

NEW YEAR IN BARCELONA

Helen Reed gives an overview of her New Year's Eve celebrations in Barcelona and details the many beautiful and wonderful sites that the city has to offer.

I landed on time and was pleased to be re-united with my electric wheelchair. I travelled alone as my friend flew in from a different airport and we met at the apartment that I booked through www.barcelona-enabled.com. It was my second visit to Barcelona and the apartment was one of the best accommodations abroad that I've found. Mics Sant Jordi is in a residential area of Barcelona, a 10-minute Metro ride to the city centre. There are one- and two-bedroom apartments, all with wet-rooms, shower chairs and electric beds, lounge and adapted kitchen and even an electric entry door. We stayed on a bed and breakfast basis, and there is care available too, which I took advantage of.

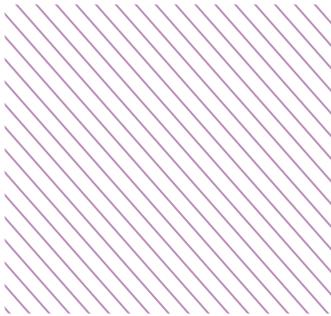
I was met at the airport by a pre-arranged driver with an adapted vehicle, and the apartment was just 25 minutes from the airport. I brought two tourist guide books with me and did a little research on TripAdvisor on the top 10 attractions. The bus and metro stops are directly in front of the apartments. All the buses have an electric ramp and ample space for a couple of wheelchairs. A five-day combined transport ticket for €26 gives unlimited travel. There's also a hop-on hop-off tour bus, which is a good option for an overall tour of the city. There are two routes with stops at all the major attractions.

We booked tickets online to avoid queues to visit the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia. It has been undergoing extensive construction for several years (more than 100, actually!) and even unfinished it's undeniably one of the most impressive churches on the planet; a Gaudi masterpiece still being worked on, with a target completion date of 2026 (the 100th anniversary of his death). Wheelchair users are guided to a ramped entrance and avoid the queues. There is a little park opposite La Sagrada Familia where we found a terrace for a quick lunch and coffee, and were delighted to find a small five-piece orchestra playing and a group of elderly citizens dancing in a ring in the warm sunshine.

We discovered the buses were the most convenient option. The metro is quicker but if you want to change lines on the metro you may find steps and have to exit the station. We booked tickets to see *Barcelona Guitar Trio: Masters of*



HELEN REED – SIA MEMBER



the Spanish Guitar and flamenco dancing at the Palau de Musica Catalana. The show started at midday and I had a very good position at the back to watch this magical 90-minute spectacle. The pictures of the Palau simply cannot do the decor justice. This is modernista style at its finest. The centre skylight is innovative and breath-taking. Exterior pillars are totally encased in unique mosaic designs, so no two are the same. If you're not seeing a show, guided tours are 50 minutes long. After the show we headed off up one of the little side streets to find a tapas restaurant for lunch.

Two buses from our apartment take you high up in the north of the city, to Park Guell. This iconic work of Gaudi is one of the most popular attractions in the city where the artist had an

Park Guell





Basilica de
la Sagrada
Família

cocktail on the 26th floor with spectacular views of Barcelona. We enjoyed an evening stroll up Las Ramblas, a tree-lined pedestrian mall which stretches more than a kilometre and forms the boundary between the quarters of Barri Gotic to the east, and El Raval to the west. There are lots of pavement cafes and souvenir kiosks and street artists. The majority of restaurants have disabled toilets, or I found them in hotels, where I asked if I could use their facilities.

Barcelona's official New Year's Eve event takes place next to the Montjuïc's Magic fountain. The festivities begin at Plaza Espanya at 11:30pm with a variety of entertainment. Fireworks kick off at midnight and last a good 20 minutes. When the clock strikes midnight it is customary to eat a grape for each ring of the bell, as the tradition will bring you good fortune and luck in the New Year. We bought a bottle of sparkling wine with us and drank a toast to 2016.

