

February 2026

4<sup>rd</sup> Edition

# Simply

# SANT CUGAT



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This month...

1. A Simple Guide to Carnival week
2. Association Spotlight: Rotary Sant Cugat
3. Local Entrepreneur: Greg's Barn
4. First Date Tips for Saint Valentine's
5. Jokes, puzzles, reviews and much, much more

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**Simply SANT CUGAT®**

Fourth Edition: February 2026

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## Welcome to February

February reminds us that life in Sant Cugat isn't just about places – it's about people. And more specifically, about the connections you choose to build.

Some connections are intimate: a partner, a first date, a soulmate. Valentine's nudges you to pay attention to those one-to-one relationships – not to make them perfect, but to make them mean something that can be valued. Other connections are lighter, louder, and sometimes just as important: the ones you make in a group, when you step out of your routine and into something shared. That's what Carnival offers us – permission to go outside and be social, to be playful, to be part of the crowd rather than watching from the edge.

This month's issue follows those threads through the town. We meet Joan Sabaté, a local hero whose work shows how one person's choices can improve many lives. We look at Rotary and the consistent power of people who keep turning up for others. We share a two-couple love story that reminds you there's no "right way" to tie the knot and build a life together, and a first-date guide that treats connection with a sense of humour. In our Out & About section, we discover the Pont del Diable legend (because the stories a community tells are also a kind of connection) and we explore the roots of Carnival and Lent, those annual rituals that help us reset, reflect, and rejoice the world.

Aston & Ian

## Sant Cugat Carnival Programme

(All dates February 2026)

### Thu 12th: Dijous Gras (Opening night)

[Probably about 19:00 Pl. Sant Pere TBC]

### Sat 14th: Big Saturday in the centre

- 11:00: **Cercaviles de Gitanes** (short parades through the town centre)
- 12:45: **Ball de Velles**: Pl. d'Octavià
- 13:00: **Ball de Gitanes & Ball de Giovenetes**
- 18:30: **Comparses meet-up**: Av. Cerdanyola
- 19:00: **Rua de Comparses** (parade): Jardins del Vallès → Av. Cerdanyola → C. de la Creu → C. de la Torre → Pl. d'Octavià
- 20:00: **Awards / stage moment**: Pl. d'Octavià
- 23:00: **Ball (party)**

### Sun 15th Feb: Family Sunday

- 11:00: **Baixada de Gitanetes**: Pl. de Sant Pere
- 11:30: **Pregonet** (kids' opening): Pl. d'Octavià
- 11:40: **Ball de Gitanetes**
- 12:00: **Kids' animation / family activities**
- 18:00: **Ball de Màscares** (seniors): Sala Clavé

### Tue 17th: Dress-up dinner night

**Sopar de disfressada** (fancy-dress costume dinners across bars and restaurants)

### Wed 18th: Finale: the Sardine

- 19:30: **Return of power + Enterrament de la sardina** (procession): Pl de la Vila → Llotgeta del Monestir
- 20:30: **Sardinada** (shared snack): Pl. d'Octavià



## SIMPLE GUIDES

## A Simple Guide To Carnival

### The What, When and Why of the coldest celebration of the year

Say “Carnival” and most people picture Rio: with sequins, samba, and more feathers than a pillow factory. Or Notting Hill: sound systems, street food, flags, and a moving street party that makes “let’s just pop out for an hour” sound ridiculously naïve.

Sant Cugat’s *Carnaval* is neither. It’s smaller, more local, and (in the best possible way) proudly idiosyncratic. And it happens in freezing-February, when the sun sets early, the cold bites, and you discover that fancy-dress costumes are rarely designed for their thermal insulation properties.

Here, the town symbolically hands power to a cockerel, the big headline act is a traditional dance, and the whole week ends with a mock funeral for a fish. It’s not “Carnival, imported”. It’s *Carnival a la Vallès*: colourful, communal, and slightly surreal.

*Carnaval* officially runs from Thurs. 12th to Weds. 18th February 2026 - but don’t think of it as a calendar entry. Think of it as a storyline: a comic takeover, a burst of tradition and street-party energy, and then a theatrical goodbye to mischief before normality resumes.

#### 1) The opening: why a cockerel takes control

Most places have a *Rei Carnestoltes* (Carnival King). Sant Cugat has *El Gall* - and it’s not random. The figure is inspired by the cockerel on the monastery’s weather vane. The joke is simple: the Gall has been up there all year “watching” the town, so when it comes down, it can finally deliver the Carnival message (the *\*pregó\**) and take the symbolic keys.

Underneath the humour is an older idea. The cockerel is associated with daybreak - noise and light pushing back darkness. That matters in February: short days, long coats, and a collective sense that spring is still a rumour. When *El Gall* arrives on *Dijous Gras*, it’s like the town saying, “Right. Enough grey. Let’s have some colour.”

#### 2) Dijous Gras: the real reason Carnival begins

Before *Carnaval* was costumes and glitter, it was a practical cultural invention: enjoy the good things before Lent (*Quaresma*), when restraint was supposed to kick in. That’s why *Dijous Gras* is tied to



hearty, unapologetic foods - the culinary equivalent of saying, “Right then. Eat well. We’ll be responsible later.”

In Catalonia that often means *botifarra d’ou* (egg sausage), tortilla, and *coca de llardons* (pork-fat pastry). Even if you’re not remotely religious, winter logic still applies: when it’s cold outside, you want food that feels like it’s giving you a bit of heat from the inside. Sant Cugat continues to treat this as a cultural essential: a communal warm-up before the most gloriously impractical clothing choices of the year.

#### 3) The main event: The Dance of the Giants

If Sant Cugat *Carnaval* has a “main stage”, it’s Plaça d’Octavià, and the headliner is the *Ball de Gitanes* (with the character dances *Ball de Velles* and *Ball de Giovenetes*). This isn’t something you watch from the edge like a polite bystander. It’s a whole-square phenomenon: music, colour, and rhythm.

The *Ball de Gitanes* is strongly rooted in Catalonia and has deep historical roots (often traced back centuries). In Sant Cugat, there are written references that pre-date some other well-known local dances - and there’s also a more recent story



of revival and persistence: traditions like this didn't simply "survive"; people actively kept them alive and brought them back into public celebration.

And that's the magic. Rio has professionals. Notting Hill has momentum. Sant Cugat has a community tradition that only works because a huge number of people decide (year after year) that it matters. In the middle of winter, that decision feels even more impressive: you don't fill a square in February unless you really want to be there.

#### 4) The satire engine: Ball de Velles

Carnival has always included a pressure valve: one moment in the year when the community can laugh at itself (and at those in charge) without it turning into an argument..

