

# Simply SANT CUGAT

Your community. Your magazine. Your Sant Cugat.



This month...

1. Quiz: The 12 Questions of Christmas
2. Association Spotlight: El Cau Amic
3. The Local Entrepreneurs: Fermenteria Smakelig
4. Last Chance to Ride the Frog Train
5. Jokes, puzzles, reviews and much, much more

**FREE**  
*(for now)*



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### Simply SANT CUGAT®

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## A FESTIVE HELLO FROM ASTON & IAN

Hello again to our new regulars – it's hard to believe our first edition is already last month's news. And welcome to our new readers. We've had a good response from our first edition and we know you are going to like our December festive issue.

We kick off with a *Christmas Quiz* and a quirky *Catalan Christmas story*. Leading to the fascinating world of toilet euphemisms. You'll soon see the connection. This issue also brings another new restaurant review, (spoiler alert: delicious) along with more local gems and stories to enjoy.

We also want to hear from you. Did you try out last month's recommendations? *Masala Indian Cuisine*, the concert at the Auditori? Or perhaps your first game of padel? Maybe you were inspired to support *Caritas* or join *Toastmasters*. Did you drop by *Dolores Mayorga's Art studio*? Is *Casteltallat* on your "to do" list now? Or maybe you ran into *Jordi Cots*, our *Civic Agent* we featured last month?

We hope you're finding *Simply Sant Cugat* to be more than just an interesting read – but a reason to explore, connect, and enjoy our town even more.

Bon Nadal & Merry Christmas!

See you in *Sant Cugat*,

Aston & Ian

## What Our Readers Say

*"I absolutely loved the first edition of Simply Sant Cugat! It was a delightful read – I discovered so many new things and truly felt part of a vibrant, welcoming community!"*

- Sue Harrand

*"Congrats for the magazine! Simply Aston! I don't have the pleasure to know Ian, but it reflects the way you are."*

- Eva Argiles

*"I also enjoyed reading through the magazine, lots of interesting content. Keep it up!"*

- Ilan Berker

*"I've read the first edition of Simply Sant Cugat from cover to cover. I appreciate the breadth of different topics included, and particularly enjoyed the Local Hero, A Day In The Life and Community Focus sections. I'm looking forward to read the second edition!"*

- Helen Adamson

*"I love it!"*

- Michiel de Jongh

*"The international edition. What a great read. Congratulations on your efforts and hard work. Look forward to the next edition."*

- Amelia Ward



## QUIZ

## The 12 Questions of Christmas

### Are you a Christmas expert or ignoramus?

Test your festive knowledge with our Simply Sant Cugat Christmas Quiz! From near and far, these questions explore curious Christmas customs from around the world. So grab a mince pie, sharpen your wits, and let the sleigh-bells begin!

#### 1. There are several plants associated with Christmas. One of them is mistletoe. What is its name in Catalan?

- a) Avet
- b) Grévol
- c) Vesc
- d) Ponsètia

A mysterious plant with pagan roots, mistletoe was sacred to the Druids and believed to bring fertility, protection, and peace. Hanging mistletoe in the home was thought to ward off evil spirits. Over time it took on a romantic twist: standing beneath a sprig of 'vesc' this Christmas grants a festive kiss - no excuses! Answer 'c'.

#### 2. Which country is widely credited with starting the tradition of the Christmas tree?

- a) Germany
- b) Norway
- c) Scotland
- d) Vatican City

The Christmas tree tradition is widely credited as having started in Germany during the 16th century. Devout Protestant Christians in Germany are known to have brought decorated evergreen trees into their homes as part of Christmas celebrations. One prominent figure associated with this tradition is Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, who is said to have been the cause of hundreds of homes burning down by encouraging families to add lighted candles to their Christmas trees. Answer 'a'.

#### 3. In which century was the first commercial Christmas card sent?

- a) 19th
- b) 18th
- c) 17th
- d) 1st

The tradition of sending Christmas cards as we know it today began in 1843 in the UK. Sir Henry Cole, a senior civil servant, commissioned artist John Horsley to design the first commercial Christmas card. This card showed a happy family celebrating Christmas and included scenes of charity. About 1,000 cards were printed and sold that year, marking the start of the modern Christmas card tradition. Answer 'a'.

#### 4. In Spain, midnight mass is named after which animal?

- a) Cockerel
- b) Barn Owl
- c) Roe Deer
- d) Wild Pig

The name (La Misa del Gallo) refers to the belief that this animal was the first to witness and announce the birth of Jesus by crowing at midnight. Yes, it's the cockerel. This mass is a cherished Christmas tradition and typically marks the beginning of Christmas celebrations in Spain. Answer 'a'.

#### 5. It's a sweet, dairy-based drink traditionally made from milk, cream, sugar, eggs, cinnamon and preferably a healthy dose of brandy, rum, or sherry. What is it called?

- a) Milk nog
- b) Eggnog
- c) Cinnanog
- d) Fallidown juice

This drink has its origins in medieval Britain, evolving from a milky beer called "posset," which was consumed as early as the 13th century. It was a drink primarily enjoyed by the aristocracy, as ingredients were expensive. It's called Eggnog - the "nog" part of the name either comes from "nog," an old English word for a strong beer, or "noggin," a small wooden cup used in the 16th century. 'b'.

#### 6. According to the tradition, there are 9 reindeers that pull Father Christmas's sleigh. Which of the following isn't one of them?

- a) Comet
- b) Vixen
- c) Flasher
- d) Cupid

The original 8 reindeer got their names primarily from the 1823 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (or 'Twas the Night Before Christmas) by Clement Clarke Moore who introduced the names: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donder, and Blitzen (coming from the Dutch words "donder en bliksem," - thunder and lightning). The most famous name, Rudolph, was not part of the original poem but was created much later in 1939 by Robert L. May as a character in a promotional story for a Chicago department store, later popularized in song. Answer 'c'.



**7. In the city of Oaxaca in Mexico, there is a Christmas event where artists carve intricate scenes into what root vegetable?**

a) Potato b) Carrot c) Radish d) Turnip

It's a unique Christmas event called Noche de Rábanos which takes place each year on December 23. Artists carve specially grown giant radishes into elaborate scenes inspired by nativity themes, local culture, and mythology. The tradition began as an official competition in 1897 and now draws large crowds to admire these intricate, non-edible radish sculptures. Why not try it at home? Answer 'c'.

**8. Which country is known for the tradition of eating KFC on Christmas Day?**

a) Cuba b) Japan c) China d) U.S.A

Apparently, back in the 1970s someone commented on the lack of turkey and how KFC fried chicken served as a substitute for the Christmas meal. The marketing department jumped on the idea and since then, eating KFC has become a widespread Christmas tradition in Japan, with families ordering special "party buckets" of fried chicken to celebrate the holiday. December 24<sup>th</sup> is the busiest day for KFC in Japan, and many customers place orders weeks in advance to secure their Christmas meal. Answer 'b'.

**9. Norway has a superstition to hide something on Christmas Eve to prevent witches and evil spirits from stealing them. What are they?**

a) Brooms b) Large cooking pots  
c) Cats d) Virgins

In Norway, some families traditionally hide their brooms on Christmas Eve to cunningly thwart witches (thought to fly on stolen brooms). The custom also served to protect the home from bad luck or negative energy during the night. While the superstition isn't taken seriously today, many still follow the tradition as a charming way to honour folklore and keep festive cultural traditions alive. 'a'.

**10. In the Ukraine, Christmas trees are decorated with what animals that are not usually associated with Christmas?**

a) Dragons b) Spiders c) Bears d) Peacocks

In Ukraine, Christmas trees are often decorated with spiders and glittering webs, inspired by a folk tale about a poor widow whose bare tree was magically covered in delicate spider webs on Christmas Eve. When the morning sun turned the webs to silver and gold, it brought the family good fortune. Today, spider ornaments and webs symbolise luck, prosperity, and protection for the coming year - and the tradition is also linked to the origin of Christmas tinsel. Answer 'b'.

**11. Why was the "X" in "Xmas" used as a shorter version of Christmas?**

a) It visually represents a crucifix.  
b) It was an attempt to remove Christianity from what was originally a pagan ceremony.  
c) It represents a kiss.  
d) It's the first letter of Christ's name.

