

# Simply SANT CUGAT



Your community. Your magazine. Your Sant Cugat.



This month...

1. 10 Things You Might Not Know About Sant Cugat
2. Local Hero: Artist Dolores Mayorga
3. A Day In The Life of a Civic Agent
4. Weekend Escape: Castelltallat Observatory
5. Local news, reviews, and even a few classifieds

**FREE**  
*(for now)*



## A Welcome from the Founders

Hello!... and welcome to the very first edition of **Simply SANT CUGAT!**

We're Aston and Ian — two people who love this town and believe it deserves a magazine that reflects its unique mix of cultures, stories, and personalities. Between us, we've worked in publishing, business, training, speaking, and community projects — but this is the one that brings it all together.

Our aim is simple: to create something of quality and genuine value that is still friendly and fun that helps people feel more connected, whether you've been here for many decades or just arrived. Inside, you'll find local tips, personal stories, a bit of humour, and plenty of opportunities to get involved.

This is your magazine as much as ours. So read it, share it, talk about it, and if you've got an idea, tell us! We can't wait to see where *Simply Sant Cugat* takes us — and we're glad you're here for the journey.

See you around town,

Aston & Ian

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**Simply SANT CUGAT®**

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## Why Simply Sant Cugat?

A brief look at our philosophy and objectives

When we first started talking about Simply Sant Cugat, we asked ourselves a simple question: why does our town need another magazine? After all, there are already plenty of local publications. But we felt something was missing - something in English, yes, but also something more human. Something that brings people together.

Sant Cugat is full of amazing people doing amazing things. Some are local, some are international. Some of us were born here, some moved here for work, some for family, some for adventure. Many of us have made this town our home, whether for a year or a lifetime. And yet, for all the beauty of the Monastery, the cafés, and the forest walks, it's easy to feel a touch isolated, cut off from our immediate surroundings. We believe community is the antidote. Not the online kind, with likes and scrolling, but the real kind: meeting, talking, sharing, recognising a face in the street. The power of a community is that it reminds us we belong. And belonging makes life richer, kinder, and more meaningful.

That's where Simply Sant Cugat comes in.

We want to create a space where internationals and locals who speak English can meet each other through stories. Where you can read about an observatory you didn't know existed, or a neighbour who also plays padel, or the amazing artist who lives just around the corner. We want to show you the people who make this town tick - the everyday heroes, the unsung volunteers, the small businesses with big hearts.

And we want to celebrate serendipity. That magic moment when you bump into someone who later becomes a friend, a collaborator, or the person who helps you solve a problem you didn't know how to fix. Networking sounds formal, but at its heart it's about simple human connections - and those connections often come when you least expect them.

In these pages, you'll find humour, empathy, and real names. You'll find stories of people you may already know and others you'll be glad to meet. You'll see events, activities, and services that make life easier, more fun, and more connected.

But most importantly, you'll find an invitation. Because Simply Sant Cugat isn't just our magazine... it's yours. We can only build bridges if we do it together. So get involved: share your stories, tell us about your passions, recommend a local hero, place a classified, or simply pass this magazine on to a friend.

Together we can make Sant Cugat feel smaller, warmer, and friendlier.

Together we can make it Simply Sant Cugat.



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## 10 Things You Might Not Know About Sant Cugat

History, hidden gems, and a few surprises from our beloved town.

I thought I knew Sant Cugat pretty well. After all, I'd walked through the Monestir cloister, browsed the Thursday market, and sipped countless coffees in Plaça Octavià. But the more I talked to locals, poked around side streets, and dug into the history, the more I realised this town has layers... the kind you don't always see unless you go looking.

From beheaded saints to modernist wine cellars, fairy-tale towers to wild boars, Sant Cugat is full of stories just waiting to be told. Whether you're new here or you've lived here for decades, I bet there's at least one thing on this list you didn't know...

### 1. Where did Saint "Cugat" originally come from?

- a. Eastern Europe
- b. North Africa
- c. West Pyrenees
- d. Matadepera

Saint Cugat was born into a wealthy family in what is now Tunisia. He became a Christian deacon and was sent by the Bishop of Carthage to the area around Barcelona to evangelize in the early 4th century. Unfortunately, he upset the Roman Emperor Diocletian who had him arrested, tortured and finally beheaded on the spot where the Monestir now stands. so the answer is b.

### 2. What was Saint Cugat's original name?

- a. Cagarata
- b. Cocograthe
- c. Cucuphas
- d. Cuckoo-fatty

Saint Cugat's name has taken various forms over the centuries including Culgal, Cucufas, and Cucufato. But the most historically attested version is believed to be "Cucuphas" - a name of Phoenician origin which curiously meant "he who likes to joke" and which is probably why he didn't get on well with Diocletian. So the answer is c.

### 3. What was the town Sant Cugat originally called?

- a. Pins del Vallès
- b. Castrum Octavianum
- c. Castell Augusta
- d. La Caseta de la Prada

During the Civil War, the town's name was changed from Sant Cugat to Pins del Vallès in order to move away from religious connotations. But it only lasted 3 years and Franco's government changed the name back to Sant Cugat as it had been called since the 9th century. However, before that, it was originally known as Octavianus's Castle (Castrum Octavianum). Answer b.

### 4. How much has the population increased in the last 30 years?

- a. Just under 50%
- b. About 100%
- c. Almost 150%
- d. Well over 200%

In 1995, the population was approximately 37,000. The current number is almost 100,000. This growth is due to urban expansion, the new tunnel (built for the Olympics), and Sant Cugat's attractiveness as a residential area with good connections to Barcelona. Do the maths and that's an increase of over 250%! Answer is d.

### 5. Sant Cugat is divided into Barrios. Which is alphabetically first?

- a. Ametller
- b. Antiga Esquerra
- c. Arxius
- d. Auditori

I don't know about you, but we were surprised to learn Sant Cugat is divided into 61 barrios (neighbourhoods) from Can Barrata up at the top to Mas Fortuny bordering Barcelona's municipal area. Ametller is a barrio of Mira-sol, but it's full name is Ca n'Ametller. The Antiga Esquerra is a historical barrio but it's in Barcelona. The Auditori is an important building in Sant Cugat, but not an official barrio. So the answer is c.



**6. Demographically, what proportion of Sant Cugat residents are foreign nationals?**

- a. less than 8%
- b. 15%
- c. 25%
- d. 50%

It might surprise you that the proportion of foreign nationals in Sant Cugat is well below the Catalan average of 25%. The town with the highest percentage of foreign nationals (50%) is Guissona in Lleida province. As far as we know, there are no sizeable towns in Catalonia with a foreign national population of less than 12%. The answer for Sant Cugat is b.

**7. Mount Tibidabo is a visual reference from Sant Cugat. Where does its name come from?**

- a. Saint Tibidabo
- b. Named after the Temple built on top of it.
- c. A hermit who originally lived there.
- d. A quote from the Bible

Believe it or not, Tibidabo, or to be more precise, “tibi dabo,” is Latin for “I will give to you.” This phrase is taken from the Bible, where the devil tempts Jesus by showing him all the kingdoms of the world from a high mountain and offers to give them to him if he worships him. Obviously, this must have been from Tibidabo looking north towards Sant Cugat. Answer: d.