That's exactly what Ball de Velles delivers. It's linked to satirical street performance ("balls parlats"): characters, commentary, and a 'licence' to say the things we usually only mutter in queues. The "Velles" persona is perfect for this because it carries a kind of fearless bluntness. Also, it's extremely relatable in February: no one complains with more conviction than someone wearing a wig, pretending to be an old lady, while secretly wondering why their tights offer no thermal protection whatsoever.

#### 5) Passing the torch: Gitanetes and Giovenetes

One reason Sant Cugat's *Carnaval* stays strong is that it's built like a relay race.

- *Gitanetes* gives children a role that feels real, not token.

- *Giovenetes* keeps teenagers in the tradition at the exact moment they're most likely to drift away.

It's a smart cultural design: don't lecture young people about heritage. Instead, let them to be part of it. And in winter it's especially heroic: tiny dancers, huge smiles, and parents hovering on the edge of the square with the universal "we'll get you a hot chocolate afterwards" expression.

#### 6) The street-party part

If you're craving the classic Carnival feeling (i.e. costumes, music, groups, movement through town), then the *Rua de comparses* is your entry point. This is where Sant Cugat leans closest to "big-city Carnival feel," scaled to human size.

And yes, it's often the moment when you discover Sant Cugat's unofficial Carnival accessory: the emergency layer. You'll spot it everywhere: the pirate with a puffer jacket, the fairy with a fleece, the Roman centurion with a roll-neck sweater, and the occasional genius who has built an entire costume around a thermal sleeping bag.

#### 7) The finale: why we "bury the fish"

Carnival ends on *Dimecres de Cendra* (Ash Wednesday), and Sant Cugat closes the story with a wonderfully theatrical gesture: *Enterrament de la sardina*. It's a comic funeral procession that says, "Right, enough malarkey. Get back to normal," while also squeezing in one last communal joke.

Symbolically, it's the town burying excess and mischief until next year. Practically, it's also a perfect ending: you need a finale, not a fade-out. And in February, it comes with an additional unspoken message: "we've danced, we've paraded, we've pretended to be a chicken/astronaut/banana... now please let us return to indoor life."

You don't need to understand every tradition to enjoy Sant Cugat Carnival. You just need to show up. Let El Gall wake the town up, let Plaça d'Octavià do its magic, and let the sardine bring the curtain down. Dress up, bring thermal undies, follow the noise, and if you get lost, just head towards the monastery: in Sant Cugat, *Carnaval* always seems to find its way back there.

For a full list of times and places see page 3.



#### The "I've only got 2 hours" plan

- **For pure Sant Cugat:** Plaça d'Octavià for the Gitanes/Velles/**Giovenetes** (Sat 14 Feb, 13:00)
- **For families:** Gitanetes (Sun 15 Feb, 11:40)
- **For the full story arc:** El Gall (Thur 12 Feb) + Sardine (Wed 18 Feb)



## WHY DO WE SAY THAT?

# From Carnival to Ash Wednesday

An etymological look at the story behind the language

If you can think back to Christmas it was probably devoted to overindulgence, especially in the calorie department. And now, here I am in February, standing on my bathroom scales asking myself the eternal question: “Why do I keep doing this to myself?”

But it’s not just me, is it? As the dictionary shows, the tango between overindulgence and dieting has been going on for many centuries.

Let’s start with **Lent**. Surprisingly, in English, “Lent” isn’t originally a word about dieting at all. It comes from the Old English ‘**lencten**’, meaning springtime, which in turn came from the old Saxon ‘**lentin**’ meaning to lengthen - as in the daylight time. The religious fasting got named after the season. So when people say they’re “doing Lent,” linguistically they’re basically saying they’re “doing spring.” (Which I think sounds nicer.)

Then comes **Carnival**, the pre-Lent festival. “Carnival” appears in English in the 1540s meaning the time of merrymaking before Lent, via French and Italian, and an older Italian form points to **carnelevare**: “to remove meat.” In other words: party now, because soon we’ll be removing meat from the menu.

If you prefer your warnings in neon, meet **Mardi Gras** - French for “Fat Tuesday.” It’s the last day of the Carnival season, traditionally the moment to use up all those rich, fatty foods before the fasting begins. The name isn’t subtle. It’s basically the church saying: OMG! All those triglycerides will have to go!

And the morning after? **Ash Wednesday**. The phrase is as literal as it sounds: the Wednesday marked by ashes. Remember the catchy phrase “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust”? The ashes from burnt leaves (not the deceased) symbolised mortality, and were used to mark the foreheads of the congregation during church services. There are



even records of a Middle English nickname, “**Pulver-wednesdai**” (“Dust Wednesday”), because, as the legendary Joni Mitchell said, nothing sobers you up more than a reminder that you are truly made out of star dust.

And while we’re at it, the word “**diet**” deserves a little redemption. It didn’t start life meaning “a miserable month of fasting.” It comes from Greek *diáita*, meaning a daily routine - basically how you live, not a temporary punishment. Only later did it narrow into the modern sense of restricting food to lose weight. Thus, etymologically speaking, a “diet” is less about suffering and more about returning to a sustainable rhythm.

Which is why today’s “bathroom-scale reset plans” feel so familiar. When I go back to my intermittent fasting, it doesn’t feel so much like a brand-new invention as a modern day revamp of the old cultural tradition of overdoing it, and then taking it easy.

And that brings us back to Sant Cugat. Our Carnival is gloriously wintry: brilliant costumes, cold fingertips, and that heroic decision to dance anyway. Underneath the glitter is the same ancient philosophy baked into the words themselves: indulge, laugh, overdo it... and begin again.



## BONS MOTS

# L'amor que es paga amb diners no és amor i no és res

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

To acknowledge Saint Valentine, this month's saying is: "*L'amor que es paga amb diners no és amor i no és res.*"

Word-for-word, it means: "The love that is paid for with money isn't love and it's nothing."

Now, before you picture a Catalan grandmother berating you every time you offer to buy someone a coffee... relax. This saying isn't against money. It's a warning about substitution. About mistaking spending for caring.

Think about it. Have you ever had one of those moments where someone messes up? They turn up late again, let you down again, hurt you again? Yet instead of a sincerely heartfelt apology, you get a quick "I'm sorry, tonight's on me."

Nice... but hang on. The bill gets dealt with. The feeling doesn't.