The "X" in "Xmas" comes from the Greek letter Chi (X), the first letter of Χριστός (Christos), meaning Christ. Early Christians used the Chi symbol as a sacred abbreviation for Jesus Christ. So "Xmas" isn't a modern shorthand or attempt to remove Christ - it's actually rooted in Christian tradition and has been used for centuries as a respectful abbreviation for Christmas. Answer 'd'.

**12. In what country is it traditional to hide a gherkin in the Christmas tree?**

a) Germany b) U.S.A c) Poland d) Greece

The Christmas gherkin tradition (where a gherkin ornament is hidden in the tree and the first child to find it gets a gift or good luck) is often thought to be German. In reality, most Germans have never heard of it, and the custom is far more common among families in the United States 'b'.

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We hope you enjoyed our festive challenge!

More than about being right, Christmas is about togetherness - and we're so happy to be celebrating the season with our wonderful Sant Cugat community.

Here's to good neighbours, shared traditions and new memories.

Happy holidays!



## The Fourth Shepherd

### Meet the star of Catalan Nativity scenes

*“Once upon a time, there were four shepherds who set out on a cold, starry night to visit the new-born baby Jesus. Halfway there, one of them suddenly felt his guts rumble. In a moment of necessity, he ran off in search of a bush to hide behind in order to ‘answer the call of nature’ while the others carried on their journey.*

*Unfortunately, the procedure took longer than he expected. By the time he had finished rearranging his underwear and found his shepherd’s walking staff, the other three were nowhere to be seen. He wandered round in the dark, but it was no use... he was lost! Thus it was just the other three shepherds who reached the stable in time, and made the headlines. The fourth arrived late and was almost left out of the story forever... but not quite.”*

If you wander through Christmas markets in Catalonia, you’ll spot a small figurine hiding among the shepherds and angels: a person squatting with trousers down, usually wearing a red *barretina* cap. That’s el caganer (“the defecator”), a beloved, tongue-in-cheek character placed in the *pessebre* (Nativity scene).

But far from rude, the figure is a playful symbol of fertility, good luck and abundance: by “returning” nutrients to the soil, the caganer promises prosperity in the year ahead (at least that’s what some say). Traditionally, he’s tucked discreetly at the edge of the scene so children can hunt for him.

Today, not only are there the traditional peasant versions, there are lots of modern spoofs (think Messi, Trump, Lady Gaga), but the spirit is the same – a bit of satire and a wink at our shared humanity.

Over the centuries, el caganer has quietly squatted his (or her) way from rural farmhouses into city flats. Some say they “fertilise” the fields for a good



harvest, others see them as a reminder that everyone is equal, kings and shepherds alike. Wander around Christmas markets now and you’ll find whole stalls dedicated to caganers – from traditional farmers to superstars, world leaders or TV characters – all caught with their trousers down.

#### Try this at home!

1. Hide the caganer somewhere new in the Nativity scene each day and let the kids try to find him.
2. Tell the “Fourth Shepherd” tale as a quick story – then invite the kids to draw a picture with him discreetly hiding somewhere.
3. Create your own caganer: let children design a funny version of themselves or a favourite character as a caganer (keep it kind, not cruel!).
4. Use it as a conversation starter about the realms of decency, the definition of ‘offensive’, and whether Instagram is right to suspend your account for having a photo of a Caganer.



## LANGUAGE CORNER

### Toilet Euphemisms

#### How to say that which must remain unsaid

Have you noticed how, in December, Sant Cugat, becomes curiously... scatological?

From *caga tió* to *caganer*, our festive traditions proudly celebrate nature's most basic functions. While Catalans take this with humour and cultural pride, other parts of the English-speaking world can get a touch embarrassed about basic bathroom vocabulary.

So when nature calls in the English speaking world, you may hear some curious expressions.

Here's your festive guide to sounding polite, playful, or perfectly poetic when... well, you know.

#### Instead of “the toilet”, say...

- ✓ the loo, bathroom or WC (most common)
- ✓ the Gents or Ladies
- ✓ the little boys'/girls' room (polite)
- ✓ the smallest room
- ✓ Mrs. Murphy's (old-school slang)
- ✓ the bog (very informal)
- ✓ the jacks (Ireland), the cludgie (Scotland)
- ✓ the john (U.S.A), dunnie (Australia)
- ✓ the room of requirement (Harry Potter fans)
- ✓ And if you are on a boat you ask for the Head

#### Instead of “urinate”, say...

- ✓ do a number one
- ✓ spend a penny (classic British)
- ✓ take a leak (men only)
- ✓ powder your nose (women only)
- ✓ have a piddle (or tiddle) and therefore.....
- ✓ have a jimmy riddle (Cockney rhyming slang)
- ✓ change the goldfish's water
- ✓ drain the tank (very informal)
- ✓ siphon the python
- ✓ point Percy at the porcelain



No photoshop was used with this photo, but airport security weren't happy

#### Instead of... well... the other option, say...

- ✓ do a number two
- ✓ have a quiet moment
- ✓ do a whoopsy
- ✓ download a document (modern classic)
- ✓ plant a tree (festive, at least in Catalonia!)
- ✓ see a man about a dog (or horse)
- ✓ drop the kids off at the pool
- ✓ go for a dump (very informal)
- ✓ sink the Bismarck (naval drama included)
- ✓ negotiate the release of the chocolate hostages (graphic... yet poetic?)

#### Festive Travel Thought

Wherever you go this Christmas, whether sipping cava in your local *vinoteca* or visiting relatives abroad, remember:

Every culture talks about going to the... “smallest room”... just not always in the same way.



## LOCAL HERO

## Siscu: The Barber and News Anchor of Sant Cugat

It was my neatly turned-out neighbour who, completely unprompted one day, recommended Siscu to me for a haircut. "Siscu is a legend," he said. I'd walked past his small red front door many times without noticing it. Apart from the tell-tale red, white and blue barber stripes painted on the side, it's easy to miss. Opposite are the brightly illuminated offices of TOT Sant Cugat which I normally stop to admire before walking on.

Siscu's place is an old-fashioned barbershop in every sense. It has that unmistakable barbershop scent. There's usually a customer in the same chair that generations of locals have sat in before and another on the bench flicking through the pages of a magazine. The chatter is about football, the recent storm damage or local news and time just moves a little more slowly here.

The space is too small and intimate not to join in and that is part of the ritual. It turns out this is a perfect place to practice your Spanish or Catalan with a patient listener. He also speaks a small amount of English. Tennis came up once and it turns out Siscu and his wife are devoted fans, especially Wimbledon. When I told him I used to live in Wimbledon and once worked there as a scoreboard operator, his face lit up and he couldn't wait to tell her.

*"I've been a barber all my life. Nothing interesting in that." Nothing could be further from the truth. Siscu has been a barber in our town for 43 years, joining his father in this very same spot straight from school aged 16. Just how many professions are there where father and son have listened to thousands of stories for more than six decades in the same community?"*

*"My father loved the craft. But even more, the conversation. Before opening his own shop, he worked mornings at the diesel engine factory here in Sant Cugat and spent the afternoons cutting hair. In 1964, when he had built up*



Siscu: The legendary barber of carrer Sant Antoni, 7

*enough clients to just about get by, he left the factory for good. His colleagues were incredulous as he earned far more at the factory. But Spain was booming then. Franco had opened the country to trade and tourism, giving people like my father the confidence to go it alone. He never looked back."*

Sant Cugat had a diesel factory?

*"Of course. It was our main employer. Over 1,000 people making diesel fuel injection pumps for cars and trucks for decades. On Avinguda de Cerdanyola, near where Rodi and some car showrooms are now. It was one of the main diesel fuel injection factories in Europe. There are likely cars and tractors on the road with them even today. SEAT, Renaults, Fords, Land Rovers all used them."*



Back home, I look it up. He's right of course. Siscu has been cutting the hair of locals, including journalists from across the way, all his life and throughout the hey-day of the factory. His barbershop is as much a distributor of news as a place for a number 1 or 2 head shave.

The story began in the 50's when Ramon Pintó Oliveras and two colleagues from London cleared old vineyards in Can Magí to build the factory. It changed hands a few times ending up with the American giant Delphi who ran it until 2016, when it finally closed. It was a major blow to the local community and the loss of more than 500 jobs.

