

January 2026

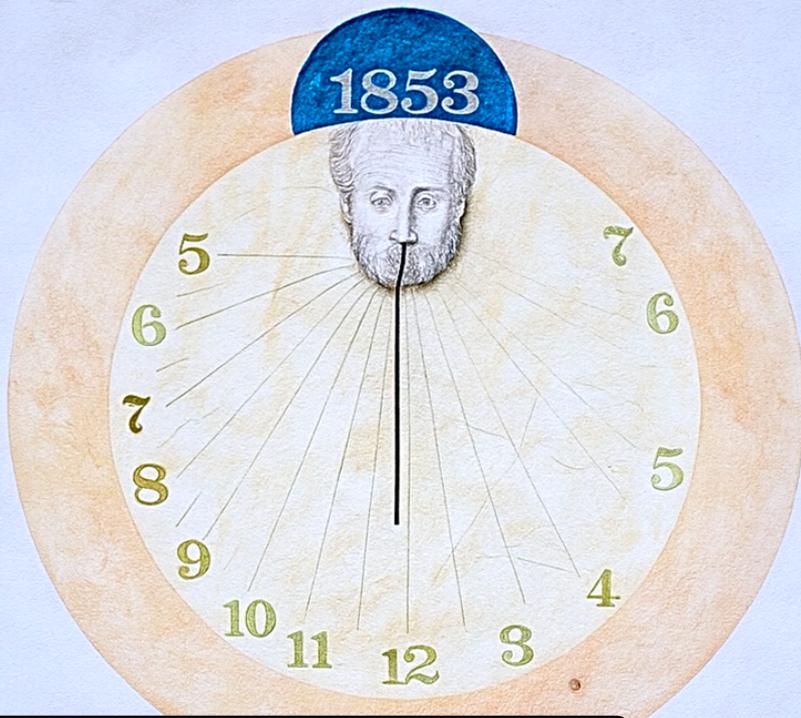
3rd Edition

Simply

SANT CUGAT



Your community. Your magazine. Your Sant Cugat.



This month...

1. A Simple Guide to Schools in Sant Cugat
2. Association Spotlight: Wise People
3. Local Entrepreneur: Porco Rosso
4. The Snow is here! Your guide to weekend skiing
5. Jokes, puzzles, reviews and much, much more

FREE
(for now)

**Simply SANT CUGAT®**

Third Edition: January 2026

Founded and edited:

Aston Swift & Ian Gibbs

Printed: Cevagraf**Writers and contributors:**Ruth Sale, Juan Vila, Richard Wilkinson,
Penny Garcia, & Marshal Montgomery**Distributed:** by Swift Delivery Services**Cover photo:** taken at plaça Barcelona, 8,
by Johan Caballeroinfo@simplysantcugat.comwww.simplysantcugat.com**DL:** B-21.145-2025**CONTENT**

Happy New Year from Aston & Ian	3
A Simple Guide to the School System	4
Why Do We Say That? The Three Kings	6
A Magical Meetup.....	7
Local Entrepreneurs: Porco Rosso.....	8
Association Spotlight: Wise People.....	10
The Snow is Here: Your Skiing Guide	12
New Restaurant: Cuina	14
Simply For Kids (pull out)	15
Culture Corner: La Traviata	19
3 Couples, 2 Cultures, 1 Home.....	20
Bons Mots: Aigua de Gener	22
Hairy Henry's (Totally Reliable) Horoscope	23
An Ode to Paper	24
Sustainable New Year's Resolutions.....	26
Language Learning Hacks	27
The Sant Cugat Comedy Tour	28
Did You Know?	30
Classifieds.....	31

SIMPLY SANT CUGAT DISTRIBUTION POINTS**Centre****Signature Luxury Homes:** Corts Catalans 5-7, 1r**Fermenteria Smakelig:** c. Josefina Mascareñas, 15**Sant Cugat Esports:** pl. Quatre Cantons, s/n**Casa Parra:** rbla. Ribatallada, 4**Cavina Vinoteca:** pl. de Barcelona, 16**Bar Hamburg:** rbla de Ribatallada, 36**Erreka Café:** pl. Gabriel Ferrater**Café Auditori:** av. del Pla del Vinyet, 48**Cinesa:** av. del Pla del Vinyet, s/n**Vins Noe:** av. de la Torre Blanca, 3**Dentalogic:** c. Francesc Moragas, 23**Esade:** av. de la Torre Blanca, 59**MaB Languages:** pg. Francesc Masià, 81**Trinity Idiomes:** rbla. Can Móra, 18**Papeleria Drac:** rbla. de Ribatallada, 4**Papeleria Blau Cel:** c. Francesc Moragas, 28**Oficina de Turisme Monestir:** pl. d'Octavià, 10**Vollpellers****Don Canino:** av. Via Augusta, 3**El Siglo:** Mercantic, av. Rius i Taulet, 120**Bodega Mauricio:** Mercantic, av. Rius i Taulet, 120**Biblioteca Vollpellers:** c. Pau Muñoz i Castanyer, 3**Mira-Sol****Padel Mira-Sol:** pg. Sevilla, 53**Casal Mira-Sol:** c. Mallorca, 42**Biblioteca Mira-sol:** pl. d'Ausiàs March, 2**La Floresta****C. Civic El Casino:** c. Casino, 27**Fleca & Café Pearson:** c. Diputació, 33**Les Planes****Casal del Barri Can Rectoret:** c. Via Làctia, 4**C. Civic El Electric:** ctra. Vallvidrera a St. Cugat, km 6,5**Casal Les Planes:** pl. Coll de la Creu d'en Blau, 7**Valldoreix****El Jardinet Del Kombu:** pl. Mas Roig, 2**Forn de la Estación:** rbla. Mossèn Jacint Verdaguer, 3



Happy 2026 from Aston & Ian!

For us, this January really does feel special, because it marks something remarkable: our third edition.

Simply Sant Cugat is still new enough to be experimenting, listening, and adjusting. We're exploring what you want, what you pick up first, what you skip, what you show your friends, and what makes you think, "Yes! this is for people like me." And honestly? The feedback so far has been better than we ever dared hope for.

What's exciting is that this issue isn't just growing in pages – it's growing in colour (this is our first full-colour edition) – and it's growing in voices.

For the first time, we have contributed articles from people in the community: Ruth Sale's guide to the school system (vital for anyone navigating education here), and Juan Vila's "Ode to Paper" – a love letter to the very thing you're holding in your hands. If you ever needed a reminder that print still matters, Juan delivers it.

We're also launching two new sections. *3 Couples* celebrates the colourful reality of international life in Sant Cugat – the little misunderstandings, the big compromises, and the unexpected joys of building a life between cultures. And *Language Learning Hacks* is born from the simple fact that whatever our nationalities, languages are one thing we all share (and we can all get better at them).

We're well on the way to becoming a familiar part of Sant Cugat, and it still surprises us how many people already know about the magazine. But our success only comes with your support. If you'd like to help, remember the three best ways:

1. Tell us about amazing people and groups here in Sant Cugat
2. Write us an article
3. Connect us with an advertiser

Thank you for being part of the story.

Happy 2026,

Aston & Ian

Announcement

Public Speaking Contest

Monday, 26th January, 19:30h

Fancy a fun, inspiring Monday evening that doesn't involve Netflix?

Sant Cugat Toastmasters Club is hosting its annual Public Speaking Contest, and you're invited to be in the audience. You'll see local residents stepping up to the microphone, sharing stories, ideas and humour (in English & Spanish) while practising the art of clear, confident communication.

Come along, cheer them on, pick up a few tips for your own presentations... and enjoy being part of Sant Cugat's international community.

- Place: Casa de Cultura, c. Castellví, 8,
- Entrance: Free and open to everyone

Please confirm your attendance by emailing:

toastmasterssantcugat@gmail.com



SIMPLE GUIDES

A Simple Guide To The School System

A Guide For Families Living In Sant Cugat by Ruth Sale

After 35 years of living in Spain and working in different international schools in Girona and Sant Cugat as a teacher and in Admissions, I totally understand that choosing the right school for your child is a big decision and, if you are new to *Catalunya*, it can feel a little overwhelming at first.

The education system here offers quite a few options, each with its own approach to language, curriculum and philosophy. If you are living in Sant Cugat - a city that is famous for its international feel and excellent schools - you will want to understand these choices so your child's transition is smooth and happy.

So, what are your options?

In Catalunya, schools fall into three main categories: Public (state), semi-private (*Concertada*) and fully private or international. Each has its own personality, so let's walk through them together.

Public schools (*Escoles Públiques*)

These are completely funded by the government, so tuition is free - you will only pay for books, materials and sometimes meals. Classes are taught mainly in Catalan, with Spanish as a subject and English introduced later. They follow the official Catalan/Spanish curriculum and places are assigned through a lottery system during the annual enrolment period.