**8. The Celler Modernista, built in 1921, was originally intended as what?**

- a. A place of worship
- b. A theatre
- c. A coworking
- d. A mortuary

Located at Carrer de Sant Medir, 24, this building was designed in 1921 by renowned architect Cèsar Martinell (a disciple of Antoni Gaudí) and noted for creating “wine cathedrals” across Catalonia. The Celler Modernista was constructed for the local winegrowers’ cooperative, which sought to create an equitable, efficient winemaking community. So ‘c’ is the closest answer.

**9. The 18-hole Sant Cugat Golf Course was designed by**

- a. A Catalan
- b. A Canadian
- c. An Englishman
- d. A Glaswegian

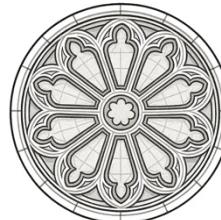
Sant Cugat’s golf club was fathered by the Canadian engineer Frederick Stark Pearson, who built the electrified train line to Barcelona and also the golf course to keep his British railway builders entertained. To make it something special, Pearson brought in the renowned English designer Harry S. Colt, who transformed the old vineyards into one of Catalonia’s very first golf clubs. Correct answer: c.

**10. What is the name for the large round window in the Monestir?**

- A Gothic Rose
- A Roman Oculus
- A Spanish Rotunda
- A Byzantine Bubble

On the front of Sant Cugat’s monastery, the 8-metre-wide window is one of the biggest in Catalonia. Inspired by Notre-Dame’s rose window, it marked the monastery’s shift from Romanesque to Gothic. It bathes the church in gentle light, creating a calm, almost magical glow. This sparkling circle of stone and glass is one of Catalonia’s true Gothic architectural gems. The answer is a.

So, now you know a few more hidden details about Sant Cugat, why not share them with friends or visitors and see who else can pass the quiz? It’s a fun way to celebrate the town we all call home.





## Why Do We Say That?

The story behind expressions in English

Language Corner is where we indulge our curiosity about the English language - those delightful oddities, mysterious expressions, and little-known stories behind the words we use every day. One month we might explore why "knight" has a silent k, another we might uncover how "raining cats and dogs" became a thing, or why Americans put a full stop after "Mr" while the British leave it out. We'll mix quirky history with practical takeaways, so readers walk away smiling, slightly better informed, and maybe armed with a linguistic factoid to drop into their next dinner conversation. Perfect for word lovers, trivia fans, and anyone who's ever wondered, "Why do we say that?"

### Why Do We Say "Halloween"?

Every October, pumpkins and zombies appear in the shops, and the word *Halloween* becomes omnipresent. But have you ever stopped to wonder where that word (and the tradition) comes from?

The name *Halloween* is a shortened form of *All Hallows' Eve* - the evening before *All Hallows' Day* (also known as All Saints' Day), celebrated on November 1st. In Old English, a 'hallow' meant a holy person or saint, and 'even' (or e'en) meant evening. Over time, the Scottish contraction *Hallowe'en* became simply *Halloween*, the version we use today.

However, although the word 'Halloween' first appeared in the 16th century, the traditions it's tied to go much further back. Halloween's roots stretch into the ancient Celtic festival of *Samhain* (pronounced "Sow-in"), marking the end of the harvest and the beginning of winter - a festival going back more than 3000 years, well before the arrival of Christianity. The Celts believed that on



this night, the barrier between the living and the dead grew thin, allowing spirits to cross over.

When Christianity spread through Celtic lands, it found it easier to rebrand old pagan customs with new religious interpretations instead of banning them - thus *Samhain* became *All Saints' Day* and was about honouring the departed. The result was a fascinating mix of sacred ritual, folklore, and festivity - the foundation of modern Halloween.

While we're on the subject, did you know the phrase "*trick or treat*" is surprisingly modern and not Celtic nor American. The earliest printed version, "*treat up or tricks*," actually appeared in a Canadian newspaper in 1922. A few decades later "*trick or treat*" had travelled round the world.

So next time you carve a pumpkin or answer the door to a small vampire, remember: behind every Halloween sign lies thousands of years of history and a word that started with *harvests*, not *horrors*.



SIMPLY MEET UP

## Join Us for Our Monthly Gathering

### Networking

At Simply Sant Cugat, we believe that community doesn't just happen on paper — it happens when people meet face to face. That's why we're launching our **Monthly Meetup**: a regular chance to bring the magazine to life, connect with others, and share a little fun along the way.

If you live in Sant Cugat, speak English, and are interested in growing your network of friends and business contacts, you're invited. Whether you've been here for twenty years or twenty days, this is your space to meet new people, swap stories, and feel part of something bigger.

Our first gathering takes place at **Cavina Vinoteca, Plaça de Barcelona, 16** on **Wednesday, 26th**

**November from 18:00 to 20:00h.** We'll kick things off with a lively speed networking session - a fast and friendly way to break the ice, discover who's in

the room, and maybe stumble upon an unexpected connection. We're keeping it light-hearted, because networking should be as much about smiles as it is about swapping cards.

And of course, there will be drinks!

So please, save the date, come along, and say hello. We'd love to meet you, hear your ideas, and raise a glass together to the start of something special.

This is just the beginning — every month we'll bring you a new edition of the magazine, and every month we'll gather to launch it, learn something useful, and keep building bridges in our community.

See you on the 26th!

— The Simply Sant Cugat Team.

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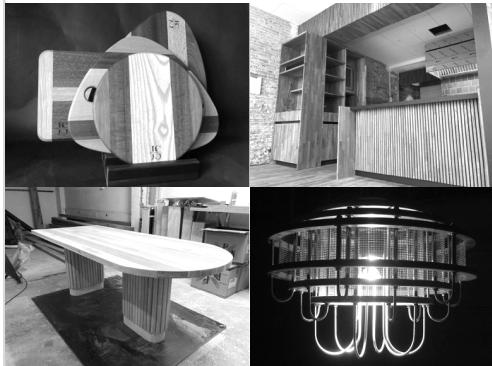
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LOCAL HERO

## Between Heaven and Earth

Interview with local artist Dolores Mayorga



Walk up a few stairs into El Loft and you feel it at once: light, space, purpose. Industrial beams, clean white walls, and at the centre the quiet authority of an old etching press. This is where Dolores Mayorga, Argentine-born artist and teacher, works every day in Sant Cugat. It's a studio, a meeting point, and a little engine room for creativity - used over the years by local artists and the all-women collective 7xSet, which Dolores helped to form. "Studios can become hidden caves," she says with a half-smile. "I try to keep the doors open."

Dolores's route to Sant Cugat is a story of creativity and courage. After formative study and collaborations in California (colour, composition, illustration, engraving) she and her husband joined a self-build group who found land here to combat soaring housing costs. They finished their home in 1992 and she set about carving a creative life: illustrating children's books (including a playful "David in..." seek-and-find series shown at Bologna and Frankfurt), raising

three children, and steadily developing her own practice.

Ask Dolores about children and creativity and she sets the record straight quickly. "Children are naturally creative," she says. "Adults try to correct them out of it." She tells a small story of a little girl who drew a horse with two eyes Picasso-style on one side of its head. Her father intervenes to fix the "mistake". "But those eyes," Dolores says, "had the horse's spirit. Art is expression before it is anatomy."

In her workshops she built a progressive pathway for the children to follow: wood (drawn, cut, sanded), then plasticine, papier-mâché, and ceramics. Each material cultivating new skills while protecting imaginative freedom. Adults arrived with fixed ideas, children arrived with curiosity. Her rule for parents and teachers is simple: step back, observe, and support. But don't try to control.