But Sant Cugat moved on, as it always has. Back at the Barbers, I ask Siscu about his grandparents.

*"Both from Murcia. In 1920, there was not much for an 18 year old there. The political system was chaotic, so, like many other youngsters at the time, they took a train to France. It stopped in Barcelona and they were persuaded to stay, settled in Sant Cugat and worked on the new electric train line that was being extended from Sant Cugat to Rubí. Most of the labourers lived here. And when they retired, they stayed. Many families can trace their roots back to that railway line."*

And do you enjoy your job?

*"Oh yes! I especially enjoy catching up with regulars and the new people I meet. I have some customers who are great grandchildren of my father's customers. And I continue to cut the hair of my father's customers, some of whom are nearly centenarians who have seen a lot of changes here."*

And so, what next for you?

*"I'll continue here until I retire. We take holidays somewhere cool in summer and I enjoy my long weekends, especially when there's tennis on."*

*During the Australian open we stay up all night watching it! My dream is to go to Wimbledon one day."*

And what about the shop?

"I hope someone will take it on, but it will almost certainly change. Still, new dreams will be made in this place."

Siscu, our local hero, who has been making Sant Cugatencs smarter for more than 40 years, would be pleased if you dropped in for a cut and chat.

WhatsApp him on 617 78 47 38 for an appointment at Carrer de Sant Antoni 17.

## 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, an article or a cartoon strip to share, we'd love to hear from you.

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



## Fermenteria Smakelig

Where Sant Cugat Learns to Live Slowly



If you happen to be wandering near the Monestir, why not take a little detour and go down past the *Casa de Cultura* and around the corner to where the Fermenteria Smakelig sits? It might look normal on the outside but in this modest space, entire universes are growing! Microscopic ones, yes, but ones that can change how we eat, feel and even think. Behind the giant jars of kombucha, trays of koji-covered grains and refrigerated shelves of fermenting vegetables is a story that begins in Kazakhstan, passes through Ukraine and Norway, and eventually finds its home here in Sant Cugat.

Smakelig (Dutch for 'delicious') is the creation of Mariia, (originally from Ukraine), and her husband Joachim (from Norway). Together, they form a duo in which Mariia leads the flavour, philosophy and science, while Joachim supplies the practical foundations - literally. "He found the space, he built it, he made it possible," she says. "Without him it would still just be an idea." After years living in Spain, the pair settled in Sant Cugat for the same reason many internationals do: its sense of

community, its slow living, and its openness to new ideas.

But the Smakelig story stretches much further back. Mariia grew up surrounded by fermented foods. Her grandmother kept a jar of kombucha ("that jellyfish thing") in the kitchen, always on the go. She brought the tradition with her from her family in Kazakhstan. Before kombucha became fashionable, before it appeared on trendy menus, its roots had already shaped her. Years later, studies in nutrition deepened her fascination. Not just with flavours, but with how food changes us - our mood, our behaviour, our health. "When I realised fermentation is central to therapeutic food and recovery food," she explains, "something clicked."

From there, one curiosity led to another: microbiome research, kombucha experiments, kefirs, kvass, and eventually a previous attempt to establish a fermentation line inside a Barcelona eco-store. Unfortunately, that project didn't work out. But like all good experiments, setbacks can become catalysts. The disappointment pushed her



toward creating something that was truly her own. Something she and Joachim could build together.

It turned out that Sant Cugat was the perfect place.

“We wanted a place with an international community, where people are open, curious, and willing to try new things,” Mariia says. “I knew when we moved here that this would eventually be the home for my project.”

Inside the fermenteria, everything that enters the kitchen (vegetables, grains, eggs, fruit, herbs) has the potential to be transformed. Mariia ferments almost anything she can get her hands on.

Anything, that is, except soya: “We’re not friends,” she laughs. Even meat goes through a metamorphosis using koji, a Japanese fungus from the *Aspergillus* family that’s responsible for miso, sake and many Asian staples. Applied to meat, it breaks down proteins, softens textures and amplifies that yummy umami flavour. Fermenting meat may be surprising to most of us, but in Mariia’s hands, surprise is the starting point for a new product.

If you ask her to choose a favourite ferment, she struggles. How do you choose between fermented asparagus, celery or a jar of aromatic, herb-infused kombucha? Liquids, perhaps, have a special place in her heart. “I feel deeply connected to fermenting liquids... lemonades, bitters, kvass,” she says. With liquids, creativity becomes infinite: flowers, spices, leaves, roots - everything is potential inspiration.

But Smakelig is far more than a production space. It is a philosophy.

As Mariia insists... fermentation is not just a kitchen technique. “It’s a community process,” she explains. “Traditionally, people fermented together. You make five kilos or fifteen, the time is the same. You wait the same 21 days. So why do it alone?” In her vision, Fermenteria Smakelig becomes a modern community hub: a place to learn, share, taste, and reconnect with the slow rhythm of life.

To this end, workshops are coming soon. Dates are not yet confirmed, but ideas are in preparation:

- Kimchi workshops, teaching not only the recipe but the underlying technique that unlocks unlimited variations.

- Liquid fermentation workshops, for those who want to explore kombucha alternatives such as water kefir or ginger bug sodas.

- Koji workshops, revealing the mysteries of this extraordinary Japanese fungus - how it grows, how it flavours, and why it’s transforming the culinary world.

And beyond workshops lies a much bigger dream. “In ten years,” she says with a smile, “I want to create a fermentation retreat. A place where people come to learn, eat fermented foods, maybe even take fermented baths.” Baths? Yes. Traditional practices in several cultures involve adding ferments to the bathwater to nourish the skin’s microbiome. But don’t panic - you won’t have to soak for 21 days. Twenty minutes is plenty.

Perhaps the most unexpected part of our conversation is how deeply fermentation shapes Mariia’s approach to life. When she needs to think something through, she says, “I need to ferment on it.” Ideas (just like food) need time, conditions, and attention. “We’re not getting old,” she says. “We’re just fermenting into something.”

As we finish the interview, jars quietly fizzing around us, it’s easy to see why Smakelig is becoming one of Sant Cugat’s quirkiest and most inspiring new projects. In a town already known for “slow living,” fermentation feels like the natural next step.

Mariia’s message to our readers is simple: “Time is our main quality ingredient. Don’t rush your own fermentation.”





## El Cau Amic

### Helping Hands and Wagging Tails in Valldoreix



When Ana Pons first met Moreno, he had already spent ten years behind a kennel door, terrified of human contact. “You couldn’t even touch him,” she remembers. “He’d never been walked, never known affection.” Through months of patience, daily visits and gentle persistence, Ana helped him rediscover trust. “Eventually,” she smiles, “he became the most obedient, faithful dog you could imagine.” Moreno was eventually adopted, but he escaped and found his own way back to Ana’s home. “When I saw him, he jumped straight into my car. That’s when I knew he’d chosen me.”

Stories like Moreno’s lie at the heart of El Cau Amic (the friendly den), the small but tireless animal-protection association based in Valldoreix, part of Sant Cugat del Vallès. Founded in 1996 by Rosa María Marqués and a group of friends moved by compassion for abandoned animals, the shelter has grown into a cornerstone of the local community run entirely by volunteers, sustained by donations, and powered by a love for our four-legged friends.

El Cau Amic’s mission is simple: to give abandoned or displaced animals a second chance at life. From its modest refuge in Can Calopa, the team offers

temporary shelter and care for up to forty dogs, while also monitoring and feeding around sixty colonies of street cats across the municipality. Every dog that arrives is vaccinated, sterilised, and carefully matched with potential adopters.

“We don’t take strays directly from the streets,” explains Ana, now the organisation’s vice president after eleven years of volunteering. “Most of the dogs come from social-service cases - people who’ve lost their homes, moved abroad, or can’t afford to care for their pets. We step in when there’s no one else.”

The association’s values (respect, responsibility, transparency and altruism) are found in everything they do. Since their first day, they have relied on goodwill rather than profit: a small municipal grant helps (just 4,000€ to eke out over a whole year), but most of their 50,000€ annual budget comes from memberships, sponsorships, micro-donations and local fundraising. “We’re not just an animal shelter,” Ana says. “We’re a family of volunteers, neighbours, and friends who care.”

