

TEN THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GIRONA

1. TOWN FESTIVAL: SAINT NARCIS

The patron saint of Girona is Saint Narcis and to celebrate it, there are multiple events held all over town two weeks between the 29th October (Saint Narcis Day) and the first week of November. The inaugural ceremony takes place in front of the Town Hall with the dancing of the giants, music and a few speeches. The giants are legendary figures from Girona's past. Adolescents head straight for the Devesa Park where there are more contemporary attractions on offer like a fairground and cheap booze stands with a stage for bands to play until the early hours of the morning. Also on offer are a firework dance around town, the famous human castles and plenty of street stands selling all sorts of foods and art.



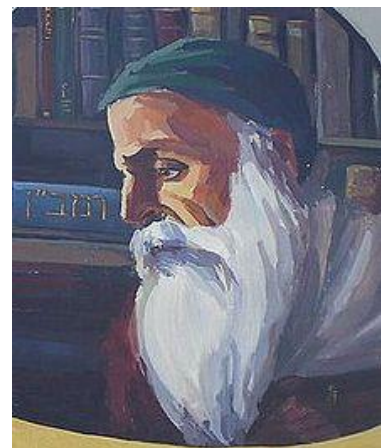
2. THE JEWISH QUARTER

Girona had an important Jewish community in the past and this shows in its buildings. The most important traces of its past are concentrated in the Old Jewish Quarter, el Call Jueu. It's an intricate and labyrinthine district, crisscrossed by winding streets and narrow flights of stone steps. In Carrer de la Força, which used to be the main street of the Jewish Quarter, there is the Museum of the Jewish History also called Centre Bonastruc ça Porta. In the houses of the nearby streets there are many treasures to be discovered such as mezuzah. Other important streets are carrer de Sant Llorenç and carrer de Manuel Cundaro. In the romantic gardens of the former Caserna dels Alemanys, in the highest part of the city, we still find the ruins of the Gironella Tower, where the Jews who fled the historic massacre of 1391 sheltered.



3. THE KABBALIST NACHMANIDES

Girona was home of an important Jewish character: the great kabbalist Nachmanides – Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman, or Bonastruc ça Porta to give him his Catalan name (1194 – 1270). He was a leading medieval Jewish scholar, Catalan rabbi, philosopher, physician, kabbalist, and biblical commentator. He was raised, studied, and lived for most of his life in Girona. He died in Jerusalem.



4. MODERNIST BUILDINGS

In Girona there are also important buildings of the Modernism, a cultural and architectural movement of the beginning of the 20th century. Its most important representative is Rafael Massó and there are many buildings of this architect all throughout Girona. There are flat buildings like casa Ribas Crehuet, Casa Cots, Casa Batlle, Casa Teixidor, known as La Punxa and Casa Massó, shops like Farmàcia Sagué or original factories like La Farinera Teixidor which is the site of a newspaper.



5. THE COCOLLONA

These apocryphal name contemporary legend originated when a nephew of photographer Emili Massanes made up the word “cocollona”, a hybrid between the Catalan words “cocodril” (crocodile) and “papallona” (butterfly). The childish word inspired Dolors Codina, Emili Massanes and Carles Vivó to invent a legend about the transformation of a novice nun into an imaginary winged reptile.



The popularity of the Cocollona legend has by now extended beyond the private sphere; the name has been used by restaurants, publishing houses and even a theatrical production, all of which has contributed to keeping the legend alive and well in Girona city.

In the Mercadal district, there used to be a convent of nuns who were not exactly a model of piety. However, there was one novice among them who did not wish to partake in the general high jinks. The other nuns kept her out of the way by locking her up in a damp underground cell. The novice stayed there for so long that the humidity made scales appear on her skin and she eventually turned into a crocodile. On the other hand, her purity and holiness made her grow butterfly wings. On full moon nights, the ghost of Cocollona can be seen swimming in the River Onyar.

6. PARIS BENEATH THE ARCHES

The ceiling of one of the arches of the Rambla de la Llibertat is completely taken up with a great map of Paris (19th century). It was painted as an advertisement for a shop selling lingerie and toilet and hairdressing goods, now no longer in existence, which went under the name of La Parisièn; it is a faithful reproduction, in the artless strokes of a naïf artist, of the urban structure of the centre of the French capital, one hundred years ago.



7. THE PETRIFIED WITCH

On one of the buttresses of the cathedral's apse we see the only gargoyle with a human face; it is popularly known as *the witch*. Legend tells how this woman, an expert in the art of witchcraft, used to throw stones at the religious processions, until one day she fell victim to a curse, which left her stuck to the church wall. An old local song narrates "Pedres tires, pedres tiraràs; de pedra et quedaràs" (You may throw stones but beware; for you'll become a stone yourself.)



8. FLOWERS' TIME



Girona celebrates spring's arrival with the annual flower festival aptly named Temps de Flors. While both public and private spaces are decorated, the celebration's centrepiece is the eighty-six steps of the Gothic cathedral. During the "Temps de Flors" the crypt of the cathedral and its garden are on display and beautifully decorated with flowers. This is also one of the few times in the year when the tower of the cathedral is open to the public, offering spectacular views across the city. For nine days in May Girona becomes a giant garden with a wealth of scent and colours. Apart from the flowers there are exhibitions, art installations and concerts. "Temps de Flors" was first held in 1954 in the Municipal Theatre, sponsored by the City and Provincial Councils. The success of the first

“Temps de Flors” forced organisers to continue the festival and find a more suitable venue, and at the same time promote the city’s rich heritage. Each year different sites around the city joined the celebration of flowers, from former monasteries, monuments, small churches and restored public gardens.



9. “TEMPORADA ALTA” FESTIVAL OF PERFORMING ARTS

Girona has a very important theatre festival, called Temporada Alta. It has been running since 1999. Temporada Alta is a festival of performing arts that takes place in the cities of Girona and Salt during October, November and December. Throughout its history, the festival has gained widespread recognition in the industry, among the public and in specialist media. Described as the “best festival in Spain”, it has become a benchmark event that is gaining status alongside the most acclaimed festivals in Europe.

The festival’s focus on staging major acts from the international scene goes hand in hand with its goal to be a springboard for fresh talent. All of this together with the festival line-up, featuring diverse genres for different audiences and an extensive range of parallel activities, has turned Temporada Alta into a must-see event.



10.A KISS OF COMMITMENT

A Romanesque column stands four metres high in the Plaça de Sant Feliu; it is a replica of the twelfth century original which is now kept in the Art Museum, with the figure of the lion- known as the lioness- climbing up onto the capital. The column used to stand at a nearby hostel, where it inspired a popular saying addressed to new comers to the city: “No pot ser veí de Girona qui no faci un petó al cul de la lleona” (You can’t be a local in Girona unless you kiss the lioness’s backside); this was a fairly complicated operation, due to the height of the column. Over the years, this saying has become a civic parable. What started out as a dare, and continued as a ritual way of seeking acceptance as a citizen, has acquired a moral: the kiss as commitment to the city. It has also been given another possible meaning for people passing through: it is a kiss that guarantees their return to Girona.