Or the classic couple's patch-up: a big argument, a frosty silence, and then... ta-daa... a weekend away, a new jacket, a meal out somewhere posh. If you live in Sant Cugat, you can practically storyboard it: a tense walk, then suddenly everything's "fixed" with a terrace table in Plaça Octavià and the promise of something special for dessert afterwards. For a day it feels like things are better. But the question is: did anything actually change, or was the problem just painted over?

And it's not only romantic love, is it? Friendships do it, too. You know the type: they're always happy to be there when there's money to be spent - the "quick coffee," the "It's my round." But then you have a rough week, or you need a small favour, or you'd just like someone to ask a simple "How are you, really?" ...and they vanish in a puff of excuses.

So what's the proverb actually saying?

It's saying: love isn't a transaction. It's not "I pay, you stay." It's not "I provide, you comply." And it's certainly not "I'll give you 100€, if you spend the night with me. There are other words for that sort of thing.

The attractive blond with the aging millionaire (and you can put the genders where you choose). Is it genuine love? Or is it a business transaction? And

at what point does one become the other? I don't know the answer, I'm just asking the question.

But here's a quick thought experiment for you: pick three relationships you have, remove money from the equation and see what's left.

If there were no gift, would there still be interest?

If there were no dinner out, would there still be conversation?

If there were no "high income," would there still be a relationship?

When life is ordinary and unglamorous, do they still show up?

Because yes, money can be one way to express love. But it can't replace it. And if the affection only appears when someone's paying for it... well, this month's saying has already delivered its verdict.

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## A DAY IN THE LIFE

### Jordi, the Forest Guard

One of four guardians of Collserola

On a winter morning, Collserola looks calm enough to be a Christmas card: the low winter sun, the frost-covered earth, a few brave dog-walkers with their thermal insulated gloves. From the outside, it's easy to think the park is "fine". The trees are standing. The birds are doing their birdy things. There's no smoke, no drama, everything's just fine.

And then Jordi's radio crackles.

A cyclist has spotted a pine tree that's snapped in half and fallen across a track. Not just any track, but one of the basic emergency routes the park tries to keep clear so vehicles can get through fast when something goes seriously wrong. Jordi notes the location, makes the call, and within the chain of coordination someone wielding a chainsaw arrives. The offending tree is removed and the route re-opened. Problem solved... in the practical sense.

But the work isn't finished. Jordi still has to file the report so the park's maintenance crew can come back and remove the leftover timber. In Collserola, the day is often like that: the urgent bit is handled quickly, then comes the more onerous work of documentation, follow-up, and making sure the "fixed" thing doesn't become tomorrow's problem.

This is the bit most of us never see. We see the park. Jordi sees the park and the to-do list.

Jordi's route into the job is charming in its simplicity. In June 1985, he took a short-term role in fire prevention, working from a watchtower for 3 months, or so he thought.

Forty years later, he's still here.

In 1991, as Collserola began organising a more formal "guardianship" inside the park, Jordi was part of a group invited to train for it - people from vigilance roles, fire prevention, and forestry. After a specialised course with park technicians in December 1991, he became one of four selected. On 1st April 1992, the first patrol of forest guards officially began.



But today, the number that really defines his work isn't a date. It's a headcount.

"We've always been four," he tells us. "Sometimes they propose expanding. But politics, economics, technical issues... it never happens."

Just four people.

Now think of Collserola on a sunny weekend. Multiply that by the whole year. Jordi estimates millions of visits annually. And you begin to understand why "forest guard" in Collserola doesn't mean the same thing as "forest guard" in a remote mountain range.

Jordi is very clear about this: the challenge here isn't the forest. It's the humans.

Collserola is wrapped around by city life - Barcelona and the Vallès pressing in on all sides. That means the park gets used like a giant shared playground: walkers, runners, families, cyclists, horse riders, nature-lovers, organised hikes, people exploring with apps, people escaping screens... and yes, sometimes people doing things they absolutely shouldn't.

The conflicts aren't always dramatic. Often they're just... incompatible.

Bikes and walkers. Horses and motorbikes. Nature observation and noisy group activities. Then there's a thornier layer: protected areas inside the park where the rules are stricter. Jordi gives an example that feels tailor-made for modern life: a zone like the Rierada, legally protected to the point where (on paper) people shouldn't be walking there at all. And



yet, he says, you can open Wikiloc and find dozens of routes that go straight through it.

So Jordi finds himself doing the most emotionally awkward part of the job: approaching a perfectly responsible person walking a dog with a child, doing everything “right”... and having to tell them they shouldn’t be there.

He doesn’t say it with swagger. He says it like someone who knows how quickly “rules” turn into resentment if you handle them badly. The park has to be protected, but it also has to be lived with. That balance is the constant tightrope.

A typical day usually starts at the office. The coordinator gives Jordi and the patrol a list of urgent tasks. The park is divided into sectors which they rotate, spending about 15 days focused on one sector before moving to the next. In theory, that gives them coverage. In practice, the park has a talent for improvisation.

There are incidents logged. Jordi mentions thousands that accumulate over time - and part of the job is revisiting: checking if a previous problem has been resolved, whether something is escalating, whether a “small issue” is turning into something more dangerous.

The examples come thick and fast:

- Someone creating a vegetable plot where it shouldn’t exist.
- A damaged cable, a risky bit of infrastructure, forestry work that needs checking.
- Someone who’s built a hut and renting it out on AirB&B.

And then today’s surprise: A wall has collapsed near Mas Pins, partly blocking a road. Jordi goes, assesses, alerts the right professionals. Bombers and technical teams take over. Jordi’s role is not “do everything”. It’s: observe, document, coordinate, escalate.

Then comes a report of squatters occupying facilities near Sant Medir. Jordi goes to confirm what’s happened, notes how access was forced, how many people appear to be inside, and files the report - because the property is public and needs an official record.

This is the hidden reality of the park: it’s not just trails and trees. It’s governance, safety, human behaviour, and a chain of responsibility that has to work fast.

And then there’s fire prevention.

When Jordi talks about fires, you can hear the pride. Fire prevention isn’t an “extra” here - it’s at the heart of the system. He argues that Collserola gets outstanding results because of speed and coordination: watchtowers, rapid detection, fast deployment, and different services working closely together.

He also shares something refreshing about technology. Jordi is not anti-tech - he’s almost the opposite. Good cameras, drones, 3D measurements for preservation: all of it can help. But he’s sceptical about replacing people with sensors and automation, because he’s lived the false alarms and the messy reality of a forest landscape.

His best example is wonderfully human: sometimes, in a watchtower, you turn your head at exactly the right moment and spot a faint column of smoke. Why did you turn at that moment? You can’t always explain it. It’s experience, pattern recognition, intuition - your brain noticing “something different” against the mental snapshot of the last hour.