Expect mixed classes, no uniforms, and larger groups of students. The big plus is that they are free and help children integrate into the local culture and language. The challenge? If your child does not speak Catalan yet, the immersion can feel intense at first.

Semi-private schools (*Escoles Concertades*)

These schools are privately managed but receive some state funding. Families usually pay a monthly

fee (around €150 to €250) plus meals and activities. Catalan is often the main language although many schools also teach Spanish and English, and some are bilingual or even trilingual.

They follow the official curriculum but can add extras like more English, arts or religious education. Many are linked to Catholic organisations, though secular options exist and admissions go through the same public process as state schools. These schools tend to have smaller classes, more personalised attention and sometimes uniforms. They are a nice middle ground - more flexibility and resources than public schools but not as costly as private ones.

THE MAIN SCHOOLS IN SANT CUGAT

Private & International Schools: Agora Sant Cugat International School (ASCIS), European International School of Barcelona (EISB), CreaNova School, Hatikva - Private Jewish school, Japanese School in Barcelona, Tretzevents Waldorf-Steiner - Private Catalan school.

Semi-Private Schools (Catholic schools): La Farga, Col·legi Pureza de María Sant Cugat, Viaró Global School, El Pinar de Nuestra Señora, Santa Isabel.

Semi-Private Schools (Non-Catholic schools): Avenç, Liceu Politèmic, Thau Sant Cugat.

Public Primary Schools (Infant & Primary): Cuitat d'Alba, Collserola, Gerbert d'Orlhac, Jaume Ferran i Clua, Joan Maragall, La Floresta, La Mirada, L'Olivera, Pi d'en Xandri, Pins del Vallès, Turó de Can Mates.

Public Primary & Secondary School: Institut-Escola Catalunya.

Public Secondary Schools (Secondary & National Baccalaureate): IES Angeleta Ferrer i Sensat, IES Arnau Cadell, IES Centre d'Alt Rendiment Esportiu (CAR), IES Joaquina Pla i Farreras, IES Leonardo Da Vinci.

Private and international schools (*Escoles Privades*)

Families cover all costs in private/international schools and fees can range from 600€ to 1,500€ a month or more. Many of these schools are international with English, French, German or other languages as the main language of instruction and Catalan and Spanish are usually taught as subjects. The curriculum is flexible - British, American, French, Japanese, IB (International Baccalaureate) etc.

Admissions are handled directly by the school and your child might encounter interviews or entrance exams before they can be enrolled. These schools often have smaller classes, lots of extra-school activities and a global outlook. They are perfect if you want continuity with your home-country education or an international programme. The downside? The cost and possibly less immersion into the local culture.

It is important to understand that choosing a school is not just about ticking boxes - it is about finding the right fit for your child and your family. If you are looking for long-term stability and a global approach, schools offering the full IB continuum (Primary Years, Middle Years and Diploma Programmes) can be an excellent choice.

I would always recommend that families visit schools during regular hours. Nothing beats seeing the atmosphere for yourself - how teachers interact with students, the energy in the classrooms and the overall atmosphere.

Brochures and websites are helpful, but real-life visits tell the full story. Always, always, always use your sixth sense when walking around a school - you know your child better than anybody else and you need to ask yourself, "Can I imagine my child

here and being content, connected and confident?"

Take your time, explore your options, and don't hesitate to ask questions. In a city as dynamic and diverse as Sant Cugat, choosing the right school won't just shape your child's education - it will help your family feel truly at home.



Ruth Sale Admissions Manager at Agora Sant Cugat

Ruth Sale is a "Yorkshire lass" from Sheffield who has called Spain home for over 35 years, 16 of them in Sant Cugat. After many years teaching Infant, Primary and Secondary, she moved into her current role as Admissions Manager at Agora Sant Cugat International School, where she has worked for over 15 years.

She is the friendly, reassuring face who helps families choose the right school and guides them step by step through the admissions process. Ruth enjoys getting to know parents from around the world and making sure they feel welcome, listened to and supported so that both children and their families can settle in with confidence.



WHY DO WE SAY THAT?

The Three Kings

From Mysterious Men to Spain's Favourite Gift-givers

Living in Sant Cugat, it's almost impossible to get through early January without hearing about ***Dia de Reis*** or **Kings Day**. But why?

The original story comes from the Gospel of Matthew, which tells of visitors from the East who followed a star to find the new-born Jesus. But in the text they're not kings, they're simply referred to as "**Magi**" - wise or senior men, and there's no number given either.

Most likely 3 was chosen because they brought 3 gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh but there could have been 2 or 200 of them. Over time, tradition turned them into three kings, although they could equally have been just a couple of old blokes popping across from Jordan having picked up a few gift-boxed items in the local bazaar for the baby-shower.

Unsurprisingly, the fictitious kings got fictitious names, invented later in the 8th century to give each one a bit of personality.

Melchor (originally Melchior) represents Europe and is usually shown as the older king. He's often imagined as calm, wise and fatherly. **Gaspar** (Gathaspa), represents Asia and is the younger king with black hair. He's sometimes pictured as curious and energetic, the one who asks the questions and leads the way. **Balthasar** (Bithisarea) is the African king. He is frequently described as generous and joyful, the one who connects with children. And family traditions, social media and Corte Inglés advertising have helped fix these personalities in our imagination.

So why do they turn up on 6 January? In the Christian calendar, Christmas Day starts the "twelve days of Christmas", ending in **Epiphany** (meaning appearance or manifestation). The idea is not that the Magi galloped from Persia to Bethlehem in under two weeks. Even at a decent caravan pace of 30-40 km a day, a camel train



Melchor, Gaspar and Balthasar, AKA The Three Kings

would only cover roughly 400-500 km in twelve days - respectable, but nowhere near enough for a long desert journey. The twelve days are about the liturgy, not the logistics: Christmas focuses on the birth itself and twelve days later, Epiphany focuses on Jesus being "shown" to the wider world through these foreign visitors.

Of course, language and tradition go hand in hand. In Catalonia, the ***Cavalcada de Reis*** on the evening of the 5th of January (where the Kings throw boiled sweets into the crowds), the ***Cartes als Reis*** (that hopeful children write), and the ***Tortell de Reis*** (the donut shaped cake with hidden figurines that can easily break your teeth, eaten on the 6th) all help keep the vocabulary alive.

So the next time someone asks, "Are you ready for *Kings Day*?", you'll know that behind that simple phrase there's a whole creative journey from anonymous old men to Magical Kings, and from an ancient story to the sweets scattered in the streets of Sant Cugat.

La Cavalcada de Reis is on 5th January, starting 5:45pm pl. Victoria, ending 8:45pm at pl. Octavia. You can send a letter to the Kings from 2nd to 4th Jan. (3pm to 9pm) in the Monestir cloisters.

MEETUP

26th November: A Truly Magical Evening**A simple summary of our last get-together**

Our second Simply Sant Cugat Meetup took place once again at Cavina Vinoteca, the chic wine bar in pl. Barcelona. This time, around 30 people squeezed into the back of the bar - noticeably busier than at our first event.

With Cavina's growing popularity, we did end up rather squashed together at the back. But if anything, that only added to the atmosphere. Shoulder-to-shoulder conversations quickly sprang up between new faces and familiar ones, such as Ingrid, Sue, Karen, Nachi, Clare, Jinguo, Adam, Marjolein, Helmi, Govert, Michiel, Dani, Pau, Millie, Marc, Mariia, Carmen, Juan, Julio & Aima. With glasses of Cava in hand, people leaned in to swap stories about life, work and settling into Sant Cugat.

One of the most heart-warming parts of the evening was meeting readers who had acted on something they'd seen in the magazine. Several people told us they'd joined local associations or volunteered to help with community projects after discovering them in Simply Sant Cugat. For a small, print-only magazine, it was a powerful reminder that these stories really do ripple out into real life.

The undisputed highlight of the night, however, was a surprise visit from local magicians Julio and Aima. They moved from group to group performing close-up magic: cards changed, vanished and reappeared right under people's noses. Someone's wedding ring disappeared, only to reappear hooked up in Julio's wallet. One particularly baffling card trick was repeated three times on request... and still nobody had the faintest idea how it worked.

In a town as big as Sant Cugat, the international community can feel surprisingly small. Even so, evenings like this show there's no substitute for meeting face to face. Our hope is that these Meetups become a bit like going to your local pub: somewhere you can always find friendly faces, good conversation and the chance to meet someone new. (see photos on our website!)

Host a Simply Sant Cugat Meetup

We launch each new issue with a friendly meetup for **20 to 30 people, 6 to 8pm**

We're seeking new venues + a monthly sponsor. Ideal: private or clearly defined area for easy mingling.

Want to host or know a great place?