Every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, a small army of volunteers gathers at the refuge,



clipboards and walkie-talkies in hand, to make sure each dog enjoys a real walk. “We take turns, because some dogs can’t meet others face to face,” Ana explains. “Each one gets about forty minutes of walking through the green paths by the Riera de Rubí.”

Volunteers come from all walks of life (retirees, students, professionals) united by their love for our furry friends. “At first you come just to walk a dog,” Ana says, “but soon you realise you’re part of something bigger. You build bonds. You see progress.”

El Cau Amic currently has around 170 members and sponsors, plus a rotating group of active volunteers. Some focus on the dogs, others help with events, taxi animals to the vet, or set up adoption days in local shopping centres like Sant Cugat Centre Comercial and Jardiland. “Time is as valuable as money,” Ana insists. “Every person who gives a few hours makes a difference.”

The team also organises educational talks in schools to promote responsible pet ownership. “A dog isn’t a toy or a Christmas gift,” Ana stresses. “When you adopt, you commit to a life, not a season.”

Among the shelter’s residents are what volunteers call “the invisible ones” - dogs who, for reasons of trauma or shyness, are repeatedly overlooked. Some have lived there for seven or eight years. “They’re the ones who break your heart,” Ana admits. “But we never give up on them.”

The association recently began working with a professional trainer to help these dogs adjust to city environments and become more adoptable. “Sometimes it takes months, sometimes years,” she says. “But every successful adoption is a victory for compassion.”

Moreno’s story is emblematic: a dog once labelled untouchable who, through patience and love, transformed completely. “He reminds me why we’re here,” says Ana. “Every animal deserves that chance.”

Looking ahead, El Cau Amic hopes to expand its facilities by adding four new kennels, improving

insulation against heat and cold, and installing security cameras. They also plan more outreach events and community campaigns to recruit members and volunteers.

Their goals are ambitious but achievable, especially with continued public support. “We dream of a future where no animal in Sant Cugat suffers neglect,” Ana says. “But we can’t do it alone.”

Through collaboration with Sant Cugat City Council and EMD Valldoreix, El Cau Amic has already established itself as a reference point for responsible adoption and animal welfare in the region. Their message is clear: animal protection is a shared civic duty.

El Cau Amic stands as proof that kindness multiplies when shared. In an age of speed and distraction, its volunteers remind us what genuine care looks like: steady, local, and deeply human. Each walk in the woods, each animal fed, is another stitch in the tapestry of life in Sant Cugat - a community where love has four paws and a wagging tail.

### How You Can Help

There are three simple ways to get involved and support El Cau Amic:

- ⌚ Give your time. Join the volunteer walks or help during weekend events. No special skills needed, just patience and empathy. It’s good exercise, too!
- € Give your support. Become a member or sponsor (padrí) with a small monthly donation through ‘Teaming’ or direct membership.
- ❤ Give a home. Adopt or foster an animal in need, especially senior dogs who struggle with cold winters in kennels.

Anyone over 18 can apply to volunteer after a short interview to ensure they’re comfortable handling dogs. “It’s not always easy,” Ana admits, “but it’s always rewarding.”

For more information or to get involved, contact [info@cauamic.cat](mailto:info@cauamic.cat) or visit [www.cauamic.cat](http://www.cauamic.cat)



## NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

## EL JARDINET DEL KOMBU

### A Cosy Retreat with Fresh Flavours and Warm Hospitality

At the edge of Valldoreix opposite the fishmongers and Condis, is a brand-new vegetarian café-restaurant, opened by Anna and Katia. A real treat for the neighbours and only a short car journey with easy parking for the rest of us. It offers a pleasant culinary experience and after enjoying a filling three course lunchtime set menu, I had no need for supper.

Anna and Katia are true professionals. They know customer service. They know their ingredients and food. And they combine all of these with aplomb. Previously they ran the Kombu restaurant up near the old market which by all accounts was very successful. This goes a step further, thanks to the additional space, offering room for kids, pets and yoga! Outside there is lots of room and inside it is a cosy cottage-style interior, freshly painted in white and cream, with hard benches and chairs that are made comfortable with soft cushions.

From the moment we arrived, we were made to feel welcome despite the staff being rushed off their feet and we were treated as though we were like special guests. I felt privileged then realised, everyone had the same nice warm and friendly treatment. The place was bustling, but the atmosphere was relaxed, with no rush to order, allowing us to fully enjoy our long lunch.

The menu is focused, with choices only on the main course and dessert. For starters we had mushroom soup. It was thick, creamy and delicious. For the main, it was either a tofu and aubergine stew served with quinoa or a chickpea and spinach timbal with rice. Both were beautifully presented, filling and delicious. The tofu stew was slightly spicy, with a nutty undertone. The chickpea timbal brought back memories of Marrakech with its earthy, aromatic spices and satisfying texture. Both dishes were accompanied by a tasty beetroot, lettuce and carrot salad dressed in a subtle vinaigrette. Another highlight was the curried deep-fried pumpkin



pieces. For dessert we had a choice of three dishes: a rich dark chocolate treat, a lighter option of kefir and mango or an apple compote. The chocolate was very satisfying and surprisingly healthy tasting. I have no doubt it was all organic, natural chocolate with no added sugar or artificial flavours. The kefir and mango was the "sorbet" choice and I would like to have tried the apple compote.

The pricing is straightforward and reasonable for the quality and quantity: a main course is 14.50€, two courses for 16.50€, and a full three-course meal including a large glass of organic wine (or alternative) at 19.50€. This set menu approach makes for an uncomplicated dining experience.

This is a charming addition to what looks like an up-and-coming Valldoreix. I would not have gone was it not for undertaking this exercise, especially given its location and that I don't normally choose vegetarian restaurants. But I am now converted. After enjoying Restaurant Greta in Mercantí, from now on I will be open-minded and proactively choose vegetarian restaurants in future benefiting body, soul and of course the environment.

Open every day for breakfast and lunch.

Tel 932 80 99 06 [www.eljardinetdelkombu.com](http://www.eljardinetdelkombu.com)



# SIMPLY FOR KIDS

## FIND GIMBY

Hello!

This month we would like you to meet Gimby. Gimby is a friendly little pig from Collserola. He loves Sant Cugat and often comes to visit the town.

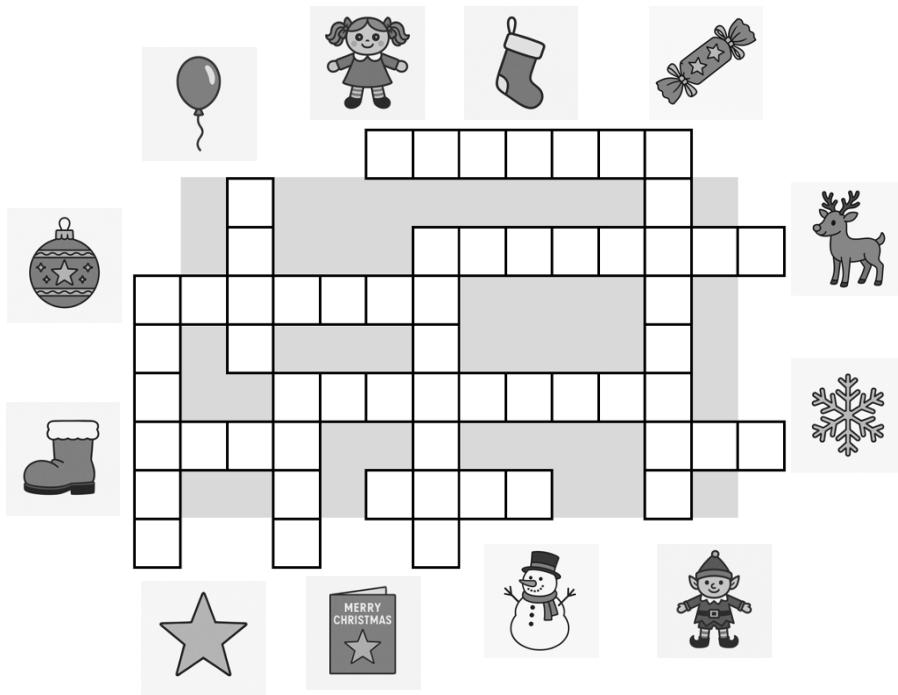
But, he is a bit shy. So, you might see Gimby hiding somewhere in this magazine. Can you find him?



