



**Your on the  
Water Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Cruising the Northern Mediterranean  
Barcelona**

## Cruising the Northern Med Report Two: Barcelona

**August 4-5, 2023**

Viking service: end- to-end. We were met at the Barcelona Airport by a Viking representative and transported to the awaiting ship, all part of the tour package price. Viking had mailed us red stickers to place on our shirts/blouses so they could immediately take us into their care after we left customs. They had also sent us baggage tags that identified Holly and me and our designated cabin number aboard the ship. After leaving customs, we and our luggage were personally delivered to our cabin, never lifting anything but our feet.

As shown in Figure 2-1, we remained in Barcelona August 5 to take tours of the city and places of interest around the area. The plan was to sail that evening for the port of Montpellier/Sete, and spend August 6 there.



Figure 2-1. First place of exploration.

Most cruise ship cabins have all the conveniences of home living, but are more confined. Having been on these kinds of cruises before, as you may have as well, we knew to pack frugally. But Viking had enough drawers, closets, and nooks for us to stuff our stuff. I'll have more to say about the Viking accommodations later.

Holly and I sometimes take different tours when we go on a cruise. On the first day of this cruise, I took an excursion titled, "Panoramic Countryside by Trolley Train." It is so-named because the mode of transportation is a small replica of a locomotive that pulls open trolleys, as seen in figure 2-2.



Figure 2-2. The trolley train.

While waiting for the trolley to arrive, I walked across the street to have a cup of coffee at a café, shown in left photo of Figure 2-3. The place had a full kitchen and waitresses, as seen in the middle photo. I sat myself down and a waitress came over.

- “Buenos dias.”
- Hm, maybe I had passed for a Spaniard...until I opened my mouth, “Howdy!” ...Actually, being attuned to masking my national identity, as Americans are not universally revered, I responded with the same greeting, but with a southwest drawl. “Can you make a latte?”
- “I’ll bring you some milk with the coffee.”

That’s all a latte is: coffee and (steamed) milk. She did not steam the milk, but the coffee and cold milk were just what the morning doctor ordered, as shown in the right photo of Figure 2-3. The coffee cost \$2.09, paid in Euros. A comparable cup of Starbucks coffee is about the same price, Euros not accepted.



Figure 2-3. A Spanish latte.

I had forgotten to break-down my Euro bills, all valued at €100. That’s about \$109.00. The man who was manning the cash register, was taken aback by the large denomination. But what could he do? I had already drunk his coffee.

More to the point, he opened the cash register, and cleaned out most of his lower-denomination bills, never scowling, just hesitantly pulling out the cash...and probably thinking, *Ugly Americans, always throwing money around.*

My waitress was standing nearby. Sensing the moment of his inconvenience, I asked her to step over to the cashier and me, then handed her a €5 bill. She was very surprised, as was her (likely) boss/cashier. “Please accept this as a token of my appreciation for accepting the large Euro bill.” Maybe this American was not so ugly.

The ride through the countryside in an open-air carriage was fun and refreshing. The terrain was flat with much greenery (and even windmills), as depicted in Figure 2-4. My tour companions, also seen in Figure 2-4, proved to be amiable, as well as patient and understanding, as explained shortly.



Figure 2-4. Tour scenes.

**Peratallada.** Besides the trolley ride, the other feature of this tour was a visit to Peratallada. This town and surrounding buildings (a castle...what else, in Europe?) go back to Medieval times. A fortification where we spent two to three hours was erected in the 1660s (with stones taken from a quarry in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.)

An interesting thought. At that time, Pilgrims had been eking out a living in future America for only forty years. My country was over a century away from becoming a nation. It is not without reason that Americans often consider European hide-bound in ossified traditions and the Europeans think of Americans as lacking in culture...not to mention in taste.

During the trolley ride to the once fortified town, the tour narrator would inform us about the history of the region. After a few comments, the trolley driver would second her statements with a response from the trolley train:

- Its name is derived from *pedra tallada*, which means “carved stone.” Most of the buildings were built from stone taken from a huge and deep (now dry) moat which still encircles parts of this medieval town.



- The fortress is located atop a sandstone-based quarry. It reached its “maximum splendor” during the Middle Ages, but remains of settlements from earlier times have been found. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was a key throughfare between other towns in the area, and became one of the major feudal domains in the 1250s.



