

Where in the World is Kristi Kelly?

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Contributor



Kristi Kelly Enjoying the sites in Barcelona

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Barcelona! So, after freezing in some of the coldest weather in France's history - getting to escape to the clear, sunny skies of Spain was a dream come true. Warm weather, sandy beaches, and a hot party scene to match... I get excited all over again, just thinking about it! Leaving my winter jackets and boots behind - hola Espana!

Now, this was my first chance in flying with Ryanair - and for those of you "lucky" enough to have experienced discount flying in Europe, you can imagine my utter shock at how it all works. Ryanair is like a cramped tourist bus (that just happens to fly). It's a mad cattle call to who basically can get on the plane first to get the best seat. No seat numbers... just elbowing and ankle kicking. Now, combine a crazy combination of cultures, an abundance of screaming children and 30 minute unloading/loading times between flights— ummm, yeah... pure madness. As much as I hate to say this... I thought Air Canada was bad. In all fairness, the cost of the flight was 14.99 (euro) - so you honestly get what you pay for. Anyways, madness aside - I made it to Barcelona in one piece (slightly bruised, but in one piece none the less). Bikini, sun screen, flip flops and sunglasses in tow - I was so ready to take Barcelona by storm! With so many things to see and do - and considering how HUGE the city itself is, I decided that the "hop on/hop off" bus tour was the way to go. This way, I could spend as much time as I wanted - where I wanted... and any place else, I could see, or skip by. Yay for strategy! First major stop? The works of the famous architect/artist Antoni Gaudi - best known for their "natural" feel and "modernism" (Art Nouveau). Instead of using merely a canvas to display his artistic desires, Gaudi, instead, used building design and structure to develop, in my humble opinion, some of the most breathtakingly original works of art I have ever seen in my life. True to his ties to nature, he incorporated simplistic beauty and color into each structure in such a unique manner. Writing about it does no justice, just google it. Though several of his buildings can be found throughout

the city, his trade mark style and presence has undoubtedly set the tone of Barcelona itself. Striking, funky and un contemporary - what better mascot for a city that continues to breathe such fundamental truths.

Arguably, Gaudi's most famous piece is the "Sagrada familia". It is this HUGE cathedral that looms over the city itself, and even after being started in the 1880's, it is not yet finished. The detailing is indescribable, with carvings of plant and wild life throughout its carefully etched out, story high walls. It won't actually be finished in 2026 - and baby, when its done, you better believe that I am going back! It was nothing short of specular and it is not even done yet!

After spending days fulfilling my artistic cravings, it was off to satisfy a completely different one... SHOPPING! Spain (and Portugal) are known for its cheap shopping! What better place than "Las Ramblas"! This main passage-way, mid city, is packed with street vendors and buskers, all basking for your attention! It is jammed with musicians, dancers, artists, food and flower carts, and tourists/locals alike! What an atmosphere! And if the day time was hectic, just wait until night - then things really heat up! It was at this time that we had the chance to stock up on fresh fruits and supplies for the day's adventures as "La Boqueria" is this massive marketplace just off Las Ramblas, selling everything from fresh oranges to live chicken (and everything in between)! Las Ramblas lead right to the heart of

Barcelona - the shopping district. Every possible high-end clothing store could be found - not to mention at some amazing prices! So, you can't visit a country like Spain, and not try the food. The Spanish in particular have these neat places called "Tapas" bars - which I believe translates into "snacks" or "small meal" - and how it works, is that you go into this bar, you are given a menu with literally 30 or 40 little dishes. You pick and chose which ones you want - and the bartender (with your alcoholic drink of choice) will bring you choices. Bring on the Sangria! Tapas are relatively cheap if you practice self restraint can be a great choice when traveling, as not only do you get a great meal - but you can try a little of everything at once!

I couldn't leave Barcelona without spending some quality time on the beach. With something like 5K of swimming beach available - how could you even resist. Its almost surreal to see how the beach literally is part of the city itself. With a "mediterraneo" coast and the hot heat of the siesta sizzling away the afternoon - trust me, the beach is the place to be! For those of you interested... this also happened to be my first experience in witnessing the whole "topless" beach thing. Was I brave enough to attempt it?? I'll never tell, but, I was impressed to realize that it really, "is not that big of a deal". Ha, can you imagine at Brackley Beach, the kind of response you would get from "just strutting" around? Its just a way of life in there... an accepted norm and frankly, it was kinda refreshing. And

who says confidence doesn't come with age...

The list of attractions could go on - I managed to check out everything that I wanted, and more. The Olympic Port, the Barcelona Palace, the FCBarcelona Football Club/Stadium, and the Gothic Quarter were all un-missable sights. Combine that with the fun-loving people, beautiful language and fantastic atmosphere, you really can't go wrong in this city. Fair warning though, WATCH YOUR POCKETS! Pickpocketing is a successful career for some the sketchy folk wandering around popular tourist hot spots - and man, can they be tricky! They team up and create some of the most unique ways of trying to grab what they can - everything from purse snatching, to all out mugging!

Piece of advice? First of all, don't look too damn obvious - the whole "camera around the neck" and the "US of A" ball cap tends to give you away pretty quickly - making you easy prey. Even when at a club or a bar keep nothing in your back or front pockets, and at night, stay with at least one other person when wandering around. Keep vitals like passports and visas locked away safe in your hostel/hotel - but if you have to take them with you - wear a money belt/band under your clothing. Ugly? Yes, very. Worth it? Totally. Now... don't be paranoid about "protecting yourself from the evil on the streets" - but keep your eyes open and stay aware - and you'll just end up saving yourself from unnecessary heartache.

What a place though! Barcelona stole my heart! The whole place just hummed excitement and passion - I could have easily spent longer, and I was utterly fascinated by palm trees... but you know what they say, "a rolling stone gathers no moss"... and this was still just the beginning of the adventures to come!!!

