

A place to stay: The Cotton House Hotel

IN 1879 a wealthy Catalan family commissioned a home in the wide streets and amid the elegant Art Nouveau buildings of Barcelona's newly developing Eixample district. They lived in Casa Boada until the Sixties, when it became the Cotton Manufacturer's Guild HQ.

Another four floors were added, along with a wide, wonderfully retro metal spiral staircase suspended from the ceiling, keeping the airy grand rooms on the "noble" first floor.

Last year the property saw its latest transformation when Marriott launched it as the five-star, 83-room Cotton House Hotel, above. Original parquet floors, wood panelling and a grand marble staircase, matched by a wide outdoor restaurant and bar and wonderfully comfortable bedrooms, make this an intriguing and beautiful place to stay.

The young staff are eager to please and the location is good, in the heart of Barcelona, five minutes from Gaudi's wonderful buildings on the Passeig de Gràcia and 15 minutes from the Sagrada Família. Top marks for a thrilling renovation of a classical Barcelona home.

■ ROOMS start from £178 a night, with 10 per cent tax. Cotton House Hotel (hotelcottonhouse.com) Gran Vía de les Corts Catalanes 670.

Spain's second city will stun you

Leave London on Friday afternoon and enjoy tapas in Barcelona by 9pm, says **Cathy Hawker**

THE best weekend retreats are easy to reach and offer an enviable change of lifestyle. Step forward Barcelona, Spain's second city. Leave London on a Friday afternoon and by 9pm you can be sampling tapas by the Med with two full sunny days ahead.

This stunning city's location, between Montjuïc Mountain and the sea, keeps it relatively contained, while its distinct areas including the Gothic Old Town, elegant modernist Eixample and the seafront promenade, provide variety and interest.

Access is good from around the world, the weather is great and escaping for day trips to the beaches and bays of the Costa Brava or to the ski resorts of the Pyrenees is easy. No wonder a Barcelona bolt hole appeals to more and more buyers.

VALUE IN THE OLD TOWN

"After eight years of price falls and with an improving economy, the value on offer in Spain now is extraordinary," says Joanna Leverett of Cluttons. "You can buy a renovated apartment in Barcelona for £194,000, one of the most visited and loved cities in the world. That is why we chose to open an office there this summer."

This perfect storm of price falls and a now-growing economy has encouraged developers to renovate entire apartment buildings. Off a small square in the Gothic quarter of the Old Town 13 one- and two-bedroom completed



Gorgeous, by Gaudi: the work of the Catalan Modernist architect peppers Barcelona, above

From £488,000: two-bedroom flats at Marlet 1 in Barcelona Old Town. Through Lucas Fox



From £279,000: furnished flats with good-size terraces at Correu Vell in the Gothic Old Town. Through Cluttons

apartments in **Correu Vell**, an 1850s building artfully designed with an industrial-modern touch, have sold well. The final four start from £279,000 for a furnished 503sq ft with a good-size terrace, through Cluttons.

The Old Town's narrow streets and charming small squares are atmospheric, but can also be dark. This is the prime tourist area and noise bounces off the walls of tightly packed buildings. Look out for wider streets and skilful design that lightens living areas.

The Spanish developer of Correu Vell has started work on a larger building in a wider street just one block from the sea. **Anselm Clave** will have 20 flats, all one to three bedrooms and with a similar style of painted brick walls and whitewashed beams, priced from £194,000 for 495sq ft, also through Cluttons. A two-bedroom garden flat costs £306,000 and three bedrooms cost £503,500, all due for completion next spring.

RENTAL YIELDS

A well-finished two-bedroom flat in the Old Town would rent long-term for £1,046 a month or £116 a night. Short-term rentals – anything under three months – remain illegal for flats without a rental licence and city authorities are halfway through a two-year moratorium when no new licences will be issued.

Marlet 1 is a fully renovated 19th-century building that is claimed to offer more natural light than any property on sale in the Old Town. Two-bedroom flats of 1,237sq ft to 1,335sq ft with high ceilings, open-plan living areas and big windows are priced from £488,000.

The communal roof terrace has views across Barcelona and sales agent Lucas Fox says there is potential for long-term 3½ per cent rental yields.

■ Cluttons: cluttons.com (020 3813 9191)
■ Lucas Fox: lucasfox.com

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