Let us know: info@simplysantcugat.com

FERMENTERIA
SMAKELIG



FERMENT BAR & LIVING FOOD

PROBIOTIC DRINKS on tap

WOOD OVEN PIZZA INTERNATIONAL FLAVOURS

FERMENTED VEGETABLES

WORKSHOPS SOURDOUGH BREAD



Time is our main quality ingredient

C. Joseфина Mascareñas 15, Sant Cugat del Valles
more information smakelig.es



LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

Porco Rosso and Love at First Bite!

Two cousins bringing Florence-style sandwiches to Sant Cugat

In a town full of cafés, bakeries and restaurants, launching something genuinely new is no small task. Yet that's exactly what Quim and his cousin Guillem have done with Porco Rosso, Sant Cugat's newest (and already much-talked-about) sandwich shop, just off the centre at Carrer Valldoreix, 10.

Opened on the 8th of November 2025, Porco Rosso isn't just another place to grab a quick bite. It's a passion project built on family ties, shared dreams, and an unexpectedly deep dive into the world of Florentine-style sandwiches.

But first, the question everyone asks: *Why start a restaurant in a world where small businesses have it so tough?*

Quim smiles at the suggestion that it might be madness. "To start a restaurant, you have to be a little bit romantic about the business," he says. "It's tough hours, low margins, lots of room for mistakes. But I've loved cooking since I was a kid. I learned everything from my grandmothers, just being in the kitchen with them."

Guillem, meanwhile, had spent years working in restaurants - all kinds, all sizes, all roles. "He always said big restaurants equal big problems," Quim laughs. "He wanted something small, simple, good, where he could deal with customers face to face, look them in the eye."

And that's where the idea started.

Porco Rosso is modelled on the tiny panini shops of Florence - the kind where the meat is cut in front of you, where the menu is small, and the smiles are big.

"We knew Catalan people love sandwiches," Quim explains. "Pa amb tomàquet, good ham, good cheese... it's very traditional. So we thought: what if we blend that with the Italian way of doing things?"

The result is what they call: Italian products, Catalan character.



Porco Rosso: Guillem (left) & Quim (right)

And their sandwiches are not your average "*dos llesques i ja està*". They're built using *lingua romana* (a crispy-soft focaccia-meets-pizza-style bread), baked on site. Inside you might find creamy stracciatella, artisan cheese, prosciutto or Catalan charcuterie, and always "a magical touch," Quim says, "something that gives character and makes it unforgettable."

They're designed to be shared. "It's a big sandwich," Quim says proudly. "The best way is to come with two or three people, order different ones and share. You get to try everything that way."

The idea for Porco Rosso was born almost exactly one year before opening day. But turning an idea into a functioning restaurant on a tight timeline required strategy, and a surprising amount of Italian fieldwork.

Quim approached their new project like a scientist:

"I start by breaking down the riskiest assumptions. The first one was: *Will Catalan people love this?* If the answer is no, nothing else works."



So he and Guillem spent months investigating similar concepts in Barcelona, studying customer habits, and (crucially) travelling to Florence to try the real thing.

Then came a legendary evening at home: mountains of bread, dozens of ingredients, and a group of friends told to “play”.

“We let them build whatever they wanted,” Quim says. “It helped us see what people naturally go for.”

And their friends’ reactions were clear: *they loved it*.

With that certainty, they began refining, testing, retesting, and adjusting their menu. “I think we changed the menu six or seven times,” Quim admits. “It took a long time to find the right balance - creaminess, crunch, acidity, structure. Too much sauce and it gets soggy. Too much meat and it’s dry.”

When they had got that right, then came the other tough part: pricing.

“Many restaurants overlook unit economics,” Quim says. “Good Italian products don’t come cheap. We had to design a menu that worked both for flavour and sustainability.”

And then there were the challenges nobody warns you about. Every new business has unexpected hurdles, but Quim discovered one he underestimated: bureaucracy.

“I knew it would be difficult... but not *that* difficult.”

He tells the story of a single supplier registration that required notarised paperwork at impossible hours, endless returns to the office, “the woman there admitted that what they wanted was impossible, but that’s the way it is.” Eventually, a sympathetic civil servant quietly bent the rules to help them move forward (but that’s a secret!).

“It felt like Sisyphus,” Quim laughs. “Pushing the boulder up the mountain again and again.”

In the end, what drives him isn’t profit or prestige - it’s retention.

“For me, love is when a customer comes back, doesn’t even check the menu and just says, ‘I want that one again.’ That is the best feeling.”

He believes this applies to any business:

“It’s more important to have ten people who *love* your product than a hundred who just like it. Love creates organic growth. Liking doesn’t.”

Perhaps the most meaningful part of the journey has been the relationship between the two founders.

“It’s more important to have ten people who love your product than a hundred who just like it.” – Quim.

“There were months we didn’t open and lost money. Tough decisions. Stress. But working with someone you care about... it strengthens the bond. That’s the lesson I take from this year.”

Porco Rosso isn’t just a new restaurant. It’s a tribute to family, the art of sandwich-making, and doing something with love. And judging by the stream of returning customers already lining up on Carrer Valldoreix, Sant Cugat seems ready to fall in love with it too.



Porco Rosso: Turning the sandwich into an artform



ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT

WISE PEOPLE**Because nobody should job hunt alone after 45**

Fran Castanyer, Wise People President, (left) and Francisco Gallardo, advisor and member of the Board (right)

What do you do when your career suddenly vanishes in mid-flight at 50? For almost 600 people in Sant Cugat, the answer has been the same: knock on the door of Wise People, a small local association that helps professionals over 45 get back into the job market.

President Fran Castanyer sums it up like this: “Wise People are the (almost) 600 people who, over ten years, have come here looking for help to find work - or to help others find it.” The project grew out of the 2008 crisis, when unemployed professionals in Sant Cugat began meeting informally to share information and encouragement. In 2015 they turned that coffee-group into a formal non-profit with one clear idea: turn experience into something useful for others.

After a decade, they have built up a strong sense of what works (and what doesn't) when you're looking for work after 45. One of the biggest lessons is the importance of focus. Many over-50s arrive saying “I

can do six different things” and try to look for all six at once. From nearly 600 cases, Wise People has seen that those who find work fastest are the ones who pick one clear objective and organise their search around it.

Unemployment is usually discussed in numbers. Wise People deals with individuals, and they arrive in very different situations. Some still have a job but want to change direction. Others have just been laid off but still have a financial cushion. A third group come in saying, “I've lost my job and I don't have a euro.”

“We have a protocol,” says Fran, “and then we break it shamelessly. We adapt it to each person.” Some haven't written a CV for 30 years. Others already have a polished CV and LinkedIn profile but zero results. Many are still in shock after losing their job. For some, the first recommendation is even: don't look for work yet. If someone is still carrying the full emotional backpack of what's happened, Wise People may suggest a short pause to process

the loss and update skills before jumping back into interviews.

From all these stories, some classic traps appear again and again. One is the “spray-and-pray” strategy: sending hundreds of CVs everywhere and hoping for the best. When someone proudly says, “I’ve sent hundreds and nobody answers,” Wise People usually replies: wrong strategy. It is far better to send a few highly targeted CVs where you really fit than hundreds of generic ones that only create frustration.

Another frequent mistake is trying to be everything at once. After 45, many people have done lots of different jobs, so the temptation is to look for all of them at the same time. The association’s experience suggests the opposite: choose one clear professional objective and say no to the rest, at least for now.

There is also the myth that job hunting should be a 10-hour-a-day job. Some candidates spend all day every day searching for work, but arrive exhausted and discouraged to interviews. A bit of rest, reflection and normal life often does more for their chances than yet another hour on job portals. Fran likes to compare job hunting to picking fruit: after losing a job, you sometimes need to let the yourself ripen and go through a small period of mourning before you’re really ready to impress in an interview.

And finally, there is isolation. “One woman said, ‘I feel terrible, everyone works except me,’” recalls Board member Francisco Gallardo. He simply asked the group, “Who here is working?” Nobody raised their hand. Just realising you’re not alone changes the mood in the room... and often leads to new contacts and ideas.

Both men underline another key message: most jobs never appear in public ads. They arrive through people. Wise People runs regular workshops on networking for over-45s, encouraging members to start with the people they already know and to see networking as a long-term habit rather than a panic button you press when you’re desperate.

For Simply Sant Cugat’s international readers, there is good news: you don’t need perfect Catalan to ask Wise People for help. Francisco has spent almost four decades working in Catalonia in Spanish and English without problems, and Fran points out that for many medium and higher-level roles either Spanish or English is enough to start, though Catalan or English may be required in some positions later on.

The association itself is free to join. Wise People used to charge a small monthly fee, but dropped it when they realised that even a few euros could exclude the people who most needed support. Today nobody is turned away for financial reasons. What they do ask, gently, is that if you can help, you do: come back as a volunteer, share job offers, open doors, or simply sit with someone who is now where you were a few months earlier.

After a decade of Wise People, Fran’s conclusion is simple: “If you really look for work, you find it. But you have to look where the work actually is, and you have to look for it in the right way.” For a town like Sant Cugat – full of talent, but also full of uncertainty - Wise People is a comforting reminder that you don’t have to face the second half of your career alone.

