

Barcelona: a Real Open-Air Museum!

Symposium attendees will enjoy a great Mediterranean city, full of history and culture.

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Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, is a Mediterranean and cosmopolitan city with Roman remains, medieval quarters and the most beautiful examples of 20th century Modernism and the Avant-Garde. It is no surprise that emblematic constructions by the Catalan architects Antoni Gaudí and Lluís Domènech i Montaner have been declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. The city's origins are Roman, and its long history and economic dynamism have made Barcelona a cultural city, which can be seen in the historic-artistic heritage and the promotion of the most innovative artistic trends.

The city's original site, which was surrounded by walls in the Roman period, is today the Barri Gòtic (Gothic Quarter). Along narrow streets, with secluded squares and charming corners, you will find a series of secular and religious Gothic constructions. Medieval palaces stand around the impressive cathedral. The Plaça del Rei is a square with an array of spectacular buildings such as the Reial Major Palace, the Santa Àgata Chapel or the History of the City Museum. In the Plaça de Sant Jaume there are important institutions, such as the Regional Parliament and the City Hall.

Next to the Gothic Quarter is the Ribera district, which is also medieval. Originally, traders and fishermen gathered there, but over the years magnificent mansions were built. Some of them have been fitted out to be used as important

museums such as the Picasso Museum. Barcelona has many different styles in the same place – from the Gothic structures of the Santa María del Mar Church to the Modernism of the Palau de la Música Catalana auditorium. At the end of the 19th century the new urban development area in the centre of Barcelona was built – L'Eixample. A vast grid plan, with large avenues and chamfered corners joined the irregular plan of old districts and suburbs with the hills in the surrounding areas. The emerging Catalan bourgeoisie built their daring Modernist mansions here. Architects such as Gaudí, Domènech i Montaner or Puig i Cadafalch relied on the help of master craftsmen to fill the streets of Barcelona with fantasy with works such as Park Güell, the house “La Pedrera” or the temple of the Sagrada Família (the Holy Family), which are just a few of the many modernist gems treasured by the city. One of the main arteries of the historic quarter, La Rambla, leads to the Mediterranean Sea, and it is one of the best places to catch the rhythm of the city. The visitor is led through its different sections, from the Romanesque church of Santa Anna, to the bird and flower stalls, passing gorgeous examples of Baroque and Renaissance architecture on the way. There are centres of cultural activity and daily life in this area such as the Palau de la Virreina, the Boquería Market and the Liceu Opera House. Barcelona overlooks the sea, and it has a waterfront that encompasses many different artistic styles. Les Drassanes, formerly a dockyard and now home to the Maritime Museum, and the Llotja del Mar are part of the medieval port facilities. Arcaded houses lead to the Ciutadella Park, the Olympic Village and the Port Olímpic. Beaches, piers and an impressive array of museums and leisure centres (such as the Aquarium, the 3D IMAX Theatre, the Colon viewing point, etc.) make Barcelona's seaport a cosmopolitan place, full of life. Some of these modern facilities are the inheritance from the 1992 Olympics. Their mark can also be seen on the hill at Montjuïc, beside the monumental work from the 1929 World Exhibition. The castle of Montjuïc, (now the Army Museum) takes over this symbolic hill, where true gems of

Barcelona's architecture can be found. The Plaça d'Espanya, the Magic Fountain, the Palau Nacional (with the medieval collection of the Catalan National Museum of Art – MNAC) and the Olympic Ring are a few of its most important works. The Olympic Stadium, the Calatrava Tower, the Sant Jordi Sports Centre and the INEFC (Catalonia National Institute of Physical Education) Pavilion, built by Ricardo Bofill, rise among gorgeous gardens. Barcelona's culture is not only evident in its buildings, parks and outdoor sculptures, but also in its countless museum collections. Artists of the stature of Picasso, Miró, Tàpies or Gaudí have museums entirely devoted to collecting their works. Artistic pieces from all periods are kept in the city's History Museum, the Museum of the History of Catalonia, the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art. Many other institutions also bring the avant-garde movement to the eyes of the general public, through permanent and temporary collections. Sometimes the container is as important as the contents it preserves, and, in the case of buildings and museums, this is true of the collections found in the beautiful structures that the Barcelona Centre for Contemporary Culture (CCCB) and Caixa Forum.

The participants at the symposium will enjoy the best choral singing and a magnificent city.

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