

## Bill and Cathy McArthur in Spain: 22

We took the ferry from Mallorca back to Barcelona, a seven hour trip that landed close to where Columbus returned from his first trip to America. Although it was a beautiful day with calm seas, it was a boring trip for all of the passengers. Bill had plenty of time to check out the map of Barcelona on his computer and discovered that our hotel was only about eight-tenths of a mile from the dock, straight up the **Ramblas**, a tree-lined, kiosk-lined walkway which runs about a mile from the port into the city. So, with memories of Rome and Venice fresh in our minds, we walked to our hotel. It was a very easy stroll and the GPS was hardly necessary to find our hotel. Bill had had a very difficult time getting a hotel on the Ramblas for our stay. We ended up paying a very high amount for a very weird situation. We stayed at a **Citidines Apart'Hotel** which is a studio apartment. The room was very clean and nicely furnished, but it didn't have a bed – just a pull-out couch. Also, there is no maid service (unless one wants to pay an extra 22 euros per day) or linen service (7 euros extra per day). However, the location was perfect, with lots of interesting sites within walking distance.

Barcelona is the second largest city in Spain and is about half the size as Madrid. It has more than twice as many points of interest than Madrid however. The architecture of Antoni Gaudi is ever present and the artists Picasso and Miro have strong Barcelona connections. The main language spoken and on signs is Catalan, which is a language that combines elements of French and Spanish. Somehow, putting two melodious languages together, the Catalonians managed to come up with a very harsh sounding language. We found that English sufficed in most situations anyway. The best single language to know in Barcelona is probably German, with French second, and English third. A lot of people have taken us for French, rather than our identification as British that we found in Andalusia.

The Columbus monument at the base of the Ramblas, has a statue of Columbus supposedly pointing at America, but Bill swears that he is actually pointing at Ibiza which has the wildest club scene in Europe. We wondered if Columbus actually discovered the Balearics and traded beads with the Germans. One evening, coming back from dinner, we had a run-in with a pair of gypsy women pickpockets. When one of them grabbed Bill's arm going for his pocket or bag, Bill yelled "Don't touch me!" and the two thieves melted away. They both had newspapers so that they could work out of sight underneath.

Cathy learned the Paris subway system when she toured Europe in the 60s and has transferred that knowledge to conquer metros in many European cities since. So, when we wanted to travel to a distant park filled with Gaudi architecture, Cathy came through again and guided us to the destination and back. We toured the old Roman and medieval quarter, the Picasso museum, Gaudi structures, and various plazas scattered around the city.

On our last day, we toured another Gaudi casa and then headed for the waterfront. Since it was May Day, everybody was off from work and out on the walkways and beaches. Barcelona has miles of golden beaches lined with restaurants and can rival most shore resorts. Quite a city!

**Bill and Cathy**