At a glance...

Who it’s for: Professionals aged 45+ who are unemployed, in transition or thinking about a change.

What they offer: Personalised job-search support, CV and LinkedIn help, workshops (networking, DAFO, AI, etc.) and a supportive peer group.

How they work: Volunteer-run, flexible, “made-to-measure” support rather than a one-size-fits-all programme.

Cost: 100% free. No quotas or compulsory fees.

Languages: Mainly Catalan and Spanish, with support also possible in English.

Find out more: www.wisepeoplesantcugat.cat



OUT & ABOUT

Skiing from Sant Cugat. Snow is Here!**Where to go and how to get there**

Living in Sant Cugat, we are incredibly lucky. The Pyrenees are right on our doorstep with countless resorts easily reachable by car or train especially when we include France and Andorra, catering well to beginners and experts. In under 4 hours' drive you can choose from ten Catalan resorts, nine in France or the whole of Andorra with two huge ski areas and another 7 towns to access them. Choose carefully: terrain, size, elevation and prices vary a lot. Day passes range from 26 euros in little old Vallter to 68 in Baqueira-Beret and Andorra.

Ski passes and rentals are always cheaper booked online in advance and look out for hotel + lift + train packages. If you drive, carry chains or snow-socks. The snow train is convenient, but it is slower than driving.

Closest. La Masella and La Molina are just up the motorway, through the Cadí tunnel. When the kids were younger, we'd leave at 7am, arrive at La Masella at 8.30 and slopes by 9. Home by dinner, exhausted and happy, although the drive home always took longer, especially on a Sunday night in

season. If you arrive in the afternoon, it has floodlit night skiing. La Masella is perfect for learning to ski with easy beginner runs and good for progressing. If the link to La Molina is open, it's perfect for a long weekend. But usually, it is too limited for more than a day or two, especially if there is less snow and it is rare that every single run is open. As I'm writing though, the website is proudly announcing every run is open and the resort opened at the end of November. Not much accommodation and no après-ski. The Barcelonans tend to stay in Alp, a lively town just down the mountain.

La Molina is on the other side of the mountain. Even more beginner friendly and a bigger town. Its secret weapon though is that you can get there by train

5 Ways to Save Money on Ski Trips

- ✓ Book passes and rentals online in advance
- ✓ Look for hotel + lift + train packages
- ✓ Share car journeys and parking
- ✓ Go outside peak weekends if you can
- ✓ Take your own food and drinks

from Barcelona on the Rodalies R3 (buy the package from Plaça Catalunya) and this resort, like a few others belongs to the Ferrocarrils.

Little Gems. Vall de Núria a bit further round and also reachable by train, and then Vallter are tiny and perfect for first timers or a relaxed family day. Westwards we have peaceful Espot and Boí Taüll offering stunning scenery and quiet slopes rather than big thrills.

Your Day-Trip Checklist

- ✓ Ski socks, gloves, neck warmer, sunglasses/goggles
- ✓ Sun cream & lip balm
- ✓ Extra layer / dry T-shirt for the drive home
- ✓ Water & snacks for the car
- ✓ Chains or snow-socks for the car
- ✓ Health card / insurance details

Experts. In the same direction as Espot and Boí Taüll and you reach Spain's only resort north side of the Pyrenees, Baqueira-Beret, widely considered the premier resort in Iberia. It's where the Spanish King and Queen ski and the town has become distinctly glitzy. Snow is reliable and the reds and blacks and off-piste will challenge the experts. I have never been, but after everything I have heard, this is the season I go.

France. Into France we have Font Romeu and Les Angles as the biggest (of the small) nine local resorts. Perfect for a couple of days, although expect older, slower lifts. People stay nearby and pick their resort each morning.

Andorra. Now that the family skis, Grandvalira is our go-to. The border crossing can be slow (remember your passport!), but it is worth it,

especially if going for several days or a week. More than 200km of skiing, plenty off-piste, modern lifts, good value and interesting restaurants and terrain for everyone. Pick a town that has a gondola up to the ski area. Pas de la Casa is the highest up, functional, good value but ugly as sin. Families and youngsters for the night life more than the skiing. Going down the valley you can get a touch of luxury at the hotel in Grau Roig. Nothing else there though.

Then we have Soldeu, a good all-rounder, very British and reminiscent of the 3-valleys in France. El Tarter, Canillo and Encamp complete the Grandvalira side of the mountain. On the other side of Andorra we have Val-Nord, a bit smaller and lower. The two main towns are Pal and Arinsal and, although not connected to Grandvalira, a ski pass bought at one gives entry to the other. These are better accessed through the Spanish border and have a more Spanish/Catalan feel.

Go online. The information is good and they all have webcams and offers.

If you have never skied or snowboarded, now is your chance. A day trip is so easy from here and comparatively good value (compare to the \$319 a ski-pass cost in Vail, California). So grab your gear and go!



**SANT CUGAT
ESPORTS**

Buy or rent ski gear - Expert advice
All sports equipment available

Pl. Quatre Cantons s/n.
Phone: 93 674 30 81
info@santcugatesports.com
www.santcugatesports.com





NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

Cuina Sant Cugat

A Very Welcome Return

After a mysterious six-month “*tancat*”, Cuina Sant Cugat is back. Word is, it had something to do with a reshuffle in the partnership with Raül Balam Ruscaleda (son of the legendary Carme Ruscaleda) who is now no longer part of the restaurant. What matters to us winers and diners and good value *menú del dia* seekers, is that the doors are open again and Sant Cugat is all the better for it.

The bright, fun and modern entrance is a photo-stop and will give you a sense of pride when you bring guests along for the first time. Step inside and it's like the closure never happened. Same comfortable furniture, same big front window, same cosy-modern vibe that feels just right, like La Barra does. What has changed is the price. And the menu is more normal. But also, we now felt an atmosphere which I do not recall from before. On a random weekday lunchtime the place was busy. Dropping the *menú del dia* from 26.50€ to 16.90€ probably explains it.

I liked the old Cuina a lot. The cooking was creative, presented beautifully and tasty. The service was spot-on. The pleasant surprise now is that the food quality hasn't slipped, yet it's affordable. Some of the team are clearly new, but they're keen and friendly. The new *màitre d'* is a real find for them as he was conversational and not just transactional.

Food? Straight in with the *ceps croquetes*. Crunchy outside and deeply mushroomy within. The *torrada* with roast beef was the only slight misstep for me. The toast was too aggressive and the avocado was just a smear. A dollop of horseradish and softer bread would have nailed it for me.

The beetroot, goat's cheese and orange salad, though, was beautiful and perfectly balanced. I'm having that next time.

Then we shared the signature black rice with carabinero prawns. Eight prawns lined up like overweight soldiers thoughtfully peeled bodies with



Cuina Restaurant, c. Sant Bonaventura 6, now open for business

the heads and tails left on for show, and no messy fingers. The dish was great, though I still have a softer spot for the inkier version at *Ébano* in Bellaterra, admittedly at double the price.

Desserts kept the winning streak alive: a classic baked apple with ice cream and cinnamon and a cheesecake that actually tasted of cheese.

Lunch is only *menú del dia*, but with plenty of choices, while dinner has interesting and mouth-watering options. Prices feel almost too reasonable for the setting. We paid 55€ for two, including many extras. But we could easily have kept it to 33€ if we stayed disciplined and had an equally good time.

Cuina still works for pretty much any occasion from casual to business lunches, romantic encounters, groups, or just a quiet glass of wine at the bar. I'm genuinely delighted it's back, and this time at prices that might actually keep it here. Sant Cugat needs this place. It's on our “where shall we go?” list.

Welcome Back!



SIMPLY FOR KIDS

FIND GIMBY

Hello again!

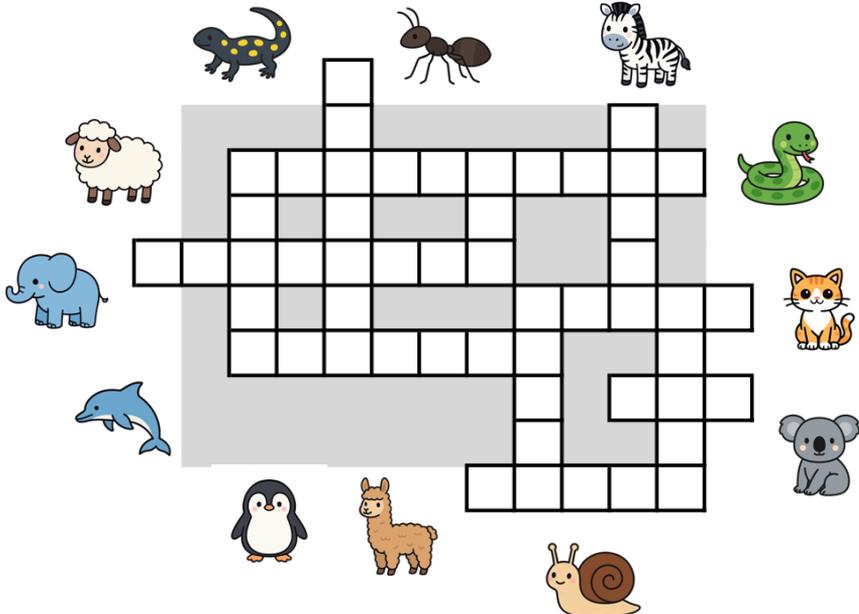
This month, Gimby is worried. This Swine Fever is causing him lots of stress. Most of his friends have disappeared and there are strangers dressed in uniform in the forest. So he is hiding. If you spot Gimby somewhere among these pages, can you report him to the authorities?