Surviving as a freelance creative in Sant Cugat isn't romantic, it's tough work. "Recognition is



hard,” she says. “If you don’t have a major show, you can disappear inside your own four walls.”

The remedy, for her, is part persistence and part participation. “Enter competitions such as the Premio Torre García or the Vila Casas Painting Prize, send the work out, get your work noticed.” she advises. “Play. Experiment. Don’t be frightened. Fear is the big mistake.” She appreciates the Town Hall’s cultural programme (well organised and responsive) but believes more support for private spaces and initiatives would strengthen the artistic ecosystem. “There’s so much potential here. Collaboration multiplies it.”

In 2018, life stopped. A serious operation led to a coma followed by long and painful recovery. The story is personal, but its effects are clear. “It was like starting again,” she says. “Back to the child, but with new eyes.” The experience has fed directly into her recent and upcoming work, including her next exhibition “Between Heaven and Earth,” that combines living with chronic pain with a spiritual search. The palette leans to greys and blues - earth and sky in quiet tension. “You hold both,” she says. “Weight and light.”

None of this has blunted her appetite for risk. “I’m proud when a work is different and brave,” she says, citing one of her favourite pieces (see photo) that re-imagines Little Red Riding Hood from a fresh angle. “Transgressing the expected. That’s where art breathes.” It’s why playfulness sits so close to discipline in her practice: trying, failing, trying again, getting paint under your skin. “The most creative moments come when you stop aiming at the masterpiece and start enjoying the process.”

What does she say to the next generation of Sant Cugat artists, the ones working at kitchen tables or quietly losing faith in spare rooms? “Never stop working, never stop creating,” she says, without hesitation. “Creativity is found through persistent

effort. If you don’t work, you won’t discover your potential.” Then a gentler add-on for the families around them: “Protect the flame. Don’t blow it out with corrections.”

It’s easy to miss how much of Dolores’s journey is also a lesson in building a life here. Find your place (El Loft), your tool (that steadfast press), your people (7xSet and the wider network), and your rhythm (mornings for the work that only you can do). Use the town’s structures (calls, competitions, culture managers) but also strengthen the private, grassroots parts of the scene.

And when fear creeps in, counter it with play. Sant Cugat can be a hard town in which to be seen. But in rooms like this, the work continues, bravely, day after day. And that, as Dolores Mayorga reminds us, is how a creative city keeps its heart beating.



*This piece about Little Red Riding Hood is one of Dolores’s favourite creations.*



## Eyes of the City

An interview with Civic Agent, Jordi Cots



Every town runs on more than streets, shops and schools – it runs on people. In this section, Simply Sant Cugat takes you behind the scenes to meet some of the men and women who quietly keep our city ticking. From those in high-viz jackets to those behind library counters, classrooms or kitchens, we'll step into their shoes for a day and see Sant Cugat through their eyes.

Our first stop: with Jordi Cots, one of Sant Cugat's Civic Agents – the friendly faces who help keep our town safe, clean and connected.

One Saturday morning, we visited **Jordi**, at his beautiful house tucked away in the little urbanisation of Sol i Aigua. Over a cup of coffee, he shed some light on what it's really like to be one of the people in the high-viz vests who help keep Sant Cugat running smoothly.

**SSC:** As a Civic Agent - how would you explain your job to a child?

**Jordi:** When I protect schools in the morning and afternoon, little kids between two and six often

stop me and say, "You're a policeman." I have to explain every day that I'm not. Policemen look for bad people, but I'm doing the opposite – protecting good people, just like them. I make sure cars don't run them over, I check the streets are okay. I don't wear a gun, I don't give fines. I just help kids, and they're happy with that.

**SSC:** Most grown-ups know about Civic Agents, but what's something about your job that many people often misunderstand?

**Jordi:** In the five months I've been working, I've realised people often think we are the town hall. They try to complain directly to us. I have to tell them, "No, no, if you want to send a complaint, go online." We work with the police, but our role is to be closer to citizens, to help where police can't always reach.

**SSC:** You're on the streets all day. What do you notice that the rest of us don't?

**Jordi:** We notice all the things that are wrong! Every day, we report issues in something called



'Eyes of the City'. We are seven people – that's 14 eyes looking for dangerous cables, broken pavements, fallen signs. I'd say we report a few things every day. And we help in ways nobody sees. Yesterday, we helped a woman who was dizzy in the street. We got her safely home. We're like scouts for the city, quietly helping and fixing things.

### **A Civic Agent's Top 5 Daily Tasks**

*Jordi's quick list of what keeps him busy.*

1. *School safety – Making sure children (and parents!) arrive and leave safely.*
2. *Spotting problems – Reporting broken pavements, fallen signs, dangerous cables and more via Eyes of the City.*
3. *Helping neighbours – From giving directions to supporting someone who feels unwell in the street.*
4. *Public guidance – Explaining rules about scooters, dogs, rubbish, or just where to catch a taxi.*
5. *Community presence – Being visible, approachable, and a friendly bridge between residents and the council.*

**SSC:** What's the best part of the job? And the worst?

**Jordi:** The best part is feeling useful. I'm a citizen too, and it's great to know people can ask me for help. The worst is dealing with the occasional very difficult person, when we have to call the police. Luckily, Sant Cugat is a nice place – it's not like working in bigger, tougher cities. Oh, and working outside when it's 40 degrees is not nice... we'll see how winter goes!

**SSC:** Do you have your own professional jargon?

**Jordi:** (laughs) Yes. On the walkie-talkies we use numbers a lot, never names. So, I'm "65." The car is "Tango 15." And when we want breakfast, we say "18" – let's go for 18.

**SSC:** If you had a magic wand, what would you change in Sant Cugat?

**Jordi:** The pavements. Some of them are terrible for wheelchairs or anyone with reduced mobility. The town says fixing all of them would take a long time. A magic wand would be a great help with that.

**SSC:** And you cover more than just Sant Cugat centre, right?

**Jordi:** Yes, the municipality is the second largest in Catalonia. We cover Sant Cugat, Les Planes, La Floresta... But with only seven of us, it's impossible to cover everything.

**SSC:** What could residents do to make your job easier?

**Jordi:** Be more responsible, especially with transport. Teenagers on scooters and bikes can be reckless. And adults aren't perfect either – rubbish and bulky waste are often worse. People need to respect the rules. That said, there is one thing where Sant Cugat citizens are much cleaner than Barcelona. Almost no dog mess in the streets – a big difference. The dog owners are very good.

**SSC:** Final question – what's your message for Sant Cugat residents?

**Jordi:** I'll put it in 3 words: **Respect** – respect your neighbours. **Care** – take care of the city. And **Enjoy** – because you're lucky to live in one of the best cities in the world.



## Toastmasters Sant Cugat

Interview with Club President, Eulalia Gacia



Toastmasters is an international organisation where people learn to improve their public speaking skills. Groups usually meet twice a month, and welcome anyone who wants to improve their rhetoric, build confidence and enjoy learning with others. SSC interviewed the new president of Sant Cugat Toastmasters Club, Eulalia Gacia Del Estal.