*“I came for three months... and stayed for forty years.”*

His proposal isn’t “no tech.” It’s “tech with humans”: put cameras with the watchtower staff so other teams can see what the human sees in real time, and make faster decisions.

I asked Jordi how the public can help.

“Remember the park isn’t yours. It’s everyone’s. Leave it at least as you found it. Don’t move a rock just because it’s there. To you it’s nothing; to a geologist it might be a story.”

Jordi’s point is bigger than rocks: our tiny casual actions such as cutting corners, making our own paths, treating “nature” like a backdrop - they add up. And then he gives the line that feels like both an invitation and a warning:

“Enjoy what you have. Because you won’t easily find another place like it.”

And even if you do... it probably won’t have four guardians trying, every day, to keep it standing.



## ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT

**Rotary Sant Cugat****40 Years of Fundraising, Friends, and Getting Things Done**

Eduard (top row, 4th from right) and Helena (bottom right): 2 members of the 19 people who are Rotary Sant Cugat

If you've lived in Sant Cugat for a while, you've probably heard the name "Rotary" said with a slightly mysterious tone as if it's either a secret society, a shady business club, or (depending on who's talking) a group of well-fed retirees in suits. Eduard and Helena from Rotary Sant Cugat hear those clichés all the time. They laugh about it now, but they also know the misunderstanding has a cost: it makes it harder to explain what they really are, and it makes it harder to attract the partners and sponsors that keep their projects alive.

Rotary Sant Cugat is part of Rotary International, founded over a century ago and now made up of clubs around the world. Locally, the club is approaching its 40th anniversary, and that milestone matters because it signals something more than longevity: it shows how much the model has had to evolve. The old stereotype of "a wealthy older man who lunches for networking" doesn't fit the Sant Cugat chapter very well anymore. Eduard notes that their membership has shifted noticeably - more women, a lower average age, and a stronger emphasis on rolling up sleeves rather than swapping business cards.

**Running solidarity like a project plan**

What surprised me most in the interview wasn't the list of causes. It was how practical their approach is. When Rotary raises funds, it isn't (in their words) "money in general that we give to entities." They prefer to respond to specific projects: upgrading computers so an organisation can support immigrants with paperwork; paying for staffing or rent; adapting a van so food can reach people who need it. That project mindset comes with strict internal criteria and a vote among members - which, again, sounds less like a social club and more like a small organisation making investment decisions.

That "professional volunteer" identity is central to how both Eduard and Helena talk about Rotary. Eduard joined after feeling a need to "give back" - not by writing cheques, but through "capabilities, contacts, know-how." Helena, who formally joined in 2025 after a longer period of knowing about Rotary from the outside, describes it as a home for people who want their professional energy to translate into real impact, even if they never meet the individuals who benefit.

## The Three Pillars

Rotary Sant Cugat's calendar has a few recurring events (or pillars) that support everything else.

The flagship is **"Música per la Solidaritat"**, a concert that fills the Teatre-Auditori with a simple proposition: come for the music, and know your ticket supports a cause. It's also the emotional "this is why we do it" moment Eduard describes each year... a collective feeling when the auditorium is full and the audience understands the point. Helena adds the numbers: 19 editions and €166,000 raised over those years, supporting different organisations (this year, families linked to Alzheimer's). They also keep a global thread: 90% of what they raise goes to a local beneficiary, and 10% goes to Rotary's long-running global campaign to eradicate polio.

Alongside the concert, they mention other two familiar Rotary fixtures: **"Nit Rotària"** (their gala-style evening), and **"Nit de l'Empresa"**, a business-focused event that connects local organisations and leaders around the future of the local economy. Add to that newer initiatives such as **"Unim l'Art per erradicar la pòlio"**, an art-led project that, according to Helena, translated into thousands of polio vaccinations. They also collaborate on projects they don't "own" - for example, promoting a special concert offer where ticket sales through a Rotary code generate polio funding.

But here's the reality behind the scenes: none of these runs on goodwill alone. Their biggest challenge right now is simple: sponsors.

Eduard is direct: their projects depend heavily on companies (often local firms or multinationals with a base here) that "share our principles" and can support fundraising. In fact, he says there's more money coming through sponsorship than through private donations. That means Rotary has to keep doing two things at once: deliver real social impact, and constantly explain itself to new partners. In other words, they're not just organising events; they're also managing reputation, communication, and relationships with sponsors - the same kind of work any small organisation faces.

**"We're not religious. We're not secret. We're not here for ourselves."**

The misconceptions are so frequent that Eduard can list them quickly: people confuse Rotary with Freemasons; they see the pin, the meeting structure, the opening "invocation" and imagine something esoteric. Helena is keen to clarify that it's not religious - and she shares the line that closes their opening statement, which neatly sums up the ethos: Rotary doesn't emphasise differences of race, religion, or politics; it emphasises human similarities, and renews a commitment to service.

In the end, the 40th anniversary feels like a useful moment to say: Rotary Sant Cugat is trying to be modern, open, and effective. But effectiveness requires resources. If 2026 is about consolidation, it's because they already have solid pillars worth strengthening. And if they want to grow their impact, they need the same thing every community project needs: people who show up, partners who back them, and supporters who understand that "solidarity" is not a buzzword it's hard work.

Eduard's closing message is simple: if you want to help the community in Sant Cugat, get in touch, and they'll figure out how to collaborate.

### Five Ways You Can Help

You don't need to join to help.

- Attend a fundraiser (especially *Música per la Solidaritat* 19th March): your ticket supports a local project and Rotary's global polio work.
- Can't go? Use "Fila Zero" (donation-only ticket).
- Sponsor (or introduce a sponsor): this is one of their biggest needs.
- Share their events in WhatsApp groups, school networks, or LinkedIn. See their website in English: (<https://sant-cugat-del-valles.rotary2202.es/en>)
- Get in touch: [rc.santcugatdelvalles@rotary2202.org](mailto:rc.santcugatdelvalles@rotary2202.org)



## LOCAL HERO

**Joan Sabaté****Multiple award-winning low-impact architect**

If you live in Sant Cugat, chances are you've had at least one summer moment of "I can't cope with this heat," or one winter week of "why is it colder inside than outside?" We talk about insulation, heat pumps, solar panels... and then we get lost in a fog of technical jargon, budgets, and paperwork.

That's why it's so refreshing to meet someone like Joan Sabaté, a quiet but stubborn local "hero" based in La Floresta, who has spent decades trying to answer a simple question: how do we build (and renovate) Mediterranean

homes that are comfortable, healthy and low-impact-without turning them into luxury products.

