

Community

Blogs » Shopping » Spotlight: A Chocoholic's Dream Come True, Barcelona, Spain

Spotlight: A Chocoholic's Dream Come True, Barcelona, Spain

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One of the biggest held secrets is that **Barcelona** is a chocolate lover's paradise! Not only is there a chocolate museum with all kinds of mouth-watering exhibits, but there are several world-renowned artisan chocolate makers based there. Halfway through my holiday in Barcelona, I devoted a morning to discovering the hidden pleasures of the chocolate shops.

Caelum
 Caelum was on the top of my list to visit, but unfortunately it was closed due to summer renovations. I could only peer in through the windows like a lost orphan looking for supper. Everything in this shop has been produced in monasteries and nunneries throughout Spain: jams and preserved fruit, quality cakes and biscuits, marzipan and liquors and, of course, chocolate. The cafe downstairs, where you can sample before you buy, was a former Jewish bathhouse.



Xocoa
 Xocoa may be considered the hippest chocolate cafe in Spain. The owners hired graphic designers to revamp all of their packages and marketing material to attract the hip Catalan youngsters and I tasted various chocolates and bought a souvenir bar from the Carrer Petritxol, 11, location. In addition to chocolates there are pastries and mountains of cookies to choose from. Xocoa has chocolate candles and incense, chocolate beer, and a chocolate CD in addition to their regular offerings.



Escriba
 My final stop was Escriba. They have a flagship store (Gran Via 546), but they also have a shop in a tiled *modernista* building built in 1820 (Rambla De Les Flors 83, near La Boqueria market) and a beach-side location Xiringuito (Ronda Litoral 42). They have been serving chocolates for hundreds of years. Everything at Escriba was mouth-watering. Many drop in throughout the morning for a quick breakfast of croissant and cafe con leche or during the day for a light lunch. Then there those like me who visit for the sinful hot chocolate and the churro crema. Saying it was delicious would be an understatement. Thick and rich, but not too sweet, I shared mine with two tourists at the neighbouring table to see what they thought. They didn't speak a word of English, but I could tell they were in heaven. Christian Escriba is famous for his wedding and birthday cake creations, made to the specifications of his discerning and creative customers.

Many of these other chocolate places were closed during my visit but be sure to put them on your list:



Dulcinea: Perhaps the best chocolate and *melindros* (a Catalan soft pastry) in all of Barcelona are found at Dulcinea. Established in 1930, Dulcinea gains its namesake from Don Quixote's love, but gains its reputation for its lovely thick chocolate (Carrer de Petritxol 2).

Fargas: Adorned with the same rustic decor since 1937, this old-time chocolate shop is one of the most famous in the city (Carrer del Pi, 16).

Gelateria Xocolateria: Hidden in a corner of Placa Sant Jaume, their specialty is Spanish chocolate con churros, although their enchilada pastries are not to be missed either (Carrer de la L'libreteria 2).

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