Gimby

PICTURE CROSSWORD

Do you know the English names for these animals?
Can you fill in the crossword using them?



(Answers on page 30)

SIMPLY CARTOON

Unfortunately, Clarence, our cartoonist had another little incident with her hedge trimmer and can't draw anything at the moment. Can you help and draw the pictures for her?

Are you sure about this, Jan?

It's too late to change your mind.

I've never done this before.

Let me give you a hand.

What if I make a mess?.

Then we'll clean up together.

Ready?

That was better than expected.!

Happy 2026!

BANG!

SQUEEK!

SQUELCH!

SCRAPE!

CHOP!

POP!

WINTER STORY TIME

Unfortunately, Geraldine, our storywriter, didn't get a new typewriter for Christmas. She's still using her old one (the one with the space bar and punctuation marks that don't work). Can you read the story?

ONESNOWYDAYTHREEFRIENDSBUILTTHEBIGGESTSNOWMANTHEYHAVEVERMADETHEYGAVEHIMACARROTNOSEANOLDSCARFANDASMILEMADEOFSTONESWHENTHEYWENTHOMETHESNOWMANCAMETOLIFEHESMELTTHEFRESHAIRHESAWTHESNOWCOVEREDTREESANDHEARDTHEDISTANTSOUNDOFCHILDRENLAUGHINGBUTTHENHESTARTEDTOFEELLOELYHELOOKEDAROUNDANDSAWAGIRLBUSYDIGGINGINTHESNOWWITHALARGESPADEUSINGALLHISSTRENGTHHESTARTEDTOWOBBLEHISLARGEBOYANDSLOWLYMOVEDACROSSTHEPARKUNTILHEGOTTOTHEGIRLWHOWASNOWBUILDINGASNOWHOUSEHELLOSAIDTHESNOWMANTAPPINGHERONTHEBACKWITHHISFROZENSTICKKARMA SNOWMONSTERSCREAMEDTHEGIRLSHEGRABBEDTHESPADEANDWITHONESWINGKNOCKEDTHESNOWMANSHEADOFFSHERANHOME CRYINGANDTHESNOWMANNEVERCAMETOLIFEAGAINTHEMORALOFTHETORYISDONTTALKTOSTRANGERSEVENIFTHEYAREONLYNINEYEARSOLD

SIMPLY COLOUR

Pau, Anna and Maria are having fun skiing weekend. Unfortunately, Anna has had a little accident. How serious is it? Will she need surgery? Fill in the picture and add some colour to cheer Anna up.



Simply Jokes

Oh dear, Penelope, our editor, has mixed up the jokes and the answers yet again! Can you spot which go with which?

How did the snow globe feel after the winter storm?

What do you call a penguin in the Sahara Desert?

A polaroid

What do you call a photo taken at the North Pole?

What do you call a posh party in the North Pole?

Freeze!

Icebergs

How do snowmen get information?

What do snowmen win in the Olympic games?

Because it's too far to walk.

A little shaken.

What did the police officer say when he saw the snowman stealing?

Why do birds fly south for the winter?

Aunt Arctica

They search on the winter-net.

What is the name of Jack Frost's favourite relative??

What do snowmen eat for lunch?

"Cold" medals.

Lost.

A snow ball.

CULTURE CORNER

Opera: La Traviata**Live and love, to the last breath**

We have just one pick for January. A standout “must-go” event for both opera buffs and virgins. Even for the mildly curious, this is an ideal trial of opera. We are recommending **La Traviata performed live at The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, London on Wednesday 14th January and streamed direct to us here at the Cinesa in Sant Cugat**. We get all the drama and glamour of Covent Garden while sitting in comfy cinema seats, munching popcorn and slurping your fizzy drink. And if partway through you decide you really can’t take any more, you can simply get up and leave. Try doing that when you’re stuck in the middle row at the Royal Opera House!

Best of all, the ticket costs just 28€ including an interval drink and snack. To sit the same distance from the stage in London would cost ten times that.

Heart-rending arias meet harsh realities in this captivating story, one of the most famous and frequently performed operas in the world. *La Traviata* (literally: she who has strayed – tra – from the path - via) is inspired by the real-life Parisian courtesan Marie Duplessis (Violetta in the opera), about whom Alexandre Dumas (son) wrote a novel and play: *La Dame Aux Camélias*. Verdi’s portrayal of Violetta is complex, compassionate and deeply human, highlighting her generosity, dignity and devotion to Alfredo. The role is a favourite of star sopranos, and in this production Violetta is sung by the superb Ermonela Jaho.

The story is timeless. At one of her lavish Parisian parties, Violetta meets Alfredo Germont, who has admired her from afar. They fall in love and retreat to the countryside, but their happiness is short-lived. Alfredo’s father, Giorgio, persuades Violetta to sacrifice her love to protect his family’s reputation. Heartbroken, she agrees. When Alfredo later confronts her in Paris, misunderstandings explode. And with Violetta’s health failing, the consequences are devastating.



This intimate yet sumptuous production by Richard Eyre glows with visual elegance and unforgettable music, including the famous drinking song *Libiamo* - a tune everyone knows, with its irresistible message that pleasure is all that matters.

Opera is an all-encompassing art form and can be an acquired taste, but preparation is key. Read the synopsis beforehand, listen to a few arias on YouTube, read the back-story of the heroine, and you’ll enjoy it far more. The performance lasts around two hours plus two intervals, makes it a relaxed three-hour evening. We’ll be there with our Sant Cugat magazines. Bring yours and say hello at the interval.

Tickets from the box office or online at:
www.cinemessantcugat.com



THREE COUPLES

Two Cultures, One Home

How three international couples are building a shared life in Sant Cugat



Jinguo and Rafael



Candela and Daniel



Maria and Michael

In some Sant Cugat homes, New Year doesn't happen once, it happens twice.

First come the twelve lucky grapes and the cava at midnight on 31st December. Then, a few weeks later, a whole fish appears in the centre of the dinner table, promising prosperity for the Chinese New Year.

That's life with Jinguo, from Shanghai, and Rafael, from Zaragoza, who married in 2018 and moved back to Sant Cugat in 2019. They're one of many mixed-nationality couples who've chosen this town as the place where "your culture" and "my culture" gradually blend into "our culture".

We spoke to three of them (a Chinese/Spanish couple, an American/Mallorcan couple and a German/Catalan couple) about languages, calendars, challenges and what it means to call Sant Cugat home.

Meet the couples

Jinguo & Rafael: She's from Shanghai, he's from Zaragoza. They married in 2018 and settled in Sant Cugat after a spell in China. They still argue about what counts as a "vegetable".

Daniel & Candela: He grew up between Houston and Spain. She's from Mallorca. They met as flatmates during COVID, fell in love while the world was closed, and now live a stone's throw from the monastery.

Michael & Maria: He's from Paderborn in Germany, and came to Barcelona for an MBA in the late 80s

and rented a room in Maria's grandfather's house in Sarrià. They married in 1990, moved to Sant Cugat and raised two daughters here.

Ask any of them which language they speak at home and the answer is: "It's complicated."

When Jinguo and Rafael first met, English was their lingua franca. Over time, Spanish took over... and now Chinese is slowly slipping in through the gaps.

"We started out always speaking English," they say. "Then more and more Spanish, and little by little we're introducing Chinese."

For Daniel and Candela, all three local languages have an open invitation. They move between English and Spanish at home, and Catalan at work, often without noticing: the conversation simply picks whichever word arrives first.

Sometimes, of course, languages don't cooperate. Candela once told Daniel's mum she was "constipada" - in Spanish, that means she had a cold. In English... not so much. "A very awkward five seconds followed," they remember.

Michael and Maria's household adds German into the mix. Over the years, their daughters picked it up thanks to long periods spent in Germany. Today, the family switches mainly between Spanish, German and English. It's noisy, rich, and never entirely monolingual.

Besides the jokes, there's something more profound. As Jinguo and Rafael point out, language doesn't just change what you say - it shapes how



you think. Chinese and Spanish build sentences in very different ways, which can lead to very different ways of expressing feelings or processing conflict. Being a mixed couple means learning not only each other's vocabulary but also each other's thought process.