Joan is the director of SaAS (*Sabaté Associats, Arquitectura i Sostenibilitat*) and one of the people behind LIMA: Low Impact Mediterranean Architecture. His projects have been recognised with major awards, but his story starts much more humbly: a teenager with tools in his hands.

When I asked Joan if he always knew he'd become an architect, he didn't talk about star-architect dreams or glossy magazine covers. He talked about his grandfather: a builder, a craftsman, and an anarchist - someone who shaped the way Joan thinks about making things and questioning systems.

Joan's first "design piece" wasn't a signature building. It was a wooden lamp, built when he was 13, inspired by what he'd seen in architecture magazines. He still has it. It still works. And it was the start of a key mindset: curiosity, hands-on experimentation, and dedication.

Later, he turned an attic space in his grandparents' home into a small studio, learning to work with materials and tools from the inside out. That "craft" mindset is still there today - and it explains why he doesn't love being boxed into the modern stereotype of an architect who draws plans and then disappears.

Early on, SaAS did what many architecture practices do: they started making submissions for public tenders. They won some. But Joan describes



Joan's home has received the Generalitat's National Environmental Award, Barcelona City Council's "Acció 21" award, and the International Union of Architecture Critics' Award for Small-Scale Works.

an important twist: sustainability was not always part of the brief. "They asked for beautiful architecture," he told me. So SaAS would win on the formal side - and then push for sustainability afterwards, persuading public clients to accept changes that weren't always welcomed at first.

Two achievements from that era matter for everyday readers because they show what's possible at scale:

- 95 social housing units in Barcelona designed to reach energy class A (and, in Joan's words, closer to an "A++" level before that label even existed).
- The Banc de Sang i Teixits (Blood and Tissues Bank), which Joan describes as one of the most efficient buildings in the Mediterranean, with major recognition at European level.

Even if you never set foot in those buildings, the message is clear: efficiency is not a boutique hobby. It can be designed into normal, public projects.

Then came a big leap: LIMA. The idea was not to publish another manifesto, but to build a working prototype that could be shown to the construction sector-first as an exhibition pavilion at Construmat, then tested at university (La Salle / Universitat



Ramon Llull), and finally relocated to a plot in La Floresta, the house where Joan now lives.

Here's the part that makes this story feel very Sant Cugat: the "prototype" became his home because the original promoter went bankrupt just months before launch. Joan had savings, and he used them to keep the project alive-essentially betting his personal future on the experiment.

The result is the remarkable house you see today: a living laboratory of comfort, materials, and sustainability.

Joan breaks low impact down into three big buckets that any homeowner can understand:

1. **Emissions** (climate): reduce CO<sub>2</sub> in construction and in day-to-day use. That means designing homes that need less energy-and choosing materials that require less energy to produce. Wood matters here because, handled well, it can store carbon rather than emit it.
2. **Water**: in a country that regularly faces drought, the home itself should waste less. Joan's approach includes rainwater and greywater strategies and returning cleaned water to the ground rather than sending it to the sewer.
3. **Health**: the indoor environment matters. He's blunt about the "new car smell": that smell is actually a combination of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and are not a feature of his work. His projects prioritise low-tox materials, mineral paints (silicates), and finishes that don't secretly pollute the air you breathe.

Joan gets frustrated about two misunderstandings.

The first is the idea that ecological housing is exclusive - a luxury status symbol, like buying a high-end gadget and calling it sustainable. Joan insists the opposite: low-impact design should be accessible, because it usually means better living: comfort, lower bills, and better health.

The second is the "wood equals deforestation" reaction. He argues for responsibly-managed forests, not destruction - harvesting thoughtfully so forests renew, store carbon, and even reduce wildfire risk.

You probably aren't building a new house in La Floresta. You're living in something that already

exists - often with leaky windows, old boilers, and that familiar Mediterranean paradox: uncomfortably hot summers, but also uncomfortably cold winters.

Joan's practical advice starts with the least glamorous step:

Step 1: use. Shorten showers. Don't waste energy. Don't ask your home to be "eco" while living as if resources are infinite.

Step 2: upgrade efficiency. If you own your place: consider switching from an electric water heater to a heat-pump water heater, replacing gas heating with a heat pump, improving insulation, upgrading windows, and adding external façade insulation where possible.

And if you ever do dream of building? Joan now works in an "architect-constructor" model with his colleague Pepe Ramos, helping clients from choosing land through budgeting, design and construction - trying to keep quality high without turning sustainability into a luxury tax.

Joan's final point goes beyond architecture: he believes we need more cooperation - new models like shared homes (co-housing), and less passive faith that "the administration will solve everything." (In fact he warns that bureaucracy can add a full year to a project's timeline.)

In other words: if Sant Cugat wants affordable, comfortable, low-impact living, it won't come from one miracle building. It will come from hundreds of small, smart decisions - by local government, professionals, and Sant Cugat residents - all made together.

More information: [www.saas.cat](http://www.saas.cat) and [www.lima.cat](http://www.lima.cat)



Health living: a cornerstone of low-impact architecture  
(Photo by Soledad Soler)



## NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

# HUNGRY EYES

## Fresh and Spicy in Torreblanca

Hungry Eyes is a welcome new arrival in Sant Cugat, in the spot formerly occupied by El Mexicano on the corner by Parc de la Pollancreda. We liked El Mexicano with its delicious chicken mole, so its closure was a shame.

That said, we are still well served for Mexican food locally, and even better, for the first time, we now have two excellent Indian restaurants, sensibly located at opposite ends.

Masala Indian, reviewed previously in Simply Sant Cugat, set a high bar and has continued to impress. Hungry Eyes also impresses with its home cooked food and fresh ingredients apparent in every dish.

Hungry Eyes has been established in Barcelona for many years, where their original restaurant enjoys excellent reviews. That experience shows.

We were four diners and ordered a cross-section of the menu. The **caraway seeded poppadoms** were of the folded variety, but accompanied by four excellent **homemade pickles**, with the lime pickle being a standout. **Onion bhajis** were exactly as remembered from a good UK curry house, while the **vegetable samosas** were nicely spiced and encrusted with thick pastry.

Mains were a success. The **lamb rogan josh** was delicious with tender meat in a thick, creamy sauce with just enough heat. The **chicken korma** was also excellent, rich and comforting. A vegetarian **dal makhani** (black lentils) was full of flavour and the fish curry was not bad, made with hake on the bone in a mild aromatic herb sauce.

**Pilau rice** was colourful and fluffy and service throughout was attentive and genuinely interested in making us feel welcome, comfortable and happy.

