



PARK GÜELL TOUR

Tucked in the foothills at the edge of Barcelona, this fanciful park—designed by Antoni Gaudí—combines playful design, inviting public spaces, and sweeping views over the rooftops of the city. Exploring this fairly compact space, you'll see a pair of gingerbread houses, a grand staircase monitored by a trademark dragon, a forest of columns supporting a spectacular view terrace, a famously undulating balcony slathered in colorful tile shards, tubular passages burrowing under never-completed roadways, a network of nature trails...and Barcelonans and tourists alike enjoying a day at the park.

Orientation

Cost and Hours: Free, daily 10:00-20:00, tel. 932-130-488.

Other Park Güell Sights: **La Casa del Guarda**—€2, included in Barcelona History Museum ticket (see page 52), daily April-Sept 10:00-20:00, Oct-March 10:00-18:00, tel. 932-562-122.

Gaudí House Museum—€5.50, €16.50 combo-ticket includes Sagrada Família church, daily April-Sept 10:00-20:00, Oct-March 10:00-18:00, tel. 932-193-811, www.casamuseugaudi.org.

Length of this Tour: An hour is plenty to get your bearings, but it's a pleasant place to linger longer.

With Limited Time: Ogle the entryway, zip up the staircase, and relax on a mosaic bench for a few minutes.

Getting There: Park Güell is about 2.5 miles due north of Plaça de Catalunya, beyond the Gràcia neighborhood in Barcelona's foothills. If asking for directions, be aware that Catalans pronounce it "Park Gway" (sounds like "parkway").

From downtown, a **taxi** will drop you off at the main entrance for about €12. From Plaça de Catalunya, the blue Tourist Bus or **public bus** #24 travel to the park's side entrance. From elsewhere in the city, follow this **Metro-plus-bus combination**: Go by Metro to the Joanic stop and look for the Carrer de l'Escorial exit. Walk up Carrer de l'Escorial to the bus stop in front of #20. Take bus #116 directly to the park's main entrance; you'll see gingerbread-gate houses and a grand stairway. To get back to the city center after your visit, catch bus #116 going in the same direction; get off at Plaça de Lesseps and take the Metro from there. (It's a 15-minute downhill walk from the park's main entrance to the Lesseps Metro: Walk straight ahead down Carrer de Larrard and turn right on busy Travessera de Dalt to find the Metro entrance.)

For tips on reaching Park Güell from Gaudí's Sagrada Família church, see page 163.

Eating in the Park: Options are limited. On the main view terrace, a **snack bar** with tables offers simple sandwiches and beverages. A few vendors hawk drinks and snacks at the side entrance. If you've packed a **picnic** (a good idea), head just above the Rosary pathway near the main terrace, where you'll find tree-shaded tables.

Overview

Funded by his frequent benefactor Eusebi Güell, Gaudí intended this 30-acre garden to be a 60-residence housing project—a kind of gated community. Work began in 1900, but progress stalled in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I and the project never resumed. Only two houses were built, neither designed by Gaudí—the structures are now home to the Gaudí House Museum and Casa Trias (not open to the public). As a high-income housing development, it flopped; but as a park, it's a delight, offering another peek into Gaudí's eccentric genius in a setting that's more natural than man-made—appropriate considering the naturalism that pervades Gaudí's work.

Many sculptures and surfaces in the park are covered with colorful **trencadís mosaics**—broken ceramic bits rearranged into new patterns. This Modernista invention, made of discarded tile, dishes, and even china dolls from local factories, was an easy, cheap, and aesthetically pleasing way to cover curvy surfaces like benches and columns. Although Gaudí promoted the technique, most of what you see was executed by his collaborator, Josep Maria Jujol.

The Tour Begins

• *This tour assumes you're arriving at the front/main entrance (by taxi or bus #116). If you instead arrive at the side entrance, walk straight ahead through the gate to find the terrace with colorful mosaic benches, then walk down to the stairway and front entrance.*

Front Entrance

Before entering the park, notice the **mosaic medallions** along the outside wall that say “park” in English—reminding folks that Park Güell was modeled on the British “garden city” concept of integrating urban communities with green space.