**SSC:** Let's start at the beginning. What struck you the most on your first visit to Toastmasters?

**Eulalia:** I first visited Toastmasters as a guest 3 years ago. Three things struck me... how organised they were, there were many people who were each helping in their own way. For example, one person times the speakers. A different person introduces each speaker. And after each speech, there is someone who gives it an evaluation. They say what was good and what could be better next time. There was also a lot of handshaking. And thirdly the applause - lots of applause. Every time anyone participated, everyone applauded.

**SSC:** How has being a TM member changed you?

**Eulalia:** Firstly, it made me aware of the power of collaboration. Toastmasters is a non-profit organisation and when everyone puts in their 'granito de arena' it works very well. Also, in my professional and personal daily life, it has increased my self-confidence. That, for sure, has been the highlight of Toastmasters... giving better presentations at work without the stress.

**SSC:** That's great. What does Sant Cugat gain from having a Toastmaster Club?

**Eulalia:** Well, it's a good way to meet people and network. Many international people join. It's a safe environment that creates a self-improvement community of people who want to learn and help others learn, too. And afterwards, we go for a coffee, so you can mix and make friends.

**SSC:** Is that unique for Sant Cugat?

**Eulalia:** No, not at all. When you are a member, you can visit any TM club worldwide. If you travel, you can instantly connect with people. It's a very good way to travel.



**SSC:** Was there any moment when you thought “Yes! This is why I’m doing this.”?

**Eulalia:** Two moments. The first time I gave a speech confidently without trembling nor stress. The other was seeing a colleague who suffered a lot from nerves, he used to blank and forget his words. The first time he gave a confident speech, I was like “Wow! This is good!”

**SSC:** What do you wish new guests understood better about Toastmasters before their first visit?

**Eulalia:** That every member, no matter how good, started where they are. We all started as beginners. We’ve all been through the nervous part. It might be terrifying. But it’s not impossible. We’ve all done it with help.

**SSC:** If Toastmasters were a dish on a Sant Cugat menu, what would it be?

**Eulalia:** Fun question! I would say ‘Calçots with Feedback Sauce’! (laughing) Eating calçots is a fun activity you do with friends, and the feedback is the secret ingredient that boosts improvement and makes it worth repeating.

**SSC:** Excellent answer. I love it. Next question... How can someone who doesn’t consider themselves a public speaker benefit from Toastmasters?

**Eulalia:** Even if you don’t need to speak in public, you still need to be a good communicator. Speaking skills, knowing how to express your ideas is still important. It feels very good when you’re talking to friends or family around a table and suddenly they are all captivated by your words.

**SSC:** Yes, I can imagine that. You’ve just become president of the club. What does that involve?

**Eulalia:** The club president changes each year. The president organises the committee that runs the club and its meetings. There’s a committee with a secretary, treasurer, vice president of education, vice president of membership, and vice president of public relations. There’s also a sergeant-at-arms who is in charge of setting up the room before the meetings. If the committee works well, the president’s job is easy! The president also has to give an opening speech at every meeting and keeps in touch with other clubs in the district.

**SSC:** Final question. What would you say to someone who was thinking about joining Toastmasters?

**Eulalia:** We are super friendly and always happy to see new faces. We meet on the first and third Mondays of each month at 19:15h. And we’re totally bilingual - people speak in Spanish or English, but you don’t have to speak if you’re not ready. It’s better to contact us on Meetup, LinkedIn or send us an email in advance so we are ready to welcome you.

**SSC:** Thank you, Eulalia. I hope you continue to build bridges between locals and internationals one speech at a time.

#### CONTACT DETAILS:

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**Email:** [toastmasterssantcugat@gmail.com](mailto:toastmasterssantcugat@gmail.com)

**Meetup Link:**

<https://meetup.ps/e/PwCHP/SyHRW/>

**Meetings:** Usually on the first and third Monday of each month at 19:30h.

**Important:** Book your attendance in advance.



## NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

## Masala Indian Cuisine

Sant Cugat's Spicy Awakening

Welcome to our very first 'new restaurant review' - a space where we'll be trying out the new restaurants that perennially pop up in our beloved town. And what better way to start than with something we have been craving for a while: a proper Indian dinner!

**Masala Indian Cuisine** opened just a month ago and is already turning heads. Tucked into the heart of Sant Cugat, it's a bright, comfortable spot with a light, airy feel and a refreshingly early opening hour of 7pm (after decades of living in Spain, we still struggle with having to wait until 8 or 9pm to eat). Even better, it's open on Mondays! (but closed on Tuesdays). So it cleverly fills the gap in the local dining scene.

The owner, who also runs a popular sister restaurant in Sabadell, moved into Sant Cugat at the suggestion of loyal customers. His warm welcome and genuine interest in guests set the tone for the evening.

The menu will feel instantly familiar to anyone who grew up on British Indian cuisine: Lamb Rogan Josh, Jalfrezi, Vindaloo and even the formidable Phall (clearly marked for the brave). Spice levels can be tailored from 'mild' to 'meltdown' so there's something for everyone.

Cunningly disguised as regular customers (to avoid special treatment) our SSC restaurant-review team started with a **Prawn Puri**, which was sweet, fresh, and beautifully presented. The **Onion Bhaji**, on the other hand, came as strips of lightly battered onion more like onion rings than the classic cricket-ball shape many of us remember. The **Sag Aloo** (spinach and potato) was tasty but a touch too creamy for comfort.

The standout dish was undoubtedly the **Lamb Rogan Josh** - tender, lean pieces of lamb in a delicately spiced, subtly layered sauce that managed to be full-flavoured without being heavy.



The **Pitta bread**, flecked with caraway seeds, came with excellent homemade dips, and the **Pilau rice** was perfectly fluffy and aromatic.

At **€53 for two**, it's not the cheapest evening meal in town, but perhaps we ordered generously (although drank sparingly). Still, quality ingredients and care in cooking were evident throughout. Too full for dessert this time (though the selection looked intriguing) we'll be back to try them.

If you've been yearning for a decent curry or simply fancy something different. **Masala Indian Cuisine** is worth adding to your Sant Cugat circuit. And if you go, do tell us what you think - especially if you try the desserts we didn't!

### Masala Indian Cuisine

Pg. de Francesc Macià, 84, local 4

Tel: 935 300 910



# SIMPLY FOR KIDS

Simply Sant Cugat isn't just for the grown-ups, is it?

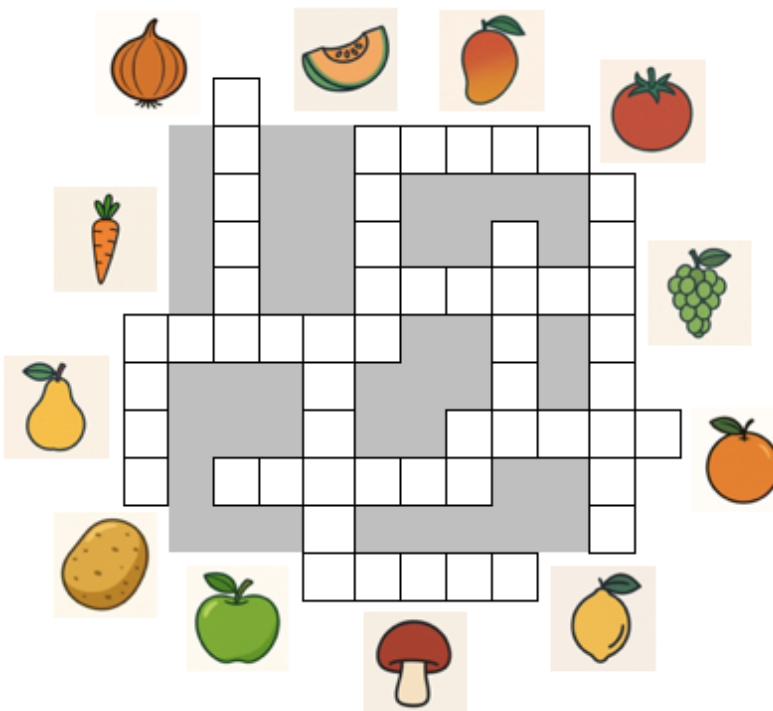
Our town is full of curious young minds, budding artists, puzzle-solvers, and future adventurers – and they deserve their own space in our pages. That's why every month we bring you *SIMPLY FOR KIDS* – a place

for games, activities, and ideas to spark imaginations and brighten afternoons.

