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**La Mercé Festival Of Barcelona**

**By Mike McDougall**

Towards the end of September Barcelona begins to limber up for the largest event on its festival

calendar, La Mercé, a celebration of the city's patron saint "Mare de Deu de la Mercé". The festival heralds the end of summer and the onset of the autumn months. The festival is a real big deal for the people of Barcelona and the still temperate weather means that, in true Mediterranean fashion, most of the fun takes place outside. There's a massive amount to do whilst the festival is on with events popping up all over the city and over 3000 artists and performers on display with over 500 activities to watch or take part in. The festival has a long and proud and first took place in 1902; today it's a fantastic blend of tradition and innovation.

You'd really need to write a novel to keep on top of everything that goes on at La Mercé each year so, we'll just have to settle for some highlights. We start with one of the oldest traditions; the human towers or "Castells" are a real must-see, sometimes as much as ten stories high they're a fantastic display of teamwork, agility and balance.

A recurring theme throughout the festival is the celebration of fire and one of the most exhilarating experiences of La Mercé is the "Correfoc" (the "Fire Run") where costumed fire-breathing devils rampage around the streets in a colourful pyrotechnic display. Kids absolutely love this sort of thing and audience participation is a big part as the devils chase after those foolish enough to get in their way. Another favourite of the children is the "Dragons and Giants" procession which starts in the Plaza Real next to Las Ramblas.

Foodies and wine lovers shouldn't feel left out either as there is no shortage of indulgence in those areas. Food and wine shows run throughout the festival showcasing local produce and allow you to try and buy the best that Catalonia has to offer.

Festivities aren't just kept on the ground either, La Mercé also celebrates the sky with static hot air balloon flights, kite displays and other aerial exhibitions taking place throughout the festival on the city's beaches. Other areas around the city to look out for are the Centro de Cultura Contemporanea de Barcelona where you can view street theatre, Moll de la Fusta which will be giving centre stage to numerous circus acts and Plaza St Rei where various dance troupes and performing artists will be

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ving for your attention. There's also a museum open day where many of the city's museums and galleries can be entered free of charge including the Picasso museum, the Museum of History of Catalonia, the Maritime Museum and many more.

The culmination of the festivities is called "Piromusica"1 - the finale involves music and a huge fireworks display choreographed together for an amazing audio–visual experience. A big named music star is usually brought in to play the finale and 2005 saw local singer and composer Pep Sala having the honour of closing out La Mercé.

For tourists La Mercé offers a perfect opportunity to see Barcelona at its best - it's a colourful, vibrant spectacle which offers something for all age groups and all tastes. It also offers visitors the perfect opportunity to see more of this wonderful city.

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[Barcelona, Madrid, Sevilla, Valencia], Argentina and Costa Rica. For more information visit

<http://www.babylon–idiomas.com>

### **A Culture–Fest In Barcelona**

#### **By Rent City Apartments**

Barcelona is one of those cities you can visit again and again. Its fantastic location, within reach of some of Spain's most beautiful coastline, together with its history, architecture and huge cultural programme is what makes it one of Europe's most popular city destinations.

So, how can you max–out on culture when you visit Barcelona? Here are just a few suggestions:

#### 1. The Picasso Museum

Barcelona is awash with museum, both public and private, and the Picasso Museum is a must–see on any tourist's itinerary. Picasso trained in Barcelona, and so the museum displays a comprehensive selection of the work he created whilst studying in the city. It is an important collection that shows his technical skills and his growth as an artist. In addition, there is a collection of over 40 ceramic pieces, which were donated to the museum by Jacqueline Picasso in the 1980s. Housed in magnificent medieval palaces, and with classical music concerts as well as the art collection, the Picasso Museum is not to be missed.

#### 2. The Architecture

Costing you nothing but tired feet at the end of the day, you can view the history of Barcelona through its buildings. From its Roman Walls, visit the Gothic quarter, where the Cathedral, public and private buildings all take you back in time to the city's Medieval period. See Modernisme buildings that are

also World Heritage Sites and modern buildings such as those built for the 1992 Olympic Games, and you'll have walked through thousands of years of Barcelonian history in just one day.

### 3. Festivals

Like any major city, Barcelona hosts a number of festivals each year. One of the most popular and best-known is the Barcelona Grec Summer Festival, which encompasses a wide range of productions and performers. In addition, festivals such as the Ciutat Vella Flamenco Festival and the Barcelona Guitar Festival give visitors a true taste of Spanish art and culture.

There's a whole lot of other cultural activities and events to keep you busy on your visit to this amazing city - and you'll want to come back for more

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