My Christmas, your Thanksgiving, our calendar

One unexpected side-effect of being a mixed couple: your calendar quietly fills up quickly.

"We celebrate New Year twice," say Jinguo and Rafael. Spanish New Year brings grapes and champagne. Chinese New Year brings Shanghaiese dishes and a whole fish on the table, symbolising abundance.

Daniel and Candela's year includes a Texan-style Thanksgiving with friends in Sant Cugat, followed by a Spanish Christmas and the magic of Three Kings' Day. Their families may live thousands of kilometres apart, but their traditions all converge in the same living room.

Michael and Maria have taken a simpler approach - they celebrate everything they possibly can.

"On 24 December, my wife's whole family (14 people plus the dog!) comes for Christmas Eve dinner," says Michael. "They've been doing it for 35 years." At midnight on New Year's Eve, they always set off a small firework to welcome the year.

The result for all three couples is the same: busy holidays, slightly confused children and a lot of stories. But also a sense that, over time, a third culture is being born - not his, not hers, but theirs.

So why Sant Cugat?

All three couples mention similar reasons: the green spaces, the hills, the services and schools, and the easy connection to Barcelona.

"We love the atmosphere, the green spaces and being close to the mountains," say Daniel and Candela, who joke that once you live near the monastery, it's hard to leave. Michael and Maria chose the town as newlyweds in 1990 because it was ideal for young families, with good schools and convenient transport for his job at SEAT in Martorell. Jinguo sees Sant Cugat as "a very open and international small city", which makes it easier to feel at home so far from Shanghai.

Of course, paradise comes at a price. The cost of living is a real challenge for young couples. City taxes sting. Parking can be a daily battle. And for those with family abroad, there's the constant ache of missing family and friends.

Michael has learned that wherever they live - Spain or Germany - one of them is always missing something they'd have in their own country. Perhaps that's why all three couples put so much emphasis on building a strong local network of friends here: if home is going to be "somewhere in between", you need other people in the middle with you.

So what's the hardest part of being a mixed couple in Sant Cugat?

For Jinguo and Rafael, it's remembering that they genuinely think differently. When a reaction seems strange or a reply isn't what the other expected, the secret is not to explode but to pause and ask, "Is this culture? Is this language?"

Michael talks about the constant need for empathy when you switch countries: one partner is always away from their comfort zone. Daniel and Candela point to distance from family and the effort involved in keeping those bonds alive.

All three agree on the antidotes: learn each other's language; make an effort with the other's culture; and build a community locally.

Their advice to new mixed couples in Sant Cugat is simple but wise:

- Integrate and learn the language. Life is easier (and much more fun) when you can chat to neighbours, colleagues and in-laws.
- Keep your own traditions alive. Don't lose the things that matter to you - add them to the mix.
- Manage expectations. "There are many high-income families in Sant Cugat," Michael notes. "Don't compare. Be happy in this nice place."

Perhaps the best summary comes from Michael and Maria, who have been at this for more than three decades:

"It never gets boring."

In a town where you can hear three languages over one coffee and celebrate New Year twice, that sounds wonderful.



BONS MOTS

Aigua de gener**An opportunity to impress the locals by learning one saying at a time**

If you've lived in Sant Cugat long enough, you'll know that January rain has a certain... reputation. Not the "Oh, bother. Where's my brolly?" kind, but something a little bit older and a little bit wiser. In Catalan, there's a saying...

"Aigua de gener, cada gota val un diner"

January rain, every drop is worth a coin.

Our ancestors weren't just being poetic. Winter rain meant fertile soil for a good harvest, full wells, and a secure year ahead. Rain was money, and not in a metaphorical way, but in a real, practical, life-shaping way.

And here's the point: That wisdom is more relevant now than ever.

Because in the last few years, we've seen just how valuable water really is. Remember the summers of drought? The hosepipe bans? The reservoir ruins? Swimming-pool restrictions? Months of extreme fire risk in Collserola? Every Sant Cugat resident now understands what previous generations took for granted: without winter rain, everything becomes fragile.

So yes... when the skies open in January, it may feel a bit of an inconvenience, especially if you're running down the street, trying to keep your umbrella (and your dignity) under control. Or your game of padel has been cancelled. But behind the soggy socks lies something fundamentally

January rain:

- ✓ replenishes reservoirs after long dry spells
- ✓ feeds the aquifers beneath Sant Cugat
- ✓ hydrates Collserola before the intense summer heat arrives
- ✓ reduces the watering needed for parks and gardens
- ✓ lowers the risk of yet another wildfire season



important - every drop still counts, perhaps now more than ever.

Of course, you're still absolutely allowed to complain when the rain makes it unpleasant to stroll down the high street. You're allowed to slip into a café looking like you've just climbed out of a lake. Rain might be precious, but that doesn't make it glamorous.

Still, the next time January clouds burst, try to welcome them (even if it's a tiny bit). Think of the forests, the reservoirs, the firefighters, the gardens, and the warm, dry, comfortable summer evenings we all hope for with swimming pools to cool off in and guilt-free showers.

And as you dodge puddles on the way home, remember the old Catalan saying:

In January, every drop is worth a coin (even if it does ruin your shoes).





HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) 2026 HOROSCOPE

100% 2026... 100% accurate

♈ Aries (21 Mar – 19 Apr)

2026 is your “let’s just do it and apologise later” year. You’ll start at least three ambitious projects. Money comes and goes like the FGC (mostly on time, occasionally on strike). Keep your head up.

♉ Taurus (20 Apr – 20 May)

Comfort is your theme: the right café, the right chair, the right olive-to-wine ratio. Work stabilises. You’ll finally realise that “no” is a complete sentence. Romantic life? – meh.

♊ Gemini (21 May – 20 Jun)

Your WhatsApp explodes: new groups, new gossip, new “let’s meet for a quick drink” that lasts 3 hours. You’ll sign up for more activities than humanly possible, then secretly enjoy cancelling half of them. Be kinder to cats.

♋ Cancer (21 Jun – 22 Jul)

Home is extra important this year: furniture, ceilings, possibly walls. Family moments are sweet but occasionally too loud. Work brings slow, steady progress if you stop second-guessing yourself.

♌ Leo (23 Jul – 22 Aug)

Spotlight time! 2026 brings applause, attention and people saying “Wow!” (Even if it’s just your tortilla.) You’ll be asked to lead, present or organise something important. Try not to screw it up this time.

♍ Virgo (23 Aug – 22 Sep)

Lists, lists and more lists. This year, you finally create the perfect system for work, home, and the bits-and-bobs drawer. People will come to you for advice. Tell them to go away. Cogito ergo... something.

♎ Libra (23 Sep – 22 Oct)

You are social glue in 2026: family, clubs, committee meetings – you keep things together. Decisions are tricky (If in doubt, do a survey). Partnerships in love and work get stronger.

♏ Scorpio (23 Oct – 21 Nov)

Deep conversations, big questions, mysterious new plans. 2026 brings change. You’ll surprise friends by being intense and honest... and then surprise them again by being right. Buy silver.

♐ Sagittarius (22 Nov – 21 Dec)

Travel calls, even if it’s just exploring new corners of Collserola or discovering a new bar. You crave freedom and learning, so courses, workshops and random adventures all go well. Work may feel small but big things will appear.

♑ Capricorn (22 Dec – 19 Jan)

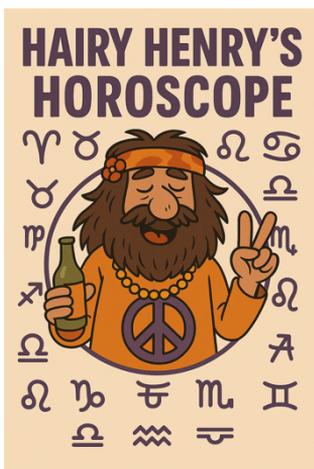
2026 is your “just do it” year. You’ll set ambitious goals and then annoy people by achieving them. Finances improve if you can resist the urge to buy unnecessary stuff. Bear all, but reveal nothing.

♒ Aquarius (20 Jan – 18 Feb)

New ideas bounce in your head like bouncy things: projects, weird hobbies, flummoxing vocabulary. Friendships are key – they’ll open doors. Stop tolerating idiots and watch less TV.

♓ Pisces (19 Feb – 20 Mar)

Your imagination is full tilt this year. Great for creativity, not so much for doing the RENTA. Get serious about losing weight. A new project will really take off. Beware Friday mornings.



FEATURED CONTRIBUTION

An Ode To Paper

by Juan Vila



Quiet Juan! Don't bother our friends with your fantasy eco stories" my wife told me the other day as we were having a drink in the Plaza Octavia with them. We were discussing the alarming disappearance of the Amazon rainforest and the unstoppable increase of CO₂ in the atmosphere. I grabbed the December issue of the Simply Sant Cugat magazine I had just picked up from the Fermenteria Smakelig round the corner and said "you know what this is? Solid CO₂!"

