in history.

We also made time to visit Casa Mila better known as La Pedrera. In fact, Gaudí is everywhere in Barcelona. The building was designed as a large pedestal to support a sculptural set dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The initial project was never completed. Of the eight storied structure, only the terrace, the attic and an apartment floor remains open for visitors. The other floors have been rented by the present owner. Architecturally, it is considered an innovative work for its steel structure and stone façade.

In the evening, it was time to visit Port Vell ('Old Harbour'), a waterfront harbour to enjoy a walk along the promenade. A blissful experience on its own.

We also made sure we spend more than half a day at Mt Montjuic. The main attraction is the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC) which houses the world's largest collection of Romanesque church murals and Catalan art and design.



Park Güell is a must-visit

Nearby is the Placa d'Espanya and located in the square is the Arena- a huge red circular building used as a stadium for bull fighting. However, with bull fighting now banned in Barcelona, the building has been restored as a modern shopping complex with restaurants, cafes and movie houses.

The sights and smells of Barcelona are endless. One afternoon we found ourselves at Parallel-a neighbourhood of about 25,000 Bangladeshis. It was a beautiful afternoon spent among people from back home.

No visit to Barcelona is complete without visiting its beaches and we made sure to visit at least one. We chose the Barceloneta Beach, which is closest to the city. The beach is serene, the water blue and the sand, a whitish-beige. We basked in the sun, sand and swayed in the slow ocean breeze.

To finish the trip, we visited Montserrat-a mountainous resort boasting a multitude of rock formations.

I write this story reminiscing my trip to Barcelona and all I can say is "Barcelona, I miss you!"