Desserts were well worth ordering. The **carrot halwa**, a warm carrot and milk pudding was



delicious, as was the **gulab jamun** served with **homemade ice cream**.

The ambience is light, airy and colourful, with plenty of space between tables and a large terrace for summer. And thankfully, no sign of Patrick Swayze. At around 30€ per person for a full meal and drinks, the value is very fair.

Overall, Hungry Eyes is a strong addition to Sant Cugat's restaurant scene, and one we will happily return to.

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# SIMPLY CARNIVAL CARTOON

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

The image is a cartoon script template for a scene. It consists of several speech bubbles connected by a purple line, and sound effects written in a stylized font. The speech bubbles contain the following text:

- Top left: "Hello?"
- Top right: "It's me!"
- Middle left: "I didn't recognise you."
- Middle right: "You have a problem."
- Bottom left: "What?."
- Bottom center: "Look,"
- Bottom right: "Fortunately, I have this!"
- Very bottom center: "That's a relief."
- Very bottom right: "Happy Carnival!"

Sound effects are written in a jagged, hand-drawn font:

- Bottom left: "BANG!"
- Bottom left: "CUT!"
- Bottom center: "SCRAPE!"
- Bottom center: "STICK!"
- Bottom right: "PULL!"
- Bottom right: "POP!"

# CARNIVAL STORY TIME

You might remember Geraldine, our storywriter, has a very old typewriter. None of the lower case letters, space bar or punctuation marks work. Nevertheless, can you read the story?

INTHESTREETLINAFOUNDAPLASTICCROWNITLOOKEDUNUSUALSHEPUT  
ITONIMMEDIATELYTWOCHILDRENBOWEDADOGSATPOLITELYAPIGEONM  
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ALLSHINYMEDALROYALTYUPGRADELINAQUEENOFGOODIDEASFOREVER

## SIMPLY COLOUR

Pau, Anna and Maria are having fun celebrating carnival and their little four-legged friends are cunningly disguised, too. Make their carnival even better by adding some colour.



# Simply Jokes

This month, Penelope, has found her favourite Valentine's jokes!  
Can you tell which questions go with which answers?

What happened when  
the two vampires went  
on a blind date?

She finally  
found Mr.  
Write.

What did the baker  
say to his girlfriend?

He was losing  
interest.

Do skunks celebrate  
Valentine's Day?

Because love  
means nothing  
to them.

Did you hear about  
the notebook that  
married the pencil?

I knead  
you!

How do tightrope walkers meet  
their romantic partners?

Because you  
look at your X  
and wonder Y.

Why should you  
never date an  
apostrophe?

He was a  
keeper.

How are relationships  
like algebra?

Why did the banker  
break up with his  
girlfriend?

Yes! They're very  
scent-imental.

It was love at  
first bite.

Why did the woman  
propose to the man  
working at the zoo?

They're  
possessive.

Why should you avoid  
marrying a tennis player?

Online  
dating.

## CULTURE CORNER

**Elliott Murphy & his band****Live and love, to the last breath**

Valentine's Day in Sant Cugat will come with a soundtrack of poetry, rock history and timeless songwriting when Elliott Murphy brings his Infinity Tour to Sala El Siglo on **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February**. Murphy's songs have always explored love, loss, memory, time and resilience. His shows are intimate, storytelling affairs with a rock edge.

The setting is also fitting. El Siglo, located in the heart of El Mercantí, is a perfect venue, surrounded by dark wood and books that give a warm literary atmosphere, the perfect backdrop for Murphy's blend of folk and rock storytelling.

Now 76 years old, Elliott Murphy remains a compelling presence on stage. His long brown hair has turned white contrasting with his trademark black felt fedora hat and his voice has naturally evolved over time, but his musicality and his enthusiasm, generosity with the audience and sheer entertainment value remain undiminished. Armed with several guitars, a mouth organ and an impressive catalogue of music, Murphy is still regarded as one of rock's most intelligent and cultured songwriters.. that maybe you have never heard of!

A New Yorker and Parisian based for over 30 years, Murphy released his critically acclaimed debut Aquashow in 1973 and has since produced more than 40 albums, earning admiration from figures such as Lou Reed, Tom Petty, Elvis Costello and Bruce Springsteen. Spain holds a special place in his touring life, returning annually to enthusiastic audiences across the country and for the first time ever in Sant Cugat.

At the heart of the concert is Murphy's long-time musical partner, Olivier Durand. Their guitar interplay is a masterclass in musical chemistry. The two share a dynamic dialogue that lifts the performance well beyond simple accompaniment, especially during powerful rock ballads that get audiences on their feet.



Melissa Cox's violin adds elegance, tension and depth to the songs. Alan Fatras is more than a timekeeper on percussion. His playing injects momentum, drama and raw energy into the performance with extended drum passages become explosive heart-thumping surges of rhythm that lift the music from intimate folk storytelling to full-blown rock intensity.

A Touch of Kindness is my favourite. A quietly powerful song, reminding us that compassion, empathy and small human gestures still matter. You Never Know What You're In For is a song Murphy has played at recent gigs and that seems to get audiences clapping and singing.

Pricey at 30 € but its Valentines and this rock legend may never return to Sant Cugat.

Tickets from <https://www.salaelsiglo.com/>

Doors open 19.30.

## INTERNATIONAL COUPLES

# Two weddings, Six Lessons

### Tips for getting married in Sant Cugat

For the month of Saint Valentine it only seems natural to look at the subject of marriage, after all, Sant Cugat does romance brilliantly. You've got the old stones of the Monestir, idyllic backgrounds for photos, and more posh restaurants than you can wave a stick at. But if one of you happens to be non-Spanish, you also get a bonus side quest: paperwork that makes you question whether love really can conquer all.

To create a simple, practical guide, we spoke to two Spanish/English couples who tied the knot here in very different ways - and yet surprisingly gave remarkably similar advice.

Adam & Julia (British/Spanish), married in July last year and did the classic Sant Cugat combo:

Ajuntament ceremony followed by a celebration at Can Ametller, with pre-wedding photos at the Monestir.

Núria & Aaron (Catalan/British), tied the knot in June 2024 and went full storybook: ceremony at the Monastery of Sant Cugat, then a party at El Brau.

Different routes. Same lessons.

#### Lesson 1: Start earlier than you think you need to

If Sant Cugat weddings had an official slogan, it would be: book first, panic later.

Julia & Adam's first step was simple: make your town hall appointment early - they recommend 6-9 months in advance, and their full process took about nine months. Their stronger warning, especially when foreign paperwork is involved: don't be shy about giving yourselves a year or more.



