

Part 2: The Tour Begins, Barcelona

In total, there were four women on the trip, (and it's worth mentioning that any woman on a Black Girl Travel tour is also called a Bella) including my friend. I was anxious beforehand what the other Bellas would be like, wondering if I would connect with them or feel a bit of an outcast. I'm also an introvert, so I tend to be quiet when first meeting people, especially in groups. The group dynamic was already interesting considering two women had experienced the Roman Holiday tour before, and myself and another woman were new to the trip.

In my first experience with the group I was relatively quiet, listening to conversations about the plane over to Barcelona and how tired everyone was. Fleace wasn't tired at all, which makes sense given she lived just a few hours away by plane in Rome. She was already dropping hints of how busy we were going to be. Fortunately I had heard the stories, but hearing stories was completely different than experiencing things myself.

After dropping our bags off at the condo, went to an old basilica and then to a Gaudi masterpiece (my description) called La Pedrera. It's a home of unique architecture and sculptures, some of which would remind someone of a space age or Star Wars. I would see more Gaudi artwork the next day on the Hop On Hop Off bus, including the famous Sagrada Familia and Parc Guell. I'm not usually one to be struck by art as I was by Gaudi. What I love about art is it can give different meanings to different people, and Gaudi's art was striking, beautiful and creative to me. La Pedrera was my favorite Gaudi piece I saw, particularly because I loved the storm trooper looking statues that I could hardly believe were created so intricately.



As a group, we didn't go to Sagrada Familia given our time constraints and time it would take to actually get in to the basilica. Yet even looking at the church outside was beautiful enough. Parc Guell was another favorite of mine, which reflected Gaudi's love of nature, including plants and animals. I got to take a picture with the famous lizard at the park, a popular tourist attraction, and I visited, as I would describe, a blue house that was in the park. This little blue house literally had cobalt blue walls throughout and views of the park's entrance on the top floor. As someone who loves nature, including the beach, mountains and forests, I loved seeing this. Although I think we as a group could've done without all the crowds, the park was well worth the visit and one I would like to make again.



Anything to do with Gaudi is going to be a lot: a lot of artwork, a lot of architecture, a lot of things coming out at once. Every time you looked at his work, I noticed something different. Some people like the artists with one singular focus. From my perspective, Gaudi was not like that, but I think the variety of work he's done has something everyone

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would appreciate. I couldn't help but think Gaudi's work was speaking to me personally about bringing out my own creativity and being myself. Comparing the Gaudi experience with my own job situation, I would dream of simply living an easy life of visiting Gaudi art, and being inspired to write incredible stories. But even with my love for Gaudi, I knew my life had to be bigger than that, and I hadn't even visited Rome yet. There's really nothing like resonating with grand artwork, even if we can't put into words the feeling we have for it.

Later in the day, my friend and I took a yin yoga class literally less than a minute from our condo. The class was practically all in Spanish, but fortunately our instructor demonstrated the postures so we could understand what he was saying. He also spoke some English too in case we needed more explaining of the postures. It was my first time taking a health/wellness class in another language, which was pretty cool to see what kind of people practice and how they practice. I enjoyed my experience, which was both relaxing and liberating for my joints, something I would seriously come to miss once I reached Italy.

As for my time with the Bellas, I still couldn't tell whether I felt a part or apart from everyone. Sometimes being introverted doesn't help, especially when people didn't know me. Yet I still liked my fellow travelers, and I was hoping we'd grow closer as time went on. The experience still felt very new, and it was just the beginning. As I said before, I had been told about Fleace taking us out and about most of the day and most of the night, which I knew right away wasn't going to sit well with my "rest and relaxation" mentality I was having. I discussed this a little bit with my friend, who basically said just go with the flow. If this was supposed to be my trip, I wasn't thrilled about going with what seemed like someone else's flow, especially with mental reminders about my financial constraints. But then there was the part of me that said this is a life experience, be open, and good will come of it. Besides, I was in Barcelona gazing at beautiful artwork, eating paella and octopus and sipping sangria all day. I should've at least been happy with that.

This was Barcelona: creativity, vibrancy, art, the beach and Gaudi. I couldn't have asked for more, especially since I had come early, caught some waves on the beach, and made a connection with someone from my flight to Barcelona (maybe a short story for another time). Yet Barcelona was just the appetizer to this Roman Holiday tour. I would soon realize that Rome was the main course, wine and dessert that I wasn't prepared to drink, chew and swallow.