## PICTURE CROSSWORD

Do you know the English names for these festive things?

Can you fill in the crossword using them?



# SIMPLY CARTOON

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

Merry  
Christmas  
Sam

Thank you.  
What's that?

It's for you.

What is it?

Guess.

It's very big.

CUT CUT  
RIP RIP

Wow. That's the  
best present I've  
ever had! Merry  
Christmas, Pat!

# CHRISTMAS STORY TIME

Geraldine, our story writer, still hasn't fixed her old typewriter. The space bar doesn't work and neither do any of the punctuation marks. Can you read the story? Or should we sack Geraldine and find another story-writer?

ONCE UPON A TIME IN A SMALL SNOWY VILLAGE THERE WAS A LITTLE CANDLE WHO WANTED TO SHINE BRIGHTER THAN ALL THE STARS IN THE SKY. EVERY NIGHT SHE WATCHED THE TALL CHURCH CANDLES GLOW AND DREAMED ONCE DAY I WILL SHINE LIKE THE MONUMENT CHRISTMAS EVE THE FAMILY FORGOT TO LIGHT HER SHE SATE ALONE ON THE WINDOW SILL FEELING SAD AND SMALL OUTSIDE ATINY ROBIN WAS SHIVERING IN THE COLD. THE LITTLE CANDLE THOUGHT IF I BURN NOW I WILL MELT AWAY BEFORE ANYONE SEES MY LIGHT BUT THEN SHE LOOKED AT THE LITTLE ROBIN AND WHISPERED COME CLOSER I WILL KEEP YOU WARM ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT. THE LITTLE FLAME GLOWED GENTLY BY MORNING SHE WAS ALMOST GONE JUST AS A SMALL PUDDLE OF WAX WHEN THE FAMILY WOKE UP THEY SAW THE HAPPY ROBIN SINGING BY THEIR WINDOW. THEY SMILED AND SAID HOW BRIGHT CHRISTMAS FEELS TODAY AND ALTHOUGH THE LITTLE CANDLE HAD MELTED HER KINDNESS MADE THE WHOLE HOUSE SHINE.

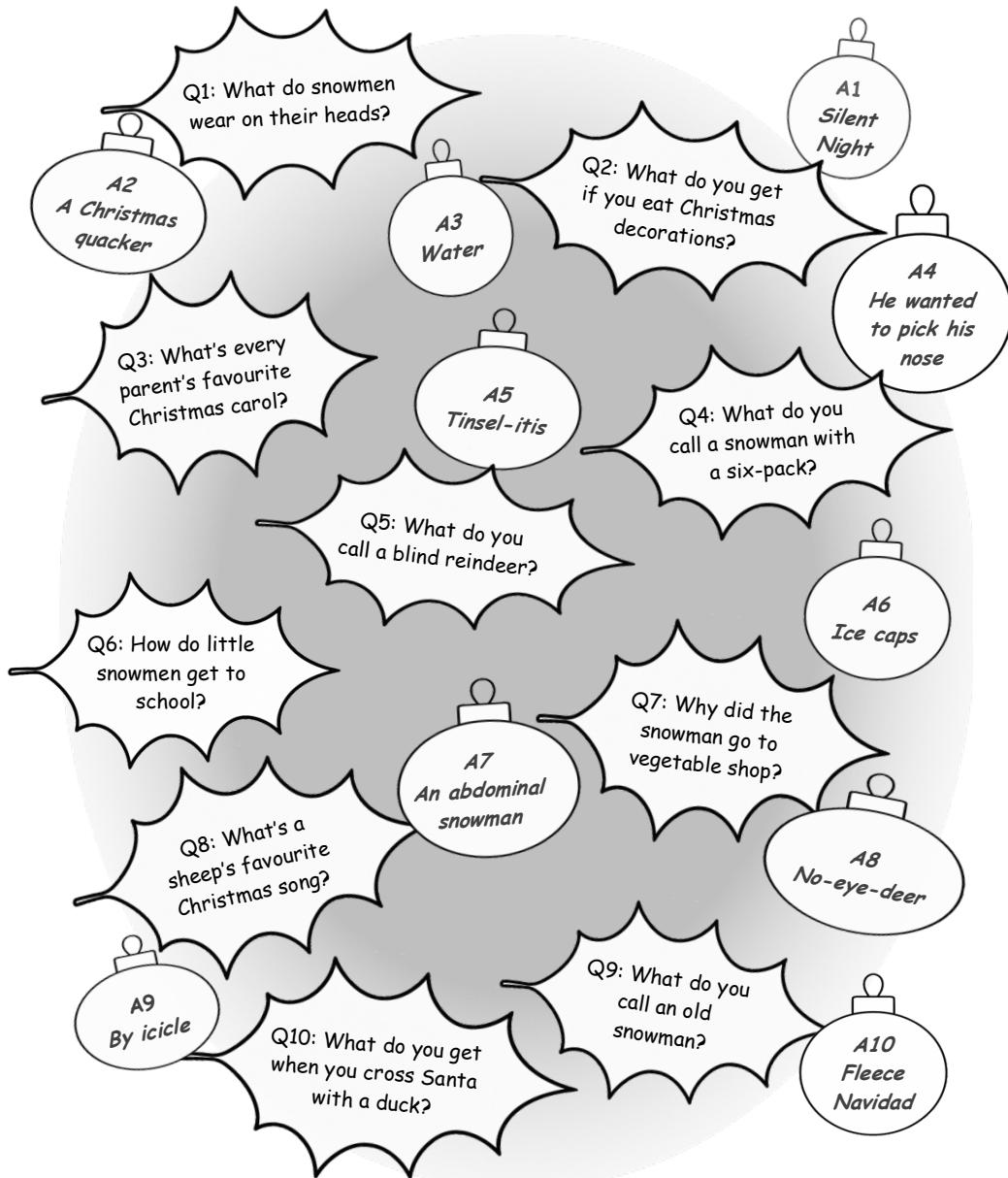
## SIMPLY COLOUR

It's Christmas Day and Pau, Anna and Maria are having fun opening their presents. 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 again! Can you spot which go with which?





## CULTURE CORNER

# Music and Tradition for Christmas

## Two handpicked soulful events for December

### Claudia Bardagí

#### Live at the Cafè Auditori Jazz en Viu

First on our list is the talented Claudia Bardagí, performing for one hour at the Cafè Auditori on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December at 9pm, with tickets priced at just 5€. This is the perfect moment to discover one of Sant Cugat's most expressive voices.

Claudia's music blends jazz, pop, and subtle touches of rock, woven together with the emotional clarity and elegance reminiscent of artists like Norah Jones and Sting. Her voice is warm and each song is crafted with care sung in Catalan, Spanish, and English, reflecting the multilingual spirit of our community.

She'll be joined by an accomplished group of musicians who bring depth and texture to her sound. Joan Carles Marí, her long-time percussionist and a well-known drum teacher in Sant Cugat, provides the rhythmic backbone with sensitivity and precision. Cece Giannotti adds acoustic guitar and vocals. Públito Delgado sings



### Claudia Bardagí

Wave

and shifts between electric and acoustic guitars, while Martín Laportilla joins on bass. Together, they create a warm, intimate atmosphere - perfect for a December evening in Sant Cugat.

This is the kind of concert that feels more like a gathering among friends being with original music that showcases the talent on our doorstep. The Café Auditori provides the perfect relaxed setting, with listeners spread out on chairs, stools or small tables, free to wander up for a drink or simply soak in the atmosphere. What better way to round off the week before the Christmas holidays!

### El Cant de la Sibil·la

The second is a haunting medieval chant foretelling the Last Judgement and one of Catalonia's most evocative Christmas traditions. It is officially recognised by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, sung at Christmas. It blends sacred drama with a mystical atmosphere, that still captivates modern audiences.

Every year, Sant Cugat has the privilege of hosting this work within the atmospheric setting of the Monastery. At 20:30 on 30<sup>th</sup> December, the early-music ensemble **Contratemps** alongside the **Cor Aglepta** will bring the piece to life. Whether you know the tradition well or are discovering it for the first time, this performance promises a memorable spiritual evening in our town.



Look out for details and tickets from the tourist office next to the Monastery.