Adam & Julia (photo Asia Valulova)



Núria & Aaron (photo Laia Ylla)

Núria & Aaron did the opposite: they planned quickly and kept it simple. Their first step was also straightforward: contact the Monastery early to see what dates were possible.

The shared takeaway is this: whether you're doing it in three months or twelve, the first win is always the same - secure the date and the main locations. Everything else is easier once the big pieces are fixed.

#### Lesson 2: The paperwork isn't "hard"... it's just tricky

This is where mixed-nationality couples get ambushed. Not by one gigantic form, but by a collection of documents that all need to be the right version, from the right place, sometimes with the right stamp.

Adam & Julia put it bluntly: the most stressful part was the paperwork for Adam (Brexit...) - stressful enough that their first appointment was "a bit of a failure" because they didn't bring exactly what was required.

Their biggest discoveries:

- they needed UK documents officially certified and translated via the British consulate in Madrid
- a birth certificate with an apostille from the UK - and they found it quicker (though more expensive) to use a service that helps obtain it
- confusion over whether they needed a CNI (certificado de no impedimento) or a CEC (certificado de estado civil) - eventually clarified through the consulate and a notary in Barcelona

Their best "wish we'd known this earlier" advice: don't guess. Don't trust vague internet lists. Find out



exactly what the registry / consulate wants for your specific case, then build your checklist from that.

Aaron & Núria, by contrast, reported no memorable document surprises - a useful reminder that not every international couple gets the full paper tornado. But if you do, you'll be very glad you started early.

### Lesson 3: Where you process things can matter

Here's a genuinely helpful insider detail from Julia & Adam: because Adam was 'empadronado' in Barcelona, it was faster to get an appointment there than in Sant Cugat - and that helped them keep everything on track.

It's a good reminder that the "Sant Cugat wedding" isn't always managed entirely in Sant Cugat. Depending on where you're registered, you may be dealing with offices elsewhere. Ask early, because the best workaround is often simply: go where the appointment is available sooner.

### Lesson 4: The real stress is people

Both couples independently circled the same planning pain point: people logistics.

For Aaron & Núria, the hardest part wasn't the venue - it was "planning who to sit next to who, language barriers, etc." (Any bilingual couple reading this is already nodding.)

Julia & Adam's biggest cultural flashpoint? The guest list. Adam wanted a few aunts and uncles to "represent" his family; Julia's logic was more Spanish: either everyone or no one. Neither is wrong... but it's exactly the sort of "small" decision that can trigger big feelings.

Practical tip: decide early what kind of wedding you're having: intimate, everyone or in between. Once you choose, you'll save yourself weeks of exasperating conversations.

### Lesson 5: Build buffer time and ditch perfection

If you want one guiding principle from these two weddings, it's this: less perfection, more presence.

Aaron & Núria's biggest "avoid this" warning was simple: trying to get everything perfect. Their

practical planning mantra was to stay flexible, communicate regularly with the key people involved (church/venue/restaurant), and be ruthless about what truly adds value versus what becomes an expensive distraction.

They also offered one of the best day-of tips I've heard: if a journey takes 15 minutes, plan for 30. Not because Sant Cugat is chaotic (it's lovely), but because weddings have a talent for creating delays.

Adam & Julia echoed the same spirit with a modern classic: avoid DIY overload. Taking on too much yourself doesn't make the wedding more "authentic"... it mainly makes it more stressful.

### The final shared lesson: remember to look up

Here's how Núria & Aaron put it: the day will fly by, so at some point, stop... and look around at all the people you love and care for in the same place.

Adam & Julia created their own version of that by anchoring the day in places that feel unmistakably "here": Monestir photos, Ajuntament vows, then a long meal with rumba catalana and classics that helped the Anglosaxon guests lean into the Spanish rhythm of celebration.

So yes: start early. Get the paperwork right. Plan the seating. Add buffer time. Don't DIY yourself into madness.

But also: Sant Cugat gives you a beautiful backdrop. Don't spend the whole day staring at your to-do list.

#### The "What we wish we'd known" checklist

- ✓ Book key appointments / venues early (think 6-9 months minimum, often longer if paperwork is complex)
- ✓ If one partner is foreign: contact the consulate early and confirm the exact documents needed
- ✓ Expect possible translations + apostille (case-dependent)
- ✓ Ask whether processing can be faster based on where you're empadronado
- ✓ Build buffer time into the schedule
- ✓ Avoid DIY overload and "perfect wedding syndrome"

## SIMPLY SPORTS

# A Love Letter to Hockey

## Why Sant Cugat Stole My Sporting Heart by Adam Goldthorp

February is a month for love. And after more than 40 years of playing field hockey (25 of those with Club Junior) I've realised this sport has become one of the great loves of my life. So this isn't just an article. It's a love letter, to hockey itself, to the people who share the pitch with me, and to Sant Cugat, a city that has steadily grown into one of Europe's most captivating hockey communities.

This Valentine's season feels extra special, because from **13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> February 2026**, Sant Cugat will host **the EuroHockey Indoor Club Cup**, Europe's premier indoor club competition, at Pabelló 3 of the ZEM Rambla del Cellar. Club Junior will compete as proud hosts, facing some of Europe's finest.

It's the perfect moment to celebrate a sport that brings so many of us together.

But first, a bit of Catalan history

The roots of field hockey in Catalonia stretch back further than most people realise. In 1923, FC Barcelona created its first field hockey section, marking the formal beginning of the sport in the region with a debut match against Espanyol.

Even earlier, inside Barcelona Cathedral, stone carvings from the late 14th century depict men holding curved sticks and chasing a small ball - clear evidence of early stick-and-ball games in the area.

Catalonia has always had an appetite for rhythm, movement, and teamwork. Hockey simply gave it a modern expression.



*Adam Goldthorp has lived in Sant Cugat for 25 years, playing field hockey for Club Junior at every level. Before moving to Spain, he played across all levels in England, representing his county and multiple first elevens. He continues to play, in the lower leagues or Masters level and looks forward to continuing to play and spectate for many years to come.*

### Club Junior: where my story found its home

Although I've played hockey for more than four decades, the chapter that defines me began 25 years ago at Club Junior. Founded in 1917, the club introduced field hockey in 1926 and has since grown to house around 40 teams, nurturing generations of players.

Last February, we witnessed something truly historic. On 16<sup>th</sup> February 2025, Club Junior's men's indoor team won the Spanish National Indoor Championship (División d'Honor A Masculí) for the first time in the club's 108-year history. The title was won right here in Sant Cugat, in a dramatic shoot-out victory over Club de Campo.