Whether it's solving a puzzle, trying a fun experiment, or creating something brand new, this is your page to play, learn, and share. So grab your pencils, roll up your sleeves, and let's get started!

## PICTURE CROSSWORD

Do you know the English names for the fruit and vegetables? Can you fill in the crossword using them? Where are the little numbers? We've no idea! 😊



# SIMPLY CARTOON

Unfortunately, Clarence, our cartoonist had another accident with her meat-grinder and can't draw anything at the moment. Can you help and draw the pictures for her?



# STORY TIME

Geraldine, our story writer is very poor. So poor, her old typewriter doesn't work properly. The space bar doesn't work and neither do any of the punctuation marks. Nevertheless, she says it's a good story with an important message (or moral, if you prefer). Can you read the story? Or should we sack Geraldine and find another story-writer?

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE FOREST A LITTLE HEDGEHOG FOUND A BEAUTIFUL SHINY GREEN ACORN UNDER A BIG OAK TREE. THIS IS THE BIGGEST MOST BEAUTIFUL ACORN EVER SEEN. SHE SQUEAKED. SHE HELD IT IN HER LITTLE PAWS AND IMAGINED IT GROWING INTO A HUGETREE. BUT SHE HADN'T PLANTED IT EACH DAY SHE CARRIED THE ACORN SHOWING IT TO HER FRIENDS DAY SPASSED. WEEK SPASSED. MONTH SPASSED. THE BEAUTIFUL GREEN ACORN BEGAN TO TURN BROWN AND A CRACK APPEARED. ONE MORNING SHE DROPPED IT AND IT BROKE INTO LITTLE PIECES. OH NO! SHE CRIED. IT CAN'T GROW NOW! HE OLD OWL HAD BEEN WATCHING HER. HE FLEW DOWN AND SAID: A SEED IS MAGIC ONLY WORKS WHEN YOU GIVE IT A CHANCE TO GROW. DREAMS ARE THE SAME! HE LITTLE HEDGEHOG REMEMBERED THOSE WORDS. THE NEXT TIME SHE FOUND A SPECIAL ACORN SHE PLANTED IT RIGHT AWAY AND IN TIME A STRONGYOUNG TREE STOOD IN THE FOREST FULL OF SHADE AND SHELTER FOR ALL THE ANIMALS. MORAL: DREAMS GROW ONLY WHEN YOU PLANT AND CARE FOR THEM.

## SIMPLY COLOUR

Pau, Anna and Maria are having fun in the forest experimenting with a small land-fill project. Why not make their day even better by adding some colour to it?



# Simply Jokes

Oh dear, Penelope, our editor, got a bit careless and has mixed up the jokes and the answers! Can you spot which answers go with which jokes?

Q1: Why did the teddy bear say "no" to dessert?

A1: Because it wasn't peeling well

Q2: What's brown and sticky?

A2: A gummy bear

Q3: What do you call a sleeping dinosaur?

A3: A stick

Q4: Why don't skeletons fight each other?

A4: Because it was already stuffed

Q5: What do you call a bear with no teeth?

A5: Frostbite

Q6: Why did the maths book look sad?

A6: Because the teacher said it was a piece of cake

Q7: Why did the banana go to the doctor?

A7: They don't have the guts

Q8: How does the ocean say hello?

A8: It had too many problems

Q9: What do you get when you cross a snowman and a dog?

A9: A dinoshore

Q10: Why did the student eat his homework?

A10: It doesn't. It just waves



## CULTURE CORNER

**Beethoven's Ninth: A Night Worth Marking in Your Calendar**

by Aston Swift



*Each month, we'll be highlighting just a handful of events - the kind you might easily miss, yet could become the highlight of your cultural calendar. If one resonates with your taste, go ahead and book it. If not, be adventurous and book it anyway. You might just discover a lifelong favourite.*

We start with a piece that needs little introduction, **Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor, "The Choral"**, performed by the **Orquestra Simfònica Sant Cugat** on **Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> November at 8pm** at the **Teatre-Auditori de Sant Cugat**.

It's a one-piece-only concert, lasting around **75 minutes**, brief by symphonic standards, but what a 75 minutes it is! The final movement, the famous "**Ode to Joy**," is one of the most uplifting and unifying moments in all of music. Its melody has echoed through history - from Berlin's reunification celebrations to the European Union anthem - carrying Beethoven's message of universal brotherhood far beyond the concert hall.

What makes this work so remarkable is not just its power, but its story. Beethoven was **completely deaf** when he composed it in 1824. At its premiere in Vienna, he stood with his back to the audience, unable to hear the applause until one of the

soloists gently turned him around to see the cheering crowd. The music he could no longer hear became the sound of humanity itself.

The **Orquestra Simfònica Sant Cugat**, our own accomplished local ensemble, will bring this towering work to life for one night only. If previous performances are anything to go by, expect a full, vibrant sound and heartfelt playing.

Tickets are **€28**, with the usual discounts available. There's even a **free pre-concert talk at 7pm** in the café by the entrance (likely in Catalan), which might deepen your appreciation of the piece before you hear it.

Make an evening of it. Perhaps a light dinner at **Erreka**, or one of the nearby restaurants beforehand, or a celebratory meal afterwards at 9:30pm once the final chords have faded.

I've already booked for Karen and myself. I hope to see some of our readers there, too - sharing a night when Sant Cugat becomes, if only for an hour and a quarter, the very centre of the musical universe.

Tickets and information in person or from the website: [teatre-auditori@santcugat.cat](mailto:teatre-auditori@santcugat.cat)



## The Surprising Benefits of Padel

by Aston Swift



Simply Sant Cugat (SSC) sat down with Aston Swift, local resident and padel enthusiast, to talk about why this racket sport has captured his heart.

**SSC:** Aston, you light up whenever you talk about padel. What's all the fuss?

**Aston:** Honestly, it's addictive... in the best way. I'm 56, I keep fit, and I've played plenty of sports in my time. But padel is different. It's social, it's quick to learn, and it makes you feel part of something bigger. After my very first game in Sant Cugat, I thought: "This is it. This is the sport I want to grow old with."

**SSC:** How would you describe padel?

**Aston:** Imagine tennis and squash had a child. You play in doubles, on a smaller court surrounded by glass walls. You use a solid racket, no strings, the serve is underarm and the ball can bounce off the walls. That makes it easier for beginners but challenging enough to keep it exciting as you improve.