## LOCAL TALENT SHOWCASE

## Julio, Aima and the Salón Mágico

### Two Magicians Bringing Wonder Back to La Floresta

When you think of La Floresta, you might imagine artists and musicians, aging hippies, or weekend hikers heading up to the Collserola hills. What you don't expect to find (within a stone's throw of La Floresta station) is a fully hand-built micro-theatre dedicated to close-up magic - a place where adults can rediscover their inner child and children learn that anything is possible.

But that's exactly what Julio and Aima have created with Salón Mágico, a cosy magical hideaway where illusions, storytelling and human connection take centre stage.

Like so many great projects, Salón Mágico was born two years ago from a serendipitous meeting. Aima (born in Barcelona but very much a Floresta local after 15 years) had spent her career in the world of children's theatre creating shows, painting fantasy make-up and storytelling. She had always loved magic, but life had taken her in other creative directions. Her childhood dream of becoming a magician had been quietly shelved.

But then one day in the *Plaça del Sol* in Barcelona, Julio walked straight up to her.

"Do you want to be a magician?"

He didn't hesitate and neither did she. The two connected instantly. For Julio (known artistically as Julio Montella) the world of magic had been calling him since he was just 14. He used to spend every lunchtime in a bar watching a magician perform. Fascinated, he eventually asked to learn, and the spark never left him. His father later saw a newspaper ad for magic classes and asked him, "Do you want to be a magician or not?" Once he began studying formally, he never looked back.

One theme came up again and again during our conversation: the difference between doing tricks and doing magic.



Aima sees it clearly:

*"Many people buy a trick on the internet and that's it. But the real magic is when you connect with the innocence of the person looking at you. When an adult becomes a child again for a moment."*

In an age of screens and instant explanations, both magicians believe that genuine astonishment is more important than ever. It's not about fooling people. It's about creating a shared moment of surprise, delight, and imagination.

Julio remembers a time when magic felt more revered. When learning a single technique required travelling to another city, and when a restaurant owner (upon discovering you were a magician), would shout into the kitchen, "Hey, come and see this!" before handing you a deck of cards and asking for a demonstration. There was no YouTube,



no tutorials, just passion, patience, mentorship and (eventually), mystery.

Today, they say, many young and budding magicians can explain how a trick works but lack the emotional structure, the rhythm, and the presentation that transform it into real magic.

When Julio and Aima perform together, they embrace their differences. He specialises in close-up techniques, especially card magic, performed with exquisite delicacy and precision. She brings energy, humour, improvisation and an instinctive understanding of kids. Together they have created a dynamic duo: the technician and the storyteller.

Learning to perform as a duo, they say, is like learning magic all over again. Timing, eye contact, pacing, it all has to be rebuilt from scratch. That's where Salón Mágico plays an essential role: it is not only their performance space but also their laboratory. A place where ideas are tested, moments refined, and reactions from real audiences help them shape better shows.

For example, one of their favourite pieces is a mentalism routine where Aima guesses numbers in a way that leaves audiences genuinely stunned, and another uses "*gominales imaginaries*" (imaginary sweets) that spectators can actually smell. Another piece transforms a chosen audience member into a magician, reinforcing the duo's mission: helping everyone discover their own magic.

What sets *Salón Mágico* apart is the intimacy of the experience. Julio built the small stage by hand. The space holds around 20 people, making every show a front-row experience. Whether it's kids' shows in the morning, family shows in the afternoon or adult shows in the evening - everything happens just a few metres from the audience.

This closeness makes every reaction meaningful. "Until you do it in front of kids..." Julio laughs, "you don't know what they're going to say." The duo frequently adjusts their routines based on these spontaneous interactions.

Their dream for the coming year is simple but ambitious: "We want people to come from everywhere just to see a show here. We want Salón Mágico to become a landmark in La Floresta."

Aima imagines weekends filled with performances from Thursday to Sunday with a steady flow of families, friends, and curious visitors discovering this hidden corner of Sant Cugat.

But Salón Mágico is not just a stage, it's also becoming a school. Julio is preparing to start magic classes for both children and adults. Several people are already on a waiting list. The idea is not only to teach techniques, but to help students develop stage presence, confidence and creativity. At the end of each course, students will perform their own routines on the Salón Mágico stage, learning to manage nerves and embrace the thrill of performing.

As Aima says: "Magic can block you when you're alone... but when you perform in front of others, you learn who you are."

Their vision is clear: Salón Mágico will be a place to learn, experience, and share the art of wonder.

Salón Mágico is more than a venue. It is a passion project built by two artists who believe in the power of surprise, imagination and human connection. Whether you're looking for a family show, a unique night out, a birthday experience, or even a place to learn magic yourself, Julio and Aima have a secret door in La Floresta and what happens behind it is magical.

### Want to experience the magic?

Visit Salón Mágico in La Floresta:

- 📍 Carrer de Can Llobet 24, Sant Cugat
- 🌐 [www.salonmagico.com](http://www.salonmagico.com)
- 📞 652 259 415
- ✉️ [salonmagicobarcelona@gmail.com](mailto:salonmagicobarcelona@gmail.com)

Family shows, children's parties, close-up magic, workshops and magic classes for adults and kids.



## Cada Ovella al Seu Corral

### A Modest Opportunity to Learn a little Catalan, one saying at a time

There's a lovely Catalan saying that captures perfectly the spirit of this time of year:

*"Per Nadal, cada ovella al seu corral."*

At Christmas, every sheep returns to its pen.

It's one of those phrases that doesn't need much explanation, even if you've never been anywhere near a sheep. However far they might have roamed over the year, December is when the woolly wanderers instinctively return home. And so do we.

For many of us, the word home can be complicated. It might mean the place we were born, or the family we grew up with, or the community we've chosen here in Sant Cugat. Some of us have one home, some have two or even more. Some people drive across town to their parents' place, others cross continents. And a few simply pop round to a neighbour's house for cava and turró. But wherever we go, we're all answering that same call to return to where we feel we belong.

I admit, there's something comforting about the predictability of it all: the familiar faces, the familiar arguments, even the familiar sofa that sags in exactly the same place. Just like the sheep, we might bleat about the journey, but deep down we're glad to be back among our flock.

But what about those of us who can't, don't, or won't travel this Christmas?

For those of us who now call Sant Cugat our home, "cada ovella al seu corral" has an extra meaning. Each December we see the town sparkle with lights, music, and a bit of Yuletide magic. Local cafés fill with friends swapping stories, and even the more adventurous senglers of Collserola wander a little closer to join in. Christmas is the only time of the year when most people have more time to give and take and primarily to be sociable and friendly. It's a reminder that belonging isn't just



No sheep was harmed while taking this photo (apart from the one on the left)

where we come from - it's where we feel safe, welcomed, and part of something.

So this Christmas, wherever your corral may be, take a moment to appreciate it. Gather your flock, pour the cava, and remember: home isn't a place on the map - it's being with the people who make you feel you've arrived.

Bon Nadal i bones festes!

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



# HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) HOROSCOPE

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

## ♈ Aries (21 Mar - 19 Apr)

Focus on balancing your responsibilities this month. Jupiter encourages you to cultivate new relationships. The opportunity for overindulgence will test you. Tinsel will probably be involved.

## ♉ Taurus (20 Apr - 20 May)

Expect a stressful month. You'll yearn for cosy evenings but forget it. This month will involve higher than average spending. Wine will bring big rewards but stay away from crustaceans. Trust your instincts about chocolate.

## ♊ Gemini (21 May - 20 Jun)

A month of reconnecting with people you haven't seen for a while. Old friends will contact you from afar. Avoid wasting paper. Prioritise what brings pleasure, not just Amazon deliveries. Use mayhem to your advantage.

## ♋ Cancer (21 Jun - 22 Jul)

Now is an opportunity to recharge. Emotional boundaries will be stretched. A large man in a red suit will influence your actions. Family matters will probably settle down a bit by January. Avoid heavy lifting.

## ♌ Leo (23 Jul - 22 Aug)

Mercury is a fickle friend! Bitter sweet social events will interfere with your agenda. Exotic fragrances will affect you, especially if sprouts are involved. A star will bring joy. Expect the unexpected.

## ♍ Virgo (23 Aug - 22 Sep)

If you happen to owe 137,50€ to a good friend, this month is a really good time to pay him back. Get your priorities sorted out and place honour and friendships before your family, your landlord or your car payments. Stop making excuses!