- The privately owned Castle of Peratallada is the dominant structure in the center of the town, where many people spend their time. The residents live and work inside a castle fortress.



**Lost and Found.** The trolley let off its passengers in front of the castle entrance, as seen above. The tour guide informed us this part of the trip would entail several kilometers of walking the streets inside the castle town. I wanted to explore this fascinating place, but I knew I could not keep up, even walk, with the tour group. So, I contented myself with sitting on a shaded bench across the castle entrance, occasionally going inside the front parts of the town (Figure 2-5) then returning to my bench to await the return of my tour companions.

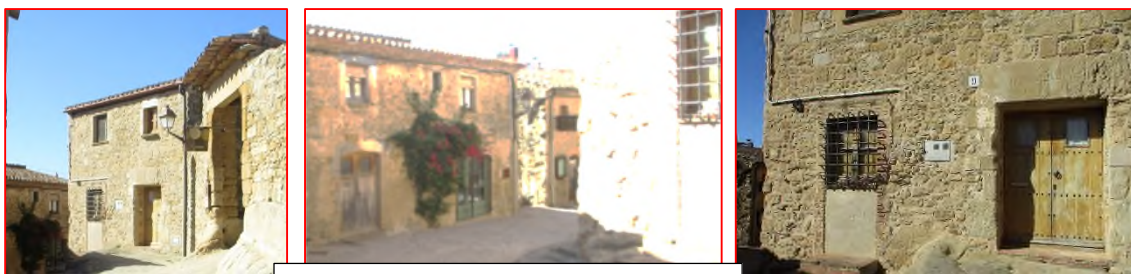


Figure 2-5. Inside the Castle town.

They did not show up. Scores of people, cars, and bikes came and went into and out of the castle, but no one from the trolley train. I waited for quite some time, and began to think this trolley might not be like other trolleys I had ridden: It disembarks its passengers at one stop, but it might embark passengers at another stop.

But where? I had not taken my cell phone with me. Besides, who would I call? *Hello there, I am lost near a medieval town whose name I cannot pronounce in an unknown area somewhere twenty miles or so from Barcelona. Can you send someone to pick me up?* That would have worked if I had had the wits to bring along my phone. GPS and such could have had the rescuers hone in on me.

I was in a dry moat without a ladder.

Sometime later, I saw one of the tour guides emerging from the castle portal. She had backtracked quite a distance when it was discovered one of the passengers was absent from the train.<sup>1</sup>

- “We’ve been wondering what happened to you.”
- “I wondered where you were. You looked at me sitting on the bench just before you began your walk into the castle. You mentioned my cane and I told you I did not do much walking. You said, ‘No worry.’ I thought the trolley left to get some gas...or coal...or something, and would circle back for all of us.”
- “Nope. We reboarded on the other side of town.”
- “So, where is the trolley?”
- “On the other side of town.”
- “And it’s not circling back?”
- “No, we have to meet it. Come along, there’s a way to the trolley outside of the wall that’s a bit closer.”

Great. I was walking a tour but not making a tour. We hiked for a couple kilometers, maybe more. I lagged behind her, but kept on going.

- “Are you okay?”
- “I’m fine, just a bit slow.”

She came back, put her arm around my waist, and assisted me to the trolley. ...Where thirty to forty probably irritated people sat in their seats watching us jointly limp toward my mobile salvation.

- Upon boarding, “I am very sorry to have detained you.”
- Recalling my college Spanish, “Lo siento mucho.”

No one scowled at me, not one person frowned. I think they were glad to see this invalid had not fallen into the castle moat. And off we went, to explore more of the countryside---Toot, toot---and return to the ship.

The next day, Holly and I were taking a ship elevator to a restaurant, one of the riders asked, “Hey, get lost today?” ...all in jest, to which, all in jest, I replied, “I’m like those French we are visiting tomorrow. I never get lost, I only get misplaced.”

After all the other tourists had left the train area, I made it a point to speak with the two tour guides, my rescuers. After joking with the woman who held me by the waist for quite a

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from notes taken later.

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distance, I thanked them for their care of me. Sure, it was their job, but they did it with humor and grace.