**SSC:** Let's talk about the benefits. We hear fitness is a big one.

**Aston:** Definitely. The game is fast but not overwhelming for beginners. You sprint, twist, stretch, without realising how many calories you're burning. For me, it's been a way to stay fit without feeling like I'm "working out." And at 56, that's gold.

**SSC:** And you can keep playing into old age?

**Aston:** Absolutely. I play with my father-in-law, John Stephens, who is 78 and a bit of a padel legend here. He's slower on the court now of course, but he really enjoys playing and can play long rallies. And he's not unique. I've seen plenty of older players on the court.

**SSC:** You've also mentioned networking.

**Aston:** Oh yes! I have made both friends and professional contacts in Sant Cugat through padel. There's something about playing, sweating, and laughing, together that breaks the ice faster than any business card exchange.



**SSC:** That sounds more fun than a networking breakfast...

**Aston:** (laughs) Much more fun... and much healthier. And the best part is it's genuine. You've already shared a game, so the conversation flows naturally.

**SSC:** And through the padel you can stay in touch?

**Aston:** Yes, because the majority of games we play here are booked through the Playtomic App and this stores your name and you can contact people again through the App.

**SSC:** You've also been practising Catalan on court?

**Aston:** Yes! It's one of the most unexpected perks. Padel attracts all kinds of people in Sant Cugat, from lifelong locals to newcomers. On court, I picked up the scoring system in Catalan... “quinze, trenta, quaranta...” and phrases like “molt bé”. It's like a free language exchange built into the game.

**SSC:** What about friendships?

**Aston:** I've made friends I never would have met otherwise... from 20-year-old students to retirees. Through the App you choose matches at your level, so you're constantly meeting new players. And it doesn't take long for a little padel community to start up with regular weekly games. It makes Sant Cugat feel smaller and friendlier and then you start bumping into players in town which is always a pleasant surprise.

**SSC:** You've convinced us! So for someone new to the game, what's the first step?

**Aston:** Easy. Download the most popular padel app, Playtomic, give yourself a rating by answering the simple questions on the App, normally start at 0.5 and then look for open matches in the area. Or join a beginner group at your nearest club. There are plenty: Augusta is the big one near the Shopping centre, SantCu opposite the McDonalds on the roundabout, and my personal favourite is Mirasol Padel just by

Mirasol train station. You don't need to buy fancy gear. Buy a beginner's racket for 50 or 60 euros, or better still, borrow one from a friend. Most clubs also rent out for a few euros. Wear your trainers, and you're good to go.

**SSC:** And if you're nervous about being a beginner?

**Aston:** Don't be. Honestly, everyone was a beginner once. Padel players are usually delighted to welcome newcomers. And because the game is easy to pick up, you'll enjoy yourself straight away. The first time you hit the ball off the glass wall and it still counts? Pure magic.

**SSC:** Final question: What's the single biggest reason you'd encourage expats to give padel a try in Sant Cugat?

**Aston:** Because it's more than a sport. It's a door into the community. You'll get fitter, you'll laugh a lot, you'll meet people who might become friends for life. And if you're new here, it's one of the fastest ways to feel at home.

#### Aston's Tip for Beginners

“Don't overthink it. Book a court, invite a friend, and just play. The walls are your friends — and so are the people!”

#### WHERE & HOW TO BOOK:

- **Augusta Padel:** Av. Guinardera 11
- **SantCu Padel:** Av. de Cerdanyola, 115
- **Mirasol Padel** (my fav) Pg. de Sevilla, 53
- **Sant Cugat Esports** (for expert advice on racquets and trainers) Pl. dels Quatre Cantons, s/n
- Book via the **Playtomic App**



## BONS MOTS #1

Learning a little of the local language one saying at a time  
by Ian Gibbs

I've spent the last few years realizing the full potential of the power of learning Catalan poc a poc (little by little). No matter how small your step, so long as you keep going in the direction you want, you'll surprise yourself when you look back after a few months to see how far you've come, regardless of what skill you're looking to learn.

You want to be a writer? Just hammer out a few hundred words every day. You want to declutter your home? Just get rid of one item every time you go out. You want to learn a new language? Just learn one useful expression every night before you go to sleep.

There's no denying it, little by little one travels far. The Catalans have a great expression for it...

*“De mica en mica s’omple la pica,  
i de gota en gota s’omple la bóta.”*

I've heard this translate as "little by little, the sink is filled and drip by drip the boot is filled" (although it sounds nicer in Catalan because the rhythm is better).

You might now be thinking "I get the sink bit, but who wants to fill their footwear with fluids?"

So let's get this straight. Although bota does mean "boot", the bóta in this case has a little accent. See it? Some people say that bóta refers to a vessel made out of a sheep's bladder for carrying wine, as used in the good old days by shepherds, travellers, and the like. Others argue that a bóta is a traditional wooden barrel for wine - much bigger than a sheep's internal organs and not convenient for carrying around anywhere. Both are viable options.

Personally, I prefer the barrel one, as it fits the spirit of the saying better. I can easily imagine a barrel filling drip by drip, but I struggle to imagine



having the patience to hold a goat's bladder for hours trying to fill it drop by drop.

Whatever you're trying to achieve, the power of 'gota en gota' is undisputed. Just pick your destination, inch out of your comfort zone every day, and you'll soon be achieving goals you never would have thought possible... especially if one of them is to impress the locals with your knowledge of Catalan expressions.

Bona sort i fins aviat! (Good luck and see you soon!)



### Free Workshop Nonviolent Communication

3rd November, 4 to 5pm, Sant Cugat

Discover how to communicate with empathy, honesty, and care - strengthening connection and harmony with others (and yourself).

Register: WhatsApp or Telegram: 610 433 433  
(Event in Spanish)



## HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) HOROSCOPE

(100% accurate... according to Henry after an evening in Plaça Octavià)

### ♈ Aries (21 Mar – 19 Apr)

You'll feel an irresistible urge to do something you'll probably regret, possibly buying something you don't need or getting involved in a project you don't have time for. Beware of cats.

### ♉ Taurus (20 Apr – 20 May)

A chance encounter at the market will lead to unexpected friendship. Or maybe just a really good cheese recommendation. Either way, savour the moment.

### ♊ Gemini (21 May – 20 Jun)

You'll find yourself in two minds about something important... again. Luckily, both minds will agree on fundamentals. Especially if liquids are involved. A doctor will be helpful.

### ♋ Cancer (21 Jun – 22 Jul)

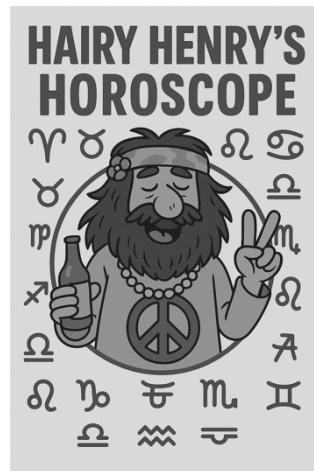
Someone will ask you for directions. You'll pretend to know and end up walking with them for 15 minutes. Friendship might blossom, or you might just end up late. Pay attention to yellow and orange.

### ♌ Leo (23 Jul – 22 Aug)

This month you shine brighter than the Monestir at Christmas. People will notice - so brush your hair and rehearse your best smile. Money will try to talk, but be prepared for a financial setback.