## ♎ Libra (23 Sep - 22 Oct)

Lunar events suggest cheese may be a means of connection. Your negotiating skills will be put to the test. A financial boost will arrive soon. Don't blow all of it on luxuries. Watch your feet.

## ♏ Scorpio (23 Oct - 21 Nov)

Pay attention to late-comers. Pressure points will become weaker than normal. The metaphysical will manifest as twinkling coloured lights - listen to what they are trying to say. Let go of inhibitions and enjoy the ride.

## ♐ Sagittarius (22 Nov - 21 Dec)

Age is a state of mind. This month is not helping. Ruby and gold will guide you. The interplay of Venus and Mars will lead to an increase in frivolities. Balance the sea and mountain. Spoil yourself a little.

## ♑ Capricorn (22 Dec - 19 Jan)

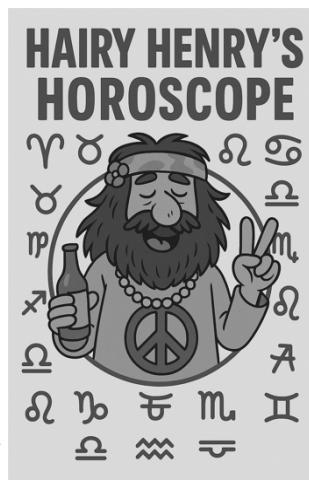
Progress is just round the corner. Be patient. People notice your life essence. Let them help. Seek and you will find. You will soon cross paths with a turkey. Munchkins will play a role in your destiny. Buy more socks.

## ♒ Aquarius (20 Jan - 18 Feb)

A person called John or Joan or possibly Jordi will create a dilemma. Diplomacy will pay off. Someone may ask you for money. Say no. Follow your nose and stay away from energy-drainers.

## ♓ Pisces (19 Feb - 20 Mar)

It's going to be a tricky month. Visitors from near and far will bring joy and pain. Avoid politics. A senior figure will be a pain in the arse. Stay alert or someone will give you an unpleasant surprise with a rodent or possibly a kitchen utensil.



## The Gifting of Moments

### Why experiences matter as much as things

I've never been particularly good at buying presents. Every December, I tell myself I'll start early, think creatively, find something perfect — and yet I end up wandering around in the days before Christmas, racking my brains for the perfect present for each member of my family and close friends, and yet feeling totally uninspired by shelves full of "stuff." Belts, wallets, purses, scarves, gadgets... they all blur into one another. Music and books used to be such easy gifts to give, but now it is all online, it's no longer the fail-safe it once was!

At some point, I realised that the problem wasn't the shops, or the changing times - it was the idea of presents itself. What I really love, and what I remember, aren't the objects people have given me. They're the moments. The time my wife took me to a Pink Floyd concert in the Auditori was one of the best presents I've ever had. The morning my kids insisted on preparing the evening dinner when they were 14 was truly amazing. The weekend walk that turned into a three-hour squelch in torrential rain still brings smiles to my face when I think about it.

Those are the things that are enjoyable for all, often cost the least, and last the longest.

### The joy of shared experiences

There's something magical about gifting an experience. It doesn't just say, "Here's something for you." It says, "Let's do something together." It invites connection, conversation and discovery.

In Sant Cugat, we're lucky to have endless opportunities to give those kinds of gifts. A comedy tour round the town, a magic show in your own living-room. A pedicure to a full-blown makeover. A friend who loves nature? Book a guided mushroom-picking walk through the forest, a visit to the apiary, or a morning of horse-riding near Valldoreix. Someone creative? Try a pottery workshop in one of the town's artisan studios, or a photography class to capture the winter light around the



Monastir. For the food lover, how about a wine-tasting at Cavina or a kombucha workshop at the fermenteria? And for the adrenaline hunter, there are countless ideas from paragliding to guided rock climbing, from snowboarding to sailing a 'Pativila'. And we could list many, many more!

But even the simple experiences can feel special when they're given with thought. A simple picnic in Parc Central. A walk up to Tibidabo and back. A promise to spend one afternoon exploring somewhere new together - whether that's the Mercantic vintage market or the paths leading up to Can Borrell.

### Experiences that last

Objects have a way of blending into the background. We enjoy them for a while, then move on. Experiences, though, stay vivid precisely because they fade. They exist in a moment, and then they're gone - leaving behind a story, a laugh, or a feeling that can't be bought.

Psychologists have actually studied this. They found that people derive longer-lasting happiness



from experiences than from possessions. Objects tend to invite comparison ("Is my phone newer than yours?"), but experiences create connection. When we share something - whether it's a concert, a workshop or even a long dinner - we strengthen our relationships, and that matters far more than another gadget or perfume bottle.

And let's be honest: Sant Cugat is full of potential memories waiting to be made. A friend recently told me that her best Christmas gift last year was a ticket to see a live performance by a local theatre company. "I still remember laughing all the way home," she said. "It was the best night of the year."

### **A slower, more meaningful Christmas**

Choosing to give experiences is also a small rebellion against the frenzy of consumerism that threatens to take over every December. Instead of rushing to buy, wrap, and spend, it invites us to slow down - to think about what really matters - and just maybe an experience gift could be a long-lasting happy memory or possibly a new lifetime hobby or sport for someone.

It's not about being anti-gift. It's about being pro-connection. It's about giving someone a reason to smile in January, not just on Christmas morning.

### **But what about kids?**

There is one group, however, for whom gifting *only* an experience can feel a little... abstract. Adults understand the joy of anticipation. Children and teenagers, on the other hand, like to unwrap something real on Christmas morning. For them, the excitement begins with the rustle of paper and the mystery of a box in their hands.

The good news is that experience-gifts work beautifully for younger people when they're paired with a small, meaningful physical item that brings the experience to life. A pottery class can come with a mini-kit of clay tools. A horse-riding session

can be wrapped together with a tiny toy pony. A photography workshop becomes more thrilling when accompanied by a simple instant-camera or a personalised notebook for their ideas. Even a day out at Tibidabo can be "wrapped" with a cap, a badge or a keyring.

For teens, the same principle works: a concert ticket tucked inside a new band T-shirt, a climbing lesson paired with chalk bag, a cooking workshop accompanied by a special ingredient. These small objects act as symbols - something to unwrap now, something to look forward to later.

The experience becomes the memory - the little object is simply the spark that makes it feel exciting from the first moment.

### **Rethinking what we give**

If we each gave one experience instead of one object this Christmas, imagine how different the season could feel. Less wrapping paper. Less stuff cluttering up the cupboards. More laughter, more connection, more moments that actually mean something.

Sant Cugat has always struck me as a town that values quality of life - green spaces, community, culture, and that gentle rhythm that makes you stop and appreciate where you are. Maybe that's the best kind of gift we can share: time, presence, and laughter.

This December, let's try giving less stuff and more stories. Because in the end, it's not the things we own that make us rich - it's the memories we make.





## How to Have a Sustainable Christmas

by Marshal Montgomery

As the season slides into 24-hour madness (spend, spend, spend!) the question is: how can we survive Christmas without losing our patience, our budget, or our planet?

I believe the answer is ridiculously clear: keep it simple!

For example - shop small, give small is my motto. As I say to the wife, a hand-knitted scarf from the local market, or a single jar of honey from Collserola (the real sort with all the bits in), or a good book from a second-hand bookshop carries far more meaning than something expensive shipped halfway across the world. Oh, yes! Even better, don't buy anything at all. Why spend your hard-earned lolly now when it'll buy twice as much in a month's time? Seriously! I've already told my family our celebrations will start on the 7th of January, when advent calendars are ten-a-penny, *turró* is 70% off, and you can literally pick up a Christmas tree completely free off any street corner.

Another great idea is to use and reinvent. Don't waste money buying wrapping paper. Instead, use old magazines or newspaper and string. Christmas decorations? You'll find an abundance of cheery material in the recycling bins to make more garlands and tree decorations than you can shake a stick at. Don't throw boxes away, either. Use them again and again. It might say 'iPhone 17' on the outside, but watch their faces when they see what's really inside! If you're clever you can stack the empty boxes, like those Russian-doll things, one inside the next so they occupy minimum space in the *alteil* until next year.