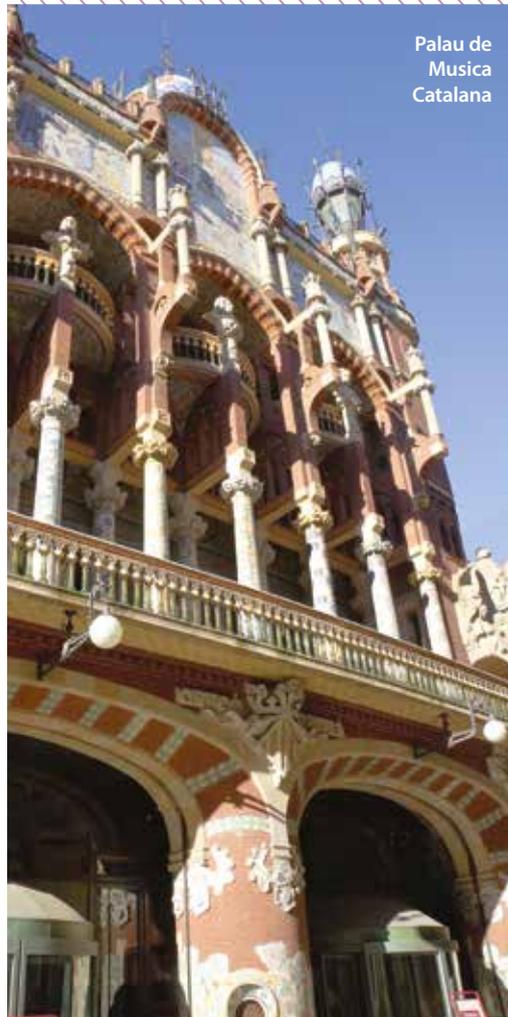
Other attractions we enjoyed were The Picasso Museum (free entry to disabled people), Hospital de la Santa Creu, cable car ride to the fort at Montjuïc, which is a bit cobbled, the cathedral and La Boquera Market – a must-visit in Barcelona. It sells everything from fresh fruits to fish, sweets, meat and gifts.

All in all, Barcelona is a very accessible city and well worth a visit.

opportunity to merge his natural art with nature itself. The idea was to build a garden estate in which the houses would form a symbiosis with nature. Although only two of them were finished, the park is like a magical forest, with an intriguing landscape and exotic species; colourful and delightful. Furthermore, the views on the city are breathtaking! Entry to the park is free but you need to pre-book and pay to see the restricted area. Some of the paths are quite steep and would be challenging in a manual wheelchair, but the views from the top are worth the effort and we found a small band playing, which was a pleasure to sit and listen to. It's a great place for a picnic but it can be very busy on weekends and holidays.

The modernist building, La Pedrera, is another expression of Gaudi's genius with a nice insight into the life of a rich family almost 100 years ago. We hadn't pre-booked and there was a queue for the ticket office, but as soon as one of the staff near the entrance spotted me we were directed through another door up a ramp and to the front of the queue. The audio guide of this magnificent building with lifts to the roof top was well worth the money. The attic space contains an exhibition of Gaudi-related artefacts and will enhance your understanding of the inspiration for the building. They say that there is not a single straight wall – all of the walls are curved. The design is really interesting.

One day we took the bus to the beachfront which features four kilometres of paved flat promenade. It provides the perfect boardwalk for a long and leisurely stroll along the waterfront. There are numerous restaurants around the port. Later we went to the W Hotel to enjoy a



Palau de
Musica
Catalana

FIVE FACTS ABOUT BARCELONA

- 1 Barcelona was voted the 'best beach city' in the world by National Geographic
- 2 St. Georges Day (la Diada de San Jordi) is one of the most celebrated days in Barcelona, representing love and literacy. Traditionally, gifts of roses and books are given, resulting in UNESCO declaring 23 April World Book and Copyright Day.
- 3 Flamenco dancing is not commonly practised in Barcelona as the locals prefer the rock-n-roll scene.
- 4 The Eiffel Tower was intended for Barcelona but the build was rejected by the residents.
- 5 There were no beaches in Barcelona until 1992, when the city hosted the Summer Olympic Games. The beaches were built to improve the appeal of the city.