Entering the park, you walk through a palm-frond **gate** and pass Gaudí's gas lamps (1900-1914), both made of wrought iron. His dad was a blacksmith, and he always enjoyed this medium.

Two Hansel-and-Gretel gingerbread lodges flank the entrance, signaling to visitors that this park is a magical space. One of the buildings houses a good bookshop; the other is home to the skippable **La Casa del Guarda**, a branch of the Barcelona History Museum (MUHBA). The sparse exhibit inside features video slideshows about Gaudí's building methods and works, old black-and-white movies of the age, and no real artifacts. True Gaudí fans might want to take a close look at the structure, though, as it's one of the few built examples of his ideas for simple housing.



ing. (The Gaudí House Museum, described later, is more interesting to me.)

• *Now face the grand...*

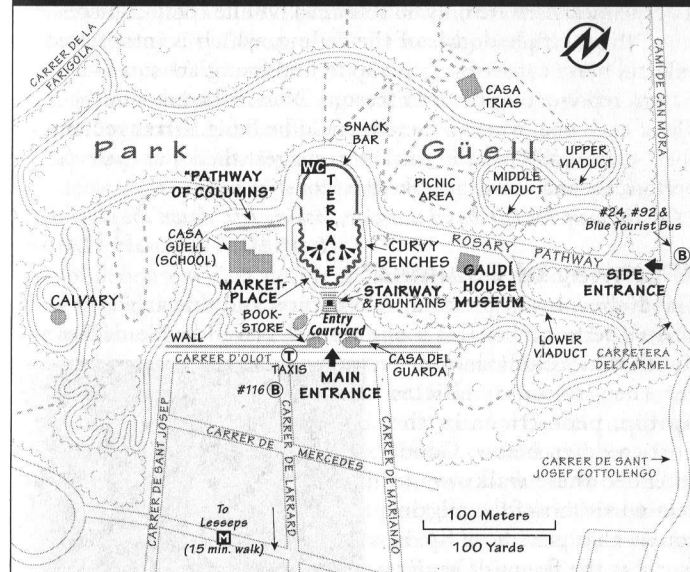
Stairway

The **cave-like enclosures** flanking the stairs were functional: One was a garage for Eusebi Güell's newfangled automobiles, while the other was a cart shelter.

Three **fountains** are stacked in the middle of the stairway. The first, at the base of the steps, is rocky and leafy, typical of Gaudí's naturalism. Next is a red-



Park Güell



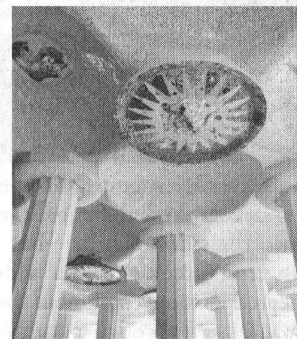
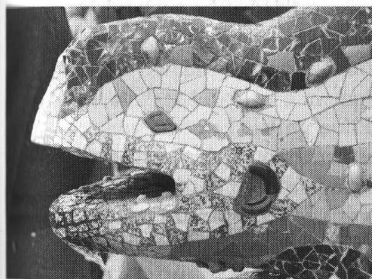
and-gold-striped Catalan shield with the head of a serpent poking out. The third is a very famous dragon—an icon of the park (and of Barcelona). While the dragon—slain by Barcelona's patron saint, George (Jordi)—is a symbol of Catalan pride, this creature also evokes the crocodile mascot of Nîmes, France, where Eusebi Güell spent much of his youth. As for the orna-

mental brown tripod at the top of the stairs: Is it the Oracle of Delphi? The tail of the serpent whose head pokes out down below? Or something else entirely? Gaudí lets the viewer decide.