Even in Iceland they are inventing processes to convert atmospheric CO₂ into basaltic minerals stored in the subsoil, DAC or Direct Air Capture they call it. In the US, they are developing other processes that combine atmospheric CO₂ with minerals to produce carbonates, also deposited in rocks or deep mines.

All these reactions work very well to reduce CO₂ in the atmosphere, but they have a small flaw; they are very expensive and they actually consume energy in the process.

For millions of years, there has been a process seemingly ignored by these brainy researchers called photosynthesis, which is easy, naturally occurring, efficient, safe and nothing but cheap. This phenomenon is most evident in forests and works as follows: The seed, once germinated and supported by the soil, grows converting CO₂ from the atmosphere into oxygen, which is released into the air, and glucose which recombines to form the fibres of the actual tree.

For me, it's always a life experience to walk through the forests around Isona in Lleida and even here in the Collserola, having this feeling of fresh air, full of oxygen, combined with the typical sweetlike smell of decaying trees. There we can see newborn trees, together with growing trees. Seedlings can often be seen sprouting among their fallen relatives.

The result for the environment of cultivated forests is very positive. Forests are farmed to extract wood for furniture, build houses, or to convert them into pulp to produce paper. Now, we know that a book contains 1.6 kg of CO₂ stored for every kilogram of paper. This is a concept that needs to be retold

often among the many people that think paper is bad for the environment.

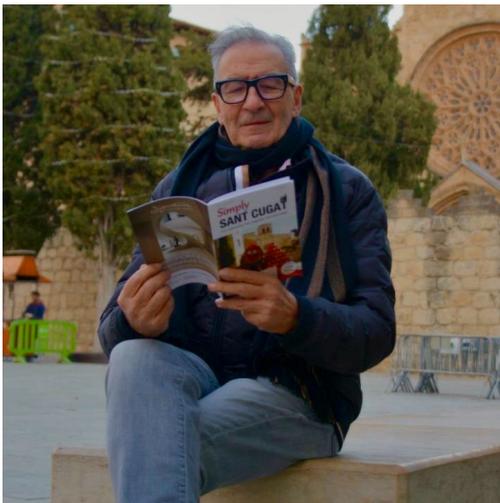
And so, the conclusion of my interrupted story to my friends is easy. The consumption of paper removes a large amount of CO₂ from the air, producing the same effect as the underground CO₂ storage of the chemical reactions highlighted above, but with much more added value for the society in employee working hours, in the protection of food, appliances, drinks and a million etceteras which use paper in one form or other. On top of that, paper is irreplaceable as a cultural and educational medium as books, newspapers or magazines. The Chinese who invented it and the Arabs who imported it to Europe through Spain were not mistaken.

In addition, paper is recyclable almost without limits. Perhaps a little exaggeration here but certainly many times more than the seven times some research papers proclaim. Every ounce of paper that goes into the blue bins is recycled in a few days to be reused again and again. In the best countries such as Germany or Belgium, 75-80 % of the paper is recycled. In Spain, we are in the 70-75 % range.

I get very upset when I read at the bottom of some emails something like “to protect the environment do not print this”. It is totally untrue.

If we want to preserve the environment, what we really need is not to reduce or to ban the felling of trees to produce cellulose or two by fours, but to plant ten times more trees. We will not solve global warming, but by consuming paper or wood for furniture we will certainly reduce its impact.

Bless the paper.



Juan Vila is an engineer who dedicated all his professional life to making paper in both Canada and Spain. He is an avid traveller and a fan of the eclectic. He has been interested in energy issues for many years. He lives in Sant Cugat since 1998 and likes to write.

Did You Know...?

- ✓ In Europe, forest area has grown by ~9% in the last 30 years.
- ✓ In well-managed forests, more trees are planted than harvested.
- ✓ Europe recycles about 75% of its paper.
- ✓ Paper fibres can usually be recycled 5-7 times before they get too short.
- ✓ Recycled paper usually needs far less energy than paper made from fresh pulp.
- ✓ Paper can also be made from bamboo, hemp, or sugarcane leftovers (bagasse)— and yes, even elephant dung (seriously).

SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES (?)

How to Make Planet-Friendly New Year's Resolutions

by Marshal Montgomery

For some, January is when we decide to become new people. Fitter, slimmer, more sanitary, etc... but usually by about the following Friday, we're back on the settee with a bag of crisps, a glass of *vi negre*, and a vague sense of inevitability.

So how about this for a radical idea? Instead of promising to become a better person this year, what if you just tried to be a slightly kinder neighbour to the planet... right here in Sant Cugat?

Think about it. No saving-the-world-in-one-week targets, no guilt trips. Just small, local changes that all add up. Here are 3 suggestions:

1. Cut One Car Trip a Week

We live in a town where almost everything is walkable or cyclable, yet many of us still drive that five-minute journey "just this once". Ridiculous!

Resolution: once a week, hide your partner's car keys so they have no choice but to leave the damn thing at home. That way, they can get up off their backside and rediscover that their legs still actually do work. Amazing!

2. Make Friends with the Recycling Bins

Sant Cugat has plenty of coloured containers, but not everyone is making the most of them.

Resolution: pick one category and recycle more.

I find there is a wealth of stuff people chuck out. If you open the back bit you can climb inside and get lots of cardboard (ideal for insulating the house), perfectly good plastic containers (no need to buy anymore Tupperware) and even enough wine and beer dregs to make a perfectly decent punch to take to your next party. Do the maths.

3. Rethink Your Shopping Habits

Those weekly supermarket trips are convenient, but you're wasting packaging, food and money.



Marshal is still our sustainable lifestyles correspondent

Resolution: once a week, turn up at the local butcher's, baker's or grocer's and see what they're about to throw out. If you're prepared to pick the bits off, you can usually find a real bargain.

Remember, you're supporting local businesses, reducing waste, and have an excuse to practise your Catalan negotiating vocabulary. It might be a bit tricky to start with, but believe me, persistence pays dividends.

Imperfect is Good Enough

Let's admit it... you will forget your reusable bag. You will sometimes drive when you could have walked. The point of planet-friendly resolutions isn't about perfection - it's about becoming a little more conscious and consistent.

So, if by next December, you've walked a bit more, wasted a bit less and supported a few more local businesses, your resolutions will have been a success, not just for you, but for Sant Cugat and for this big, beautiful planet we share.

I wish you a happy and sustainable 2026!



LANGUAGE LEARNING HACKS

Small Routines Make a Big Difference

Simple Tricks for Faster Progress

If you're reading this magazine, there's a good chance you're learning – or have learned – another language. Spanish, Catalan, English... or all three at once.

So this is the first in a new monthly language column about one simple idea:

Instead of studying harder, let's learn smarter.

Each month we'll look at a small "hack" you can use to evaluate how you learn and tweak your own strategy. Nothing complicated. Just honest questions, practical ideas and little experiments you can actually fit into real life.

We start with one of the most powerful tools of all: routines.

Why routines are powerful

The real power of a routine isn't that it's clever or intense. It's that, once it's established, you do it regularly, whether you feel inspired or not. And by doing it regularly, little by little it builds up to make a real difference.

The more of these steady routines you have, the more invisible practice you accumulate.

How to keep a routine going

If you know about the Learning App Duolingo, you'll know about streaks. Just like taking your medicine, you need to set reminders, plan and cross off your days without leaving a gap.

Social pressure is an excellent motivator. If you buddy-up with someone and encourage them to keep doing their routine(s), they will do the same for you.

And how about a little bet, or forfeit? If you don't carry out your routine every day, it'll cost you 5€! It's not the money, but the motivation that counts.



Some Routine Ideas To Steal

- ✓ Listen to a short podcast in your target language most weekdays.
- ✓ Review 5 words in a notebook or app every day.
- ✓ Watch 5–10 minutes of a series with subtitles in the language every evening.
- ✓ Write one sentence about your day in the language before bed.
- ✓ Go to a regular class once a week and almost never miss it.
- ✓ Meet an *intercanvi* partner for a drink or walk once a week.
- ✓ Read one short article, post or email in the language a few times a week.
- ✓ Record a 30-second voice note in the language three times a week.

Your mini-challenge this month

1. Don't try to redesign your whole life. Instead:
2. Choose ONE simple routine from the list (or invent your own).
3. Decide how often you'll do it (every day, three times a week, once a week).

Try to keep it going for the next two weeks – even when you're not feeling particularly inspired.

At the end of the month, ask yourself:

- Did I manage to keep this going on both good days and bad days?
- Do I feel even a little bit more "in contact" with the language?

If yes, keep it. If not, shrink it until it's something you really can do regularly. Then after one month, take a moment to appreciate the progress you've made!