### ♍ Virgo (23 Aug – 22 Sep)

Your perfectly planned schedule will be upended by an impromptu picnic. Embrace the chaos, and pack extra olives just in case. If in doubt, give more importance to cheese.



### ♎ Libra (23 Sep – 22 Oct)

An unexpected compliment will put you in a great mood. You'll pass it on, and soon the whole coffee queue will be smiling. You're basically a happiness influencer now. Value your audience.

### ♏ Scorpio (23 Oct – 21 Nov)

Your stress levels will be up and down like Tesla shares. Even the barista will notice. Go with the flow and enjoy the ride. Expect the unexpected. When in doubt, gratitude is the best option.

### ♐ Sagittarius (22 Nov – 21 Dec)

Adventure calls! It might be a hike in Collserola, or it might be a spontaneous trip to IKEA. Either way, wear comfortable shoes. Your special power this month is either sarcasm or trichotillomania.

### ♑ Capricorn (22 Dec – 19 Jan)

You'll be tempted to work through the harder than you should. Resist. The stars strongly recommend churros and a couple of bottles of Cava instead. The letter G will be a surprising influence, but don't be surprised if it doesn't.

### ♒ Aquarius (20 Jan – 18 Feb)

A new idea will strike you in the shower. You'll forget it by the time you've dried your hair, but don't worry, it probably wasn't that good. Focus on the here and now and stop trying to be clever.

### ♓ Pisces (19 Feb – 20 Mar)

Romance is in the air. Or maybe that's just the smell of fresh bread. Either way, follow your nose and savour the flavours. Try something new, like a new combination of nutrients or yoga positions.



## Helping Neighbours, Building Community

An interview with Miguel Ángel Puigmartí



I met Miguel Ángel Puigmartí on a Thursday morning at the discreet Cáritas centre in Carrer d'Orient fronted by a large loading area. Part storeroom, part distribution point, it also hides bathrooms, showers, and a laundry corner for those who need them. On an ordinary morning, it is quietly busy, with people coming and going, picking up food, signing up for courses, or simply stopping by to talk.

Miguel Ángel, a retired gentleman with an easy smile, has been a volunteer with Cáritas for 15 years. He is clearly passionate about the work being done in Sant Cugat.

**SSC:** Let's begin simply. What is Cáritas to you?

**Miguel Ángel:** For me, Cáritas is an institution of the Catholic Church dedicated to helping people advance in life... especially those with economic difficulties. We begin with food because it is a way to connect. But really, it's about much more than that: it's about helping your neighbour in every possible way.

*[Cáritas Sant Cugat is indeed much more than a food bank. Its projects range from language and literacy classes to homework support for teenagers, shared accommodation for mothers and children, employment advice, and even lessons on Catalan social customs for newcomers. At its heart, Cáritas wants to give people the tools to rebuild dignity and independence.]*

**SSC:** Many people think of Cáritas as "just" a Catholic charity. Is that a misunderstanding?

**Miguel Ángel:** It's not so much a misunderstanding as an ignorance. Some people think that because it's linked to the Church, it's only for believers. On the contrary, we have volunteers who don't go to church at all but collaborate with us. We serve Muslims, Hindus, anyone who needs help. There are no religious distinctions.

**SSC:** How can someone here in Sant Cugat get involved?

**Miguel Ángel:** It's very simple. Just come to the Cáritas office and we'll arrange an interview. We'll chat and see what kind of collaboration suits you.



For example, we run study support for children. Maybe you, as English speakers, could help teach English. We also have programmes to welcome immigrants, where people gather weekly for support. There are many different activities.

*[That “many different activities” is worth underlining. They include:*

- **A Social Dining Programme**, where meals are served daily, along with showers and laundry facilities.
- **A Food Bank (El Rebost)** stocked with staples like bags of rice, jars of legumes, tinned foods, and milk, plus fresh produce from a solidarity farm.
- **Language and literacy courses** in Catalan and Spanish.
- **Homework clubs** for struggling students.
- **Employment programmes** to help people prepare CVs, search for work, and build confidence.
- **Shared flats** for homeless individuals and mothers with children.

*Each of these initiatives is run largely by volunteers. And each needs more helping hands.]*

**SSC:** You've been here 15 years. What has changed?

**Miguel Ángel:** The changes are subtle, but we are always adding new support. For example, years ago, we didn't have hygiene facilities. One day I realised this was a gap. I looked online, found a solution, and soon we had showers and laundry in place. It's about seeing opportunities to improve and taking them.

**SSC:** And what motivates you personally?

**Miguel Ángel:** Very simple: the people. Those who come here. I don't do this for myself. The goal is always them, and to attend to them as best as possible.

*[Miguel's words are modest, but the impact is real. During the pandemic, Cáritas Sant Cugat went from supporting 200 families to 500 in the space of a week. That need has never entirely gone away. Today, around 200 families still rely on Cáritas every month. And yet, most Sant Cugat residents walk past without noticing.]*

**SSC:** Do you have a message for our readers?

**Miguel Ángel:** Always think of others. Too often, we live in a bubble: we wake up, eat, shower, go to work, and return home. And we forget that outside our bubble, there are neighbours, families here in Sant Cugat, who are struggling. If we all thought a little more about them, life would be better for everyone.

### How You Can Help

If you're reading this as an international resident, you may be wondering: *Can I really get involved if I don't speak perfect Spanish or Catalan?* The answer is yes.

Here are a few ways:

**Volunteer your skills:** From helping children with homework to assisting with language learning, there are opportunities where English is an asset.

**Support the dining room or food bank:** You can help with food preparation, distribution, or simply offering company to those who drop in.

**Join integration programmes:** Many newcomers to Sant Cugat feel isolated. Weekly welcome groups need volunteers with open ears and friendly smiles.

**Offer professional know-how:** If you have experience in HR, business, teaching, or social services, your knowledge can strengthen employment or training projects.

**Donate:** Monetary contributions help cover essentials, especially since EU food funding was cut two years ago. Even small monthly donations help keep services running. (See inside back-cover CAMPAIGN 800x10).

Contact by email: [voluntariat@santcugat.cat](mailto:voluntariat@santcugat.cat) or visit their centre: Pl. Octavia 11, Tuesdays 17:00 - 19:30. Fridays 11:00 to 13:00.



## How to beat Black Friday

by Marshal Montgomery.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting tired of this idiotic lunacy they call Black Friday. This relentless urge to buy stuff you don't need with money you don't have is a symptom of yet another American 'tradition' to turn us all into consumer zombies. And I've had enough of it. So if you have similar sentiments, here are a few suggestions to bring back a bit of sanity into your life.

1. Leave the credit cards at home (which these days probably means your phone, too). Just take the cash you have on you and spend Black Friday like the Little Match Girl, wandering the streets, looking at everyone inside shops laughing and pretending they're enjoying themselves.
2. Ignore great deals from big multinationals who import ridiculously cheap stuff from China and Kazakhstan. Instead, go to local arts & craft shops and buy something handmade that costs twice as much and feel proud you're supporting the local economy.
3. Even better, make it yourself. Last year, I gave the wife a lovely present for keeping her jewellery in, that I'd made from a couple of yoghurt pots and a few carefully selected colourful rubber-bands. You should have seen the look on her face when I explained how we were helping the environment. (Pro-tip: It's probably better if you wash the yoghurt pots out first).
4. If you can't be bothered making something, then just 'up-cycle' - a trendy-sounding term for giving stuff you don't like (or want) to friends. It's a no-brainer



Marshal Montgomery: SSC's Lifestyle correspondent

when you think about it. You free up storage space in your home and look generous at the same time. Magic!