• *At the top, dip into the...*

Marketplace (Hall of 100 Columns)

This space was designed to house a **produce market** for the neighborhood's 60 mansions. The Doric columns—each lined at the base with



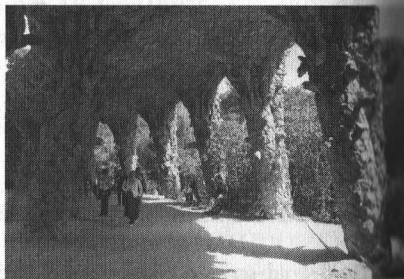
white ceramic shards—add to the market's vitality (despite the hall's name, there are only 86 columns). White ceramic pieces also cover the multiple domes of the ceiling, which is interrupted by colorful mosaic rosettes. Look up to find four giant sun-like decorations representing the four seasons. Notice the hook in the middle of each one, where a lantern could be hung. Arranged around these are smaller rosettes, meant to suggest the lunar cycle. Street performers and musicians like the acoustics here.

• *Continue up the left-hand staircase, looking left, down the playful...*

"Pathway of Columns"

Gaudí drew his inspiration from nature, and this arcade is like a surfer's perfect tube. This is one of many clever double-decker **viaducts** that Gaudí designed for the grounds: vehicles up top, pedestrians in the portico down below. Gaudí intended these walkways to remind visitors of the pilgrim routes that crisscross Spain (such as the famous Camino de Santiago). Eusebi Güell lived in the pink house (now a school) next to the terrace. This house predates the park project and was not designed by Gaudí.

• *At the top of the stairway, you pop out on the...*



Terrace

Sit on a colorful bench and enjoy one of Barcelona's best views. (Find Gaudí's Sagrada Família church in the distance.) The



360-foot-long bench is designed to fit your body ergonomically. Supposedly, Gaudí enlisted a construction worker as his guinea pig to figure out exactly where to place the lumbar support (back in a time when "ergonomics" and "lumbar support" hadn't even been invented). To Gaudí, this terrace evoked ancient Greek theaters that burrowed scenically into the sides of hills—but its primary purpose was that of the ancient Greek agora, a wide-open meeting place. Gaudí engineered a water-catchment system by which rain hitting this plaza would flow through natural filters, then through the columns of

the market below to a 300,000-gallon underground cistern. The water was bottled and sold as a health cure (this location—far away from polluting city factories—had a healthy cachet); excess water powers the park's fountains. Notice the lion's-head gargoyles and the big stone droplets that cling to the outside edge of the terrace, which hint at this hidden functional purpose.

• *From here, as you face the city, the Gaudí House Museum is to your left, and the Calvary is high up on your right (both described below).*

Gaudí House Museum

This pink house with a steeple, standing in the middle of the park (near the side entrance), was Gaudí's home for 20 years. Designed not by Gaudí but by a fellow architect, it was originally built as a model home to attract prospective residents. Gaudí lived here from 1906 until 1925. His humble artifacts are mostly gone, but the house is now a museum with some quirky Gaudí furniture. Though small, it offers a good taste of what could have been.

The main drag connecting this house to the terrace, called the **Rosary Pathway**, is lined with giant stone balls that represent the beads of a rosary. During the years he lived here, the reverent Gaudí would pray the rosary while walking this path.

The Calvary

High on a wooded hill beyond the pink school building is a stubby stone tower topped with three crosses, representative of the Hill of Calvary where Jesus was crucified. Gaudí envisioned the topography of Park Güell as a metaphor for the soul's progress: starting at the low end and toiling uphill to reach spiritual enlightenment (a chapel was originally intended to occupy this spot). And indeed, the park's higher paths seem to converge to lead pilgrims to this summit. The tower rewards those who huff up here with grand views over Barcelona and its bay.

The Rest of the Park

Like any park, this one is made for aimless rambling. As you wander, imagine living here a century ago—if this gated community had succeeded and was filled with Barcelona's wealthy. When considering the failure of Park Güell as a community development, also consider that it was an idea a hundred years ahead of its time. Back then, high-society ladies didn't want to live so far from the cultural action. Today, the surrounding neighborhoods are some of the wealthiest in town, and a gated community here could be a big hit.