OUT & ABOUT

The History & Legends Comedy Tour

Where Serious History Meets Stand-up Comedy in Sant Cugat



When my wife and I signed up for a private *comedy* tour of Sant Cugat, I wasn't sure what to expect.

Comedy is tricky at the best of times. It doesn't always travel well between cultures, and what has one person in stitches can leave another politely smiling and checking their watch. So I arrived with a healthy dose of scepticism and curiosity: would this be a clever and engaging tour... or an overbearing extrovert forcing you to smile come what may?

I'm happy to report that within the first few minutes, it was clear that Charlie, our guide (and the founder of History & Legends Comedy Tours), actually has a sense of humour and doesn't feel the need to force it. The jokes grow naturally out of the stories, the buildings and the natural interactions with us, his intimate audience.

The circuit started at the Monestir, then went up to the market, down to pl. Barcelona and ended in the cloisters. There were plenty of entertaining stories along the way, each one with their own level of suspension-of-disbelief. The most vivid, and

definitely most gruesome, was saved for the end of the tour (and I'm not going to spoil it here, because half the fun is getting there yourself).

What I can say is this: I've lived here long enough to think I "know" Sant Cugat, but after the tour I realised how much of the town I still only see on autopilot. Corners I never gave a second thought to suddenly came loaded with local legends, urban gossip, and monks behaving diabolically.

Our private tour made the experience even richer. It allowed for more conversation, more questions, and a bit of playful back-and-forth with Charlie as we went. You can feel it's his creation – something he's thought about deeply and put a lot of work into, long before anyone turns up with a booking.

Like many good stories the History & Legends Comedy Tour began in the pandemic.

While the world was grinding to a halt, Charlie (who has a corporate background but a long-standing love of history, storytelling and making people laugh) had one of those "if not now, when?"

moments. If everything was falling apart anyway, why not try blending history with comedy?

He'd already been doing stand-up: a one-man show in Valencia, open mics in Barcelona, bits of material tested on audiences who didn't always know what had hit them. At some point he realised that most of his jokes had a common ingredient: history.

Instead of inventing scenarios from scratch, he found himself making fun of real events, strange historical decisions and the wonderfully absurd things people have done over the centuries. So the question became obvious: why not combine history and comedy properly? From that moment, a tour was born.

It started in Barcelona, where he experimented with a format that mixed rigorous research with irreverent commentary. Real dates and events sit alongside legends, ghost stories and the kind of minor civic scandals that never quite make it into the official museum audio-guide.

Sant Cugat came next: a place that looks calm and controlled on the surface, but hides more than enough medieval drama and modern eccentricity to fuel an entire Netflix series. Charlie dug into the archives, listened to the locals, and built a route that weaves together monks, mysteries, odd architectural details and plenty of "no way, José" moments.

And the idea took root. Today, HL Comedy Tours has evolved into a regular Sunday morning (11:00) event, allowing Charlie to work on his next project '**HistARy**', a more ambitious experience that doesn't just rely on a live guide but also uses augmented reality where visitors can follow guided or self-guided routes in several cities, pointing their phones at buildings to see how they looked centuries ago, watch streets digitally reconstructed or have historical figures pop up in front of them.

Charlie's dream is to bring more of that technology to Sant Cugat: more routes, more layers of story, and a town you can experience in "normal mode" or

in full "history, legends and slightly ridiculous secrets" mode.

So why should someone who's walked around Sant Cugat a thousand times still go on a History & Legends Comedy Tour?

Firstly, because walking around and *really seeing* a place are two very different things.

Many of us do the same loop regularly: Plaça Octavià, the monastery, the streets around the market, maybe a favourite café or two. But we rarely stop to ask the slightly weirder questions: Why *that* statue? What used to stand on this spot? Who decided that detail was a good idea? And what on earth were those monks up to?

The tour is like flipping a switch. The city goes from background wallpaper to something more theatrical: a live stage set filled with hidden anecdotes, drama and footnotes. After that, it's hard to go back to seeing it as "just" the place you buy your bread.

Secondly, the comedy isn't there to make fun of the town or its people. It's there to keep you awake and engaged. Charlie talks about having "one foot in reality and the other in nonsense", and that balance is what makes the tour work. The facts are real - the interpretation is original. Even if you don't consider yourself a "history person", you'll find yourself listening, laughing and actually remembering things.

Finally, there's something special about doing this in your *own* town. We're used to doing guided tours when we travel, but not where we live. Yet there's a real joy in being a tourist for an afternoon in the streets you think you know best.

For us, the History & Legends Comedy Tour of Sant Cugat turned out to be exactly that kind of joy: familiar streets made strange again, a guide who clearly cares about the surroundings and the smiles, and an experience that follows you home in the form of new stories to remember.

DID YOU KNOW...?

A Little Town Called Segeda

Why Spain is the reason New Year starts on 1st January

If you were designing the Earth's calendar from scratch, you'd probably start with the winter solstice. Shortest day of the year. From that moment, the days (and effectively, the year) starts growing. Surely that's the most satisfying moment to declare: "Right, this is where the new year starts."

So why do we begin on 1st January instead of the 21st December? The initial answer is: because the people in charge at the time weren't trying to please astronomers. They were trying to run an empire.

Back in the early Roman Republic, years were closely tied to politics. Romans often identified a year by who the prime ministers or "consuls" were. When the new consuls took office was important - it was the civil reset button and as this was usually around March, that's when the new year effectively started.

But, by the mid-150s BCE, Rome had urgent military business in Hispania Citerior. A Celtiberian centre called Segeda (90km west of Zaragoza just off the A2) decided to expand and fortify itself. The Romans were really annoyed by this and treated it as an act of war.

Thus, in 153 BCE, the Senate needed the new incoming consul to go to Hispania to sort things out ASAP. So, instead of waiting until March, Rome shifted the beginning of the consular year so the new consuls took office on the "Kalends of January" (1st January), enabling earlier deployment.



In other words: Because of Spain, the "New Year" was shifted back by 2 months.

After that, habit did what habit always does. Julius Caesar later reformed the calendar (the Julian calendar) to stop the months drifting away from the seasons. But the civil year was already happily parked on 1st January. And when Pope Gregory XIII introduced the Gregorian reform in 1582 to fix leap-year drift, Europe kept the same starting date because changing the maths was difficult enough without rewriting everyone's contracts, rents, feast days and bureaucracy.

So yes: the solstice may feel like the "real" new year. But the reason we all clink glasses on 1st January is, to a surprisingly large extent, because Rome needed to deal with an unruly Spanish.

So when you raise you glass of Cava on 1st January, remember it's because we're still working on a Roman emergency timetable!

Picture Crossword Answers

Ant	Sheep	Dolphin
Cat	Snake	Penguin
Llama	Snail	Elephant
Koala	Zebra	Salamander

Find Gimby Answer

If you haven't been able to spot Gimby, our paranoid pig, try looking on page 23 again.

SIMPLY CLASSIFIEDS

Reach hundreds of local readers through *Simply Sant Cugat's* Classifieds!

Next month (Valentine offer): 20 words (including contact details) for just **10€**.

Don't miss this chance to get noticed in Sant Cugat's favourite English-language magazine. Email info@simplysantcugat.com for more information.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS ENGLISH WITH CLARE - Individual and small groups. New Year resolution, improve your English for meetings, interviews etc. WhatsApp: 689 976 152

Life Coaching – Feeling stuck? Find clarity, confidence, direction, and motivation. Free first consultation. Ian 605 801 802

Language Exchange Needed: retired Englishman needs help in practising basic standard Arabic for help in English. e-mail: ian91885@icloud.com

HOLIDAY RENTALS

SKI APARTMENT FOR RENT – 2 bedrooms in Soldeu, Andorra. Free parking, ski locker, amazing views, 2½ hours from Sant Cugat. T: 673 632 376

Large 4-bed house for rent Tossa de Mar. Beautiful views. Wifi, Free parking, 2 mins walk to beach, excellent rates. Tel: 722 228 716

SERVICES

Photography and Ad Design: Boost Your Business with High-Impact Advertising Designs. WhatsApp: 678 134 197

Padel Mirasol

play eat enjoy!

probably, the best padel court in Mirasol



tel. 936758293
608623484

 **padelmirasol**
passeig Sevilla, 53 MIRASOL

 **padelmirasol**

 www.padelmirasol.cat

 padelmirasol@padelmirasol.cat

a 120m FFCC
MIRASOL!!





Signature
LUXURY HOMES

Connecting global clients
with *remarkable homes*.

Because exceptional service speaks every language.

Contact us: +34 611 940 965 (WhatsApp & Mobile) / **+34 935 531 168** (Phone)

Sant Cugat Office

Av. Corts de les Catalanes, 5-7, 1r
08173 Sant Cugat del Vallès

Barcelona Office

Passeig de Gràcia, 87, 6°
08008 Barcelona

info@signaturehomes.es

www.signaturehomes.es

Follow us: [@signaturehomes.es](https://www.instagram.com/signaturehomes.es)