Share experiences, not excess. Especially when it comes to food and drinks. Instead of going out to an expensive restaurant, invite your neighbours round (remember to tell them to bring a bottle or two, and dessert... and a starter, too!). Even better, invite yourself round to someone else's party - even



Marshal is still our alternative lifestyles correspondent

if you hardly know them. If there's a lot of guests, no one will question who you are or why you're there. It's a guaranteed way of getting festively merry without opening your wallet. If someone does get suspicious, say you're Scottish and start talking about Hogmanay. If they're not satisfied, say you need the loo and climb out of the window. Believe me, it works every time, almost.

This Christmas, "survival" doesn't have to mean retreating from the chaos. It can mean appreciating the simpler things - the smell of pine air-freshener in the bathroom, the happy banter at the local bar opposite the *comissaria*, and that deep-seated satisfaction of not spending your money on overpriced unnecessaries.

Because the planet can't afford another consumer Christmas. If we all take responsibility for our own little corner - our town, our home, our bathroom - together we can turn the season of excess into a season of sustainable renewal. And that, surely, is the best gift we could possibly give.



## A PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

# The End of Another One

## Looking back before we look forwards

December is a curious month. It's full of commerce, carols and cava but buried underneath all that busyness, there lies a quiet opportunity for reflection. So just before we get into the rigmarole of "A new year, a new me!", I'd like to suggest we pause and ask: What did this year really mean?

For me, this autumn brought one of the biggest moments of my life here in Sant Cugat. After years of wanting to publish a magazine, we launched Simply Sant Cugat. Two great editions, 2,000 printed copies, with real pages, real ink, and real neighbours picking it up in shops, cafés and libraries. A dream turned into reality.

It was also a year of choosing where to put my energy. I made a conscious decision to step back from energy-draining projects and focus on things more meaningful and, more importantly, more enjoyable. Life is short. Why postpone a dream if you can start it now?

But enough about me.

This is now your moment.

I invite you to get yourself a coffee, or a glass of wine and take ten quiet minutes to reflect on 2025, and follow this simple three-step reflection process to close the year. Ask yourself:

### 1) What worked?

What are you proud of? Big milestones or small personal victories both count - learning a phrase in Catalan, supporting someone, surviving a tough season, starting something new. What have you done that you are proud of?

### 2) What didn't?

It's easy to get trapped in a rut. What's not moving you forwards? Which habits, commitments or relationships are draining you? What could you let go of? Where can you say "enough is enough, it's time to change"?



### 3) What do you want more of next year?

Peace? Adventure? Growth? Connection?

Instead of 'goals', think 'direction'. A direction is kinder and more forgiving. And once you know in which direction you should be heading, it's a lot easier to make the right decisions.

So, instead of ending the year with more pressure, let's end it with a moment of reflective observation. We've lived, struggled, adjusted, endured, learnt, and celebrated. That's worth recognising.

Here's to closing this year with a bit of genuine appreciation for what we've done and instead of trying to be something we aren't, focus on becoming who we already are, just a little more realism and gratitude.

*"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow." – Albert Einstein*



## Last Chance to Ride The Frog Train

An opportunity to step back in time with the FFCC



On the first Sunday last November at 12:30h, I finally did something with my wife that we've been meaning to do for a while: We rode the legendary Tren Granota — the Frog Train. (nicknamed after its distinctive green colour and the large round headlights on the front, which resemble the eyes of a frog). It's one thing to hear about it... it's quite another to see it roll into the station in all its green-and-silver glory. Like retro time capsule, it clanks and hums with a character that the sleek white trains of today simply can't match.

As it pulled into the platform, phones came out, children pointed, grown-ups smiled like children, and even a few enthusiasts in 1940s attire posed beside it as if waiting to depart for another century. This isn't just a train ride; it's a theatrical experience.

Inside, the care and pride in its restoration are impossible to miss. The wooden third-class benches are elegantly curved and varnished to a shine. The second-class seats look freshly upholstered - so comfy, it makes you wonder

where we went wrong with modern public seating. And the first-class? Maybe they didn't take the train. Nevertheless, it was all pristine, polished, graffiti-free and full of character. The air conditioning is a spotless grill at the front of the carriage. Each window has its own brown leather roller blind. Someone has loved this train back to life.

We travelled the full route: from Les Planes, through Sant Cugat, to Sabadell Parc del Nord and back. What struck me most wasn't just the scenery



*The upholstery of second class is better than in our living-room*



(though Collserola's trees and the patchwork of fields and allotments are far prettier at 30 km/h than at commuter pace). It was the people. No screens. No zombies scrolling Instagram. Just happy chatting, gentle nostalgia, and a carriage full of strangers enjoying the simple pleasure of travelling together. Imagine that.

It made me wonder what passengers in 2100 will think of our trains today. Will they look back at them fondly? Will laugh at how quaintly futuristic we once thought ourselves? Or will they be travelling in drones or horse-drawn carriages?

If you live in Sant Cugat and haven't done it yet, do so. Don't wait half a year like we did. It's a different way to experience a familiar journey, and a charming reminder that not everything worth appreciating has to be new. Sometimes the best way forward is to take a little trip backwards.

Definitely worth a morning, a smile, and a photo or two.

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### Frog Train Quick Guide

Name:	Tren Granota ("Frog Train")
Operator:	FGC – Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya
Type:	Historic heritage train (1944–1996)
Route:	Les Planes ↔ Sant Cugat ↔ Terrassa or Sabadell (round trip)
Season:	First Sunday of the month — May to December
Tickets:	Regular FGC ticket or integrated transport card
Last Date this year:	7 <sup>th</sup> December
Next opportunity:	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2026
More information:	<a href="https://turistren.cat/en/trains/granota-train/">https://turistren.cat/en/trains/granota-train/</a>

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## MEETUP

**Cava, Conversations and Community****Our First Simply Sant Cugat Meetup**

On Tuesday 28 October, our very first Simply Sant Cugat Meetup took place at Cavina Vinoteca on Plaça de Barcelona, and for two wonderful hours from 6 to 8pm the whole place felt entirely ours. The atmosphere was exactly what we'd hoped for: enthusiastic, supportive and curious. Friends, family, and neighbours arrived in ones, twos and threes, shrugging off their coats and settling into that classic Sant Cugat mix of locals and internationals.

Among the crowd were **Karen, Millie & Johan, Olga & Sol, Steven & Sonya, Jitske & Milton, Doina, Cristine, Katrien, Gabi, Virginia, Steve, Marc, Silvia, Sharon & Toby, Pau, Graham, Carmen & Josep**, plus two of the people featured in our November edition: artist **Dolores Mayorga** and Civic Agent **Jordi Cots**.

We kicked off with a simple icebreaker: a “find someone who...” game that sent people looking for someone who spoke more than 3 languages, or ran their own business, or lived in Sant Cugat for less than a year. Within minutes, strangers were laughing together like old neighbours.

Then the two cofounders, Aston and Ian, gave a short welcome. They explained that the Meetup is our way of getting to know our readers face-to-face and turning Simply Sant Cugat into more than just a magazine – it's a serendipitous mixing-pot of people who share this town, whatever their background.

Everyone who came was unofficially appointed an SSC “ambassador”. Someone who can spread the word (and the magazine), spot interesting local stories, and help us connect with future advertisers.

In true Sant Cugat style, there was even a happy coincidence: outside in the square, a photo competition awards ceremony was taking place, and a couple of our guests who had entered the competition were able to attend both events.

We'll skip December's Meetup (Christmas calendars are full enough already), but we'll be back in the new year. If you're an English speaker around Sant Cugat who enjoys good conversation, local stories and a friendly glass of something, we'd love you to join us next time. (Keep an eye on our website [www.simplysantcugat.com](http://www.simplysantcugat.com) for details).

# SIMPLY CLASSIFIEDS

Got something to share with our community? Whether you're offering a service, launching a project, or looking to connect—reach hundreds of local readers through *Simply Sant Cugat's* Classifieds!

**Next month (January Sales 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](mailto:info@simplysantcugat.com) for more information.

## HEALTH & WELLBEING

If you want to **reconnect to your inner child** and bring imagination and wonder back to your life, email Graham: [play@gameofnow.com](mailto:play@gameofnow.com)

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