

Just imagine, A-levels are over and you have an extra long summer break before you start your apprenticeship, university, or before you embark on your gap year. After months and months of revising, and doing past papers, and giving up lunches and sleep, you're finally free to do whatever you want for two months, and what's better than going on holiday and celebrating with your friends?

You have the entire world to conquer, and infinite lists of places you want to go, but right now, that might be a little out of your budget. So where can you go? This series will dive into the deep sea of websites and find a perfect place for you to spend your summer in so that you don't have to spend hours doing irksome investigating.

The destination that is kicking this series off, is Barcelona, Spain.

To start with, you need to get there, and, if you fly from Birmingham airport in June-July, the cheapest return flights you'll find are on average £79. Whilst different dates and airlines may be more expensive, you won't find any astoundingly priced flights, which immediately makes Barcelona an ideal place to explore whilst on a budget.

So the flights are sorted, and you're already imagining you and your friends laying on golden sands, but before you start planning your outfits too, you need a place to stay. There are a myriad of different options when it comes to accommodation: hotels, airbnb, hotel rentals, and many more.

Hotels are a classic, and often the most popular choice for holidays. Hotels are ideal for five star treatment, posh pools, all you can eat buffets, and easy access to breakfasts, however for large groups, such as groups of 5 people or more, they may increase in price and end up putting a hole in your pocket. The first hotel that I stumbled upon is Hostalin Barcelona Diputacion, this is a small hotel that costs around £73 per night, or £81 with free cancellation. This hotel is a 10 minute walk from the Sagrada Familia Basilica, 15 minutes away from Gracia Boulevard, and bars, shops and restaurants (the important places) are within a 5 minute walk, making this hotel a perfect and affordable place to stay.

There are hundreds of affordable hotels in Barcelona, increasing its appeal, however writing about all of them would turn this into an essay, so other honourable mentions are: Des artistes, Hostalet de Barcelona, Hotel htop BCN city, Hotel Peninsular and Hotel Monegal.

Another option you might be interested in if you want more freedom (and arguably more fun) is hotel rentals and airbnb. Staying in one of these means that you won't be as restricted by rules compared to if you stayed in a hotel, and they're often more spacious. Some rentals and airbnb's may be more expensive than a hotel, however these are perfect for large groups, and after the price has been divided by the number of people going, you'll find that it's significantly cheaper than getting a room at a hotel. For example, for a party of five, the cheapest airbnb I discovered was £123 per night, which would cost around £25 per person, per night.

Now, for the less adult-y stuff, the itinerary. It's time to start making your pinterest board. Barcelona is an irresistible city and it offers both bustling boulevards in the city centre, and beautiful beaches for you to unwind on. To start with, Barcelona's arguably most famous

attraction, the Sagrada Familia Basilica. This building is an incredible example of Antoni Gaudi's style, which is a style that's consistent throughout Barcelona's unique architecture. Its construction started in 1882, and is so complex that it's still not finished, and isn't expected to be finished until 2026. This is a definite bullet point on your Barcelona bucket list. Continuing with Gaudi's unique designs, the Casa Batlló, which is nicknamed 'House of Bones' by the local people, and Parc Güell are more magnificent masterpieces that you must see when in Barcelona.

Another place you might want to devote a day of your trip to is Montserrat. Montserrat is a breathtaking mountain range that contains a monastery. Whilst Montserrat is around an hour's drive away from Barcelona, the spectacular views at the top will make the journey worth it. It's easy to get to, you can take a train from Plaça Espanya in Barcelona by taking the R5 line to Montserrat, which costs around €11.50 for a round trip.

Returning back to Barcelona city centre, there's still plenty of things still left to do and places to see. The CosmoCaixa science museum is worth making a note of. This museum only costs £5 to enter, making this a cheap activity. It features the infamous underwater rainforest, a rare sight that is home to over 100 different animal species. Alongside this, there are many other captivating exhibitions, such as "The Universe Gallery" and the "Geological Wall", making this museum a must-see item on your list.

Pursuing the museum theme, one of the more famous museums that you can visit in Barcelona is the Picasso museum. . This activity is one of the more expensive ones, as entry is around £10, however they offer unique exhibitions throughout the year alongside Picasso's work, so no matter when you're there, there'll be something fantastic to see.

For an eccentric day time activity, you may want to visit the Mossen Costa i Llobera Gardens, which is Europe's biggest gardens that specialise in cacti and succulent plants. It's in Barcelona city centre, so is easily accessible, and offers you the opportunity to walk through 3.16 hectares of cacti and succulents, whilst overlooking the sea. This is definitely one of the most uncommon activities that you'll find to do on any holiday, and it's free!

If you want to carry on exploring Barcelona's idyllic green oasis', then Parc de la Ciutadella is a place you've got to visit. The park is free to enter, and in it you'll find a lake where you can hire a rowing boat, which for 2 people for 30 minutes costs €6. This picturesque paradise has a captivating history, which is evident through the buildings you'll find in the park.

After you've spent the day exploring the beautiful city, there's a plethora of perfect places for you to party in. The Gothic Quarter is an extremely popular party destination, as it's fully illuminated and is overflowing with lively clubs, bars and restaurants, so you'll never be short of choice. But if you just feel like unwinding at your accommodation with your friends, but don't want to miss out on seeing the Gothic Quarter, then don't worry, because it's just as breath-taking during the day too, and is full of stalls and street-food vendors.

The final item on this Barcelona itinerary is one that's perfect for the evenings where you and your friends can't decide whether you want to relax, or if you want to venture out. The Teatre Grec is an open air theatre that characterises classic Roman architecture, whilst being a key

symbol of Barcelona's cultural scene. You can go and visit a peaceful performance in the evening, or even visit it in the day and traverse the theatre's gardens too.

Whilst all of these activities are great, and won't leave you wondering how you're going to spend your days whilst in the city, it might also be useful to know how you're going to get to all of these wonderful places. Thankfully, Barcelona has an extremely quick, comfortable and easily navigable metro system. You can buy a Hola BCN travel card, and choose how many days you need it for, and this card gives you unlimited access to Barcelona's metro, and it also includes the metro from the airport to the city centre, which many companies often will try and charge you more for. For 5 days, this card is €38.20, which is around £33.92.

So, you can officially start watching videos, online shopping and making pinterest boards, because it's clear that Barcelona is a fun, affordable, eye-catching city that will give you the best of both worlds: lying on beaches under the sparkling sun, and embracing the culture in the city centre. What more could you ask for?