

GOING TO GIRONA

In a flow state on assignment while travelling, columnist *Carole Edrich* takes us to Girona.

I have an on-assignment flow state (a kind of extended hyperfocus) that is somewhere between excitement at the unknown, mindfulness as I take it all in, and heart-swelling enjoyment. On a recent trip to Girona and the Costa Brava, it struck me that my inner ADHDirector makes me good at these adventures. I never panic, and overwhelm is rare because I feel it coming and can work to prevent it. That's just as well because when it comes, I simply

shut down.

Driving solo inland through small valleys of vines, olive groves, rice plains and walled villages perched picturesquely on hilltops, I want to stop and make notes, and wait and see what happens when ochre sandstone buildings catch the afternoon light. At the wheel in the drier, more granular area of Empordà, I want to pause, properly appreciate, and photograph the patchwork of vines in geometric rows, the cypress trees standing sentinel by old farmhouses, paler limestone-walled hill villages, and scrubby holm oaks. Depending on the time of day and weather, the play of cloud and sun on the distant Pyrenees



Credit: Carole Edrich



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creates more shades of blue or purple than I could ever imagine, but I have no time to watch. Having a lot to fit in is my last-minute press trips, and I love it.

I'm here to shove as much as possible into the four days around the feast of Sant Jordi. The Catalan nation is proud of its Saint's Day, which they've twinned with UNESCO's World Book and Copyright Day. It's a working day, when people exchange books and roses, attend cultural events, and just chill.

One evening in Girona where – despite satnav – I give up trying to find the hotel and park in the right place by coincidence. The next day I walk between s'Agaró and Platja d'Aro, along the broad, low-stepped coastal promenade with Roser Serra, who shares her enthusiasms and knowledge.

Then an hour of one-to-one mindfulness with Carlota de Prada under the dappled shade of tamarisk trees, between beautiful traditional-stone walls and aquamarine shores.

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The drive to a wine tasting session at Celler Brugarol in nearby Palamos is challenging. I leave on time. Use the satnav. Follow signs. Go round in circles. But where the map says Celler Brugarol should be is a dead-end road. I'm so late it feels pointless, so park the car somewhere that might be a car park, get out, breathe deeply in, and discover I'm in Finca Bell-lloc with its beautiful Jaume Plensa sculpture. As Douglas Adams wrote: “I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.”



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There's another trip where the satnav takes me the back way. Miles along a sandy, muddy road, through a gate into a field with a rugged track and gaps that are not so much potholes as places where great lumps of road have caved in or disappeared. In the end, I leave the car and walk to the winery. It's worth the challenge. This is the new Mas Geli winery. So new they're still fixing up the building (a marvellous glass-fronted affair). They hold festivals in the vineyards, live concerts with dinners created by local producers, and my tasting of three excellent wines is served with a stunning spread of locally sourced snacks. There's just time for a quick walk to the lake, where the co-owner holds yoga-plus-wine-tasting events, and it's time to find the next place on the list. On the way to my last hotel in Girona, parking has turned into a perplexing series of surprising, small-scale horrors, probably because it's Sant Jordi's day. This includes sudden scary sharp turns into steep downhill ramps with walls that look closer than they are. I'm still in that flow state and my exhilaration is high. Excruciatingly aware of the traffic queue behind me and the

audience of friendly locals not hiding their hilarity in the slightest. Of course I manage. I have a drink at Plaça de la Independència (Independence Square). It's a porticoed square with cafés, terraces, and a central monument. Then on to Plaça dels Mercaders (Merchant's Square) where balconies become the stage and

famous Catalan poetry is performed in dialogue with songs. Then I follow the crowds for a while, enjoying the atmosphere and the crowded, cobbled but mostly accessible streets before retreating to my hotel for an excellent meal and finally to my room.

On the last day, after a relaxing breakfast and solo photo-wander, I meet Isabel Godoy again. We walk the city walls (easy seating along the route and some limited wheelchair accessibility) for the view of both old and new Girona, and finish with tea at the wonderful Casa Heras. The flow state holds. I don't shut down. I'm already wondering what would happen if my next visit really did have 'a su aire' as they say here in Girona. Space for thinking, for being, for meeting more people and doing things properly. Therein lies the nub. ■

Useful Links

CostaBrava.org for general information. I stayed at **hotelcarlemanygirona.com** and **hotelciutatdegirona.com** in Girona, and **hotelbarcarola.es** in s'Agaró. They all have wheelchair accessible rooms. **Brugarol.com** and **masgelipals.cat** are the wineries.

And Another Thing...

A conversation with a friendly bag-scanning officer at Stansted Airport makes me realise something I should always have known. By wearing the sunflower lanyard and not saying a thing I've been making life unnecessarily hard. There are quicker or easier ways to get through passport and luggage control if you ask. Similarly, SIXT Girona Airport are happy to shuttle people to their hire car. I need to get over myself and ask.

No need to ask in Durham, where another visit went swimmingly. I'll cover it in a future column.



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