5. Finally, forget material stuff altogether and focus on creating experiences. My family will never forget the day I drove them out to Sol i Aire and then abandoned them without any money, phones or travel passes. That was truly a memorable day for everyone. It even made the local newspaper.

So, by adopting a these simple actions, you can contribute to reducing overconsumption, and support a greener, healthier and happier planet while still savouring the spirit of Black Friday.

Enjoy!



# A CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

We're building a magazine by (and for) the people who call Sant Cugat home. If you're a Sant Cugat resident who speaks English and has a story to share, we'd love to hear from you.

## What we're looking for

Great pieces usually tick several boxes:

- ✓ Are about something happening in Sant Cugat.
- ✓ We're especially interested in events, associations, etc.
- ✓ But NO selling, please.
- ✓ Genuine value for readers (useful, inspiring, or eye-opening).
- ✓ Actionable or participatory (something readers can join, attend, try, support).
- ✓ People-first (real names, real lives, real voices — not just general information).
- ✓ A touch of humour is very welcome — short stories, cartoons and light pieces too!

## More details to consider

Length: 350–850 words

Language: English (we can lightly edit for clarity)

## A Few ideas to Get You Thinking:

- A hidden local group or club that changed your week/life.
- “A Day in the Life” of someone who keeps Sant Cugat running.
- A newcomer’s mini-guide to surviving your first year here.
- A profile of a local hero or small business with a big heart.
- Family-friendly trails, cafés with character, or community projects.
- Humour: short slice-of-life scenes, expat missteps, gentle satire.
- Cartoons that capture life in Sant Cugat.

*As Lord Kitchener said...*



## How to submit

Email: [info@simplysantcugat.com](mailto:info@simplysantcugat.com)

Please include:

- ✓ Your article (Google Doc or Word is fine).
- ✓ 1–2 photos or a simple illustration (optional, original only).
- ✓ Your name, a one-line bio, and a contact link you’re happy to publish.

**Deadline:** the 15th of each month for the next issue.

**Credit:** We always publish your name (and photo/bio if you’d like).

## Our promise

We’ll edit lightly for style and space (or hack it to pieces if it’s too long), keep your voice intact, and let you know if we plan to hold a piece for a later issue. Above all, we’re here to build bridges, reduce isolation, and spark those serendipitous connections that make Sant Cugat feel like home.



## Castelltallat Astronomical Observatory

by Ian Gibbs



Sometimes, the best way to put life into perspective is to see the whole of infinity. About an hour's drive from Sant Cugat, on the quiet slopes of the Serra de Castelltallat near Sant Mateu de Bages, lies a hidden opportunity to bring the infinite night sky within touching distance: the Castelltallat Astronomical Observatory.

We decided to head there as a family this summer - my wife and I, along with our two teenage kids. So, we swapped the lights of Sant Cugat for the darkness of deepest rural Catalonia, where the air feels crisper, the stars brighter, and time slows down... especially when waiting to be served in the solitary local restaurant.

Our daughter was determined to see shooting stars. My son, less so, but he perked up when he discovered the observatory guide had a laser pointer that sliced across the heavens like something out of *Star Wars*. That bright green beam seemed to go "to infinity and beyond," the guide merrily tracing constellations with dazzling clarity.

The night began inside with a talk that was engaging and accessible, even for the less astronomy-obsessed members of the group. We learned a bit about our solar system, about

comets and shooting stars, and how to spot different constellations.

The observatory experience is cleverly designed in stages: first the introduction, then constellation spotting with the laser, and finally the telescope itself. About 30 people joined the session, which meant each of us had only a brief turn at the eyepiece, but even a few seconds was an experience.

Looking at the moon up close was amazing. Craters and ridges, usually invisible to the naked eye, suddenly seemed sharp enough to touch.. For my son, the giant telescope was a surprise hit. For my daughter, catching sight of a shooting star while everyone else gasped was the perfect payoff.

However, the real magic began after the official visit when we were invited to go and spend "as long as we wanted" lying in a recently mown farmer's field, reserved for stargazers because of its perfect shape and slope. We had been advised to bring blankets to lie on, as well as anything that would help the hours more cozy.

There, at two o'clock in the morning, lying flat on our backs with nothing but the universe above us, we were reminded of how small we really are, how



magnificent the cosmos can be, and how lucky we were that it wasn't raining.

### Practicalities: Getting There and Staying There

The Castelltallat Observatory is about 80 km northwest of Sant Cugat. If you've got a car, it's a straightforward one-hour drive. If not, public transport options are virtually non-existent. This is one of those trips best done with four wheels.

We made a weekend of it, booking into a nearby farmhouse guesthouse. The atmosphere was charming, complete with a ping-pong table that kept us entertained before dinner. Speaking of dinner: there's only one restaurant in the area. It was friendly and rustic, though the portions could have been a bit bigger and hotter. Still, in preparation for a night of stargazing, even simple food tasted good.

For couples, the area offers romance in abundance. For families, it's educational and fun. For groups of friends, it's a chance to see some stars and then get very drunk in a field.

### What to Expect

The observatory's weekend public sessions are well-structured and led by knowledgeable, passionate guides. Sessions usually run Fridays and Saturdays in the early evening, with observing nights split into two groups to give everyone telescope time.

Expect a mix of:

- A clear, dynamic explanation of the night sky and solar system
- Constellation spotting with that unforgettable laser pointer
- Telescope observations of planets, star clusters, and nebulae

Sessions last around two hours, though if you stay on to stargaze outdoors afterwards (as we did) you might find yourself there until sunrise.

### Tips for Visitors

If you're planning a trip, here are a few things we wish we'd known in advance:

- **Book ahead.** Sessions are capped at around 30 people and fill up quickly.

- **Dress warmly.** In the Autumn, nights in the hills can be chilly.
- **Bring binoculars.** They give you more independence and a different view while waiting for your turn at the telescope.
- **Pack a flask of coffee or hot chocolate.** The night is long, and a warm drink can be very welcome.
- **Be patient.** With 30 participants, you won't spend hours glued to the telescope. But the guides, the laser show, and the sheer immensity of the sky make it worthwhile.

### Why Go?

Castelltallat Observatory is more than a scientific centre; it's a doorway to awe. Standing on a hill at nearly 1,000 meters, in one of Catalonia's lowest-light areas, it offers a sky untouched by city glare. The experience is at once humbling and uplifting.

Whether you're seeking a quiet evening together, a family bonding adventure, or simply an excuse to step away from the city's pace, this trip delivers. The beauty of astronomy is that it combines wonder with perspective: lying in that field at two in the morning, you realise that while our day-to-day worries can feel enormous, they are tiny compared to the universe above us.

### The Verdict

For couples, it's a uniquely romantic getaway. For families, it's an unforgettable educational experience. And for anyone in Sant Cugat needing a weekend escape, it's a chance to recharge in the quiet company of stars, planets, and galaxies.

We returned home very tired but very pleased. The kids had new stories to tell, my wife and I had shared something magical, and all of us carried with us the memory of the stars shining more brightly than we'd ever seen before.

If you've ever wanted to touch the universe, Castelltallat Observatory is the place to start.

#### Castelltallat Observatory

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