### Picture Crossword Answers

Punk	Ghost	Witch
Alien	Hippy	Pirate
Angel	Joker	Astronaut
Clown	Roman	Strongman

### Find Gimby Answer

If you haven't been able to spot Gimby, our paranoid pig, try looking on page 5 again.



As someone now playing in the Masters League, I felt that victory profoundly. The speed of the game may be different at my age, and recovery may be longer, but the fun remains the same. Hockey grows with you - it doesn't leave you behind.

### **Mamis & Papis: A love story that begins later**

Some of the best sporting love stories start with plucking up a little courage - like adults picking up a stick for the first time. That's the heart of 'Mamis & Papis' hockey, a format designed for newcomers, usually parents of youth players, who want to enjoy the game alongside the community.

The category originated as a recreational initiative for mums and dads looking for a fun, healthy, social activity tied to their children's sport.

Catalonia, especially Terrassa, helped pioneer the movement, evolving casual parent sessions into formal leagues and competitions. Today the Federació Catalana de Hockey organises regular Mamis & Papis leagues, held every few weeks and characterised by friendliness, laughter, and learning.

Eligibility rules keep things fair and beginner-friendly: players are typically over 35 and must not have competed officially before age 30.

I regularly train alongside the 'Papis', and watching them learn, step by step, week by week, is one of my greatest pleasures. Their enthusiasm is contagious. Their progress is inspiring. And their sense of fun reminds me of why I fell in love with this sport in the first place.

So, this February, let hockey steal your heart.

With Valentine's Day in the air, and Sant Cugat preparing to host Europe's finest indoor clubs, February is the perfect moment for the whole community to feel the pull of this sport.

Whether you:

- cheer on Club Junior at the EuroHockey Indoor Club Cup
- sign your children up for their first training session
- pick up a stick in a Mamis or Papis group
- or (like me) take your place in the Masters League...

...you'll find a sport that rewards effort, builds friendships, and creates memories that last decades.

After 40+ years on the pitch, through muddy winter evenings, golden spring afternoons, thrilling matches, and countless friendships, I can say with absolute certainty: Hockey doesn't just become part of your life. It becomes part of who you are.

And here in Sant Cugat, that love is stronger than ever.



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LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR

## A Barn Dance Mecca, Hidden in Plain Sight

El Barn d'en Greg



From the outside, El Barn d'en Greg looks like any other unit on an industrial estate in Rubí, the kind of place you could easily drive past without ever imagining there's anything worth stopping for. But step through the doors and the brain does a quick flip. Timber, warmth, a big open dance floor, and a space that feels more like a massive living room rather than a restaurant.

And that's the point. El Barn isn't "American-themed" in the way global chains are themed. It doesn't feel like someone imported a concept and copied-and-pasted it into Catalonia. It feels American because Greg is American - and because what he and his wife Judit have built is not a brand, but a lifestyle.

Greg, born in Chicago and raised in Indiana, spent years as a full-time professional musician. He met Judit at a concert in 1992, they married in 1994, and for a decade they performed wherever the work took them, festa majors, hotels, bars, and even several years on PortAventura's Far West stage. By the time they opened El Barn in 2004, they weren't looking to "open a restaurant" in the usual sense. The original dream was much more specific (and, in its own way, more ambitious): a proper dance space for big group dances - line dance, yes, but

also square dance, contra dance, circle dances - with a big, uninterrupted floor. No columns. No awkward corners. Just people moving together in a free space.

As Greg admits, at first, the food was secondary.

If that sounds like a risky starting point for a hospitality business, it was. And they knew it. In the early days, they tried things that would make any country-dancing purist squirm: different genres of music, disco nights, karaoke on Fridays and a close-up magician working the tables for years. They even experimented with a classic menú del día for the industrial-park lunchtime workers, charging 7€ - a price that now feels like folklore. But the pattern underneath those experiments is what makes the story interesting: the tactics changed to keep the doors open; the heart of the idea didn't.

Over time, the public for country and line dance grew - and so did the confidence to focus on what they were trying to be. Today, Greg says they've been 100% country for years, seven nights a week: they've become a national reference point for line dance, American-style music, and (increasingly) American-style food done with serious pride. Ask him what to order and he doesn't hesitate: the ribs.



Not just any ribs. Smoked, slow-cooked for 24 hours, and with their own spice blends. There's even one so large they call it a "dinosaur rib". It's part of the performance.

But if you talk to Judit about why El Barn has survived when so many venues don't, she starts with a word: authentic. Greg is a real American, a real musician who sings. The Barn isn't a copy. "Everything is real," she insists. And people feel that. Even their speciality desserts (cheese cake and carrot cake) are 100% homemade and authentic!

Greg puts it another way... they wanted to be different, but not the Hard Rock Café kind of different. Not the predictable kind of 'different' where you already know what you'll get because the brand is the same in every city. The Barn's difference comes from personality. From genuine character. From the fact that, in Judit's words, what matters isn't what you say... "it's what lives in you".

It's a teacher's insight, and Judit is exactly that: a secondary school teacher, full-time, alongside running beginners' dance groups at the Barn and tending a mini farm or 'huerto' that occupies a lot of her time. When she describes teaching, it's not a lecture about techniques; it's a philosophy of communication. Students, she says, can sense what's real. The huerto, the classes, the Barn. These aren't hobbies bolted on to an identity. They are the identity. And the Barn works for the same reason: it's authentic.

Nowadays, the kitchen is just as important as the dancing as an attraction. The two activities feed each other. Many people who came to learn country end up becoming regular restaurant customers, and others who came for dinner end up becoming regulars at the country dancing. Greg says he can look out at a packed night and know around 90% of people by their first names. Regulars return with their

friend-groups, then invite more friends, then celebrate milestones there - 40th birthdays, graduations, big family gatherings some up to a 100 people. It's not officially a social club, he says, but it's close. You come once, and the Barn offers you a place to fit in on a regular basis or just occasionally for an invigorating night out.

Even first-timers aren't left as spectators. Greg describes the dynamics of a typical night: early evening is calm, people arrive to have dinner, and then around 10pm the dancers start to arrive. For someone who's never seen it, the transformation can be startling: diners watch as the floor fills, and suddenly everyone seems to know the steps to the next song. That could easily feel intimidating, unless someone bridges the gap. So they do. If a table looks curious, Greg will signal an instructor and invite them onto the floor for something simple. No pressure. Just a small moment of participation. Enough to convert "interesting place" into "I want to come back".

And perhaps that's the real lesson for any would-be entrepreneur: authenticity isn't a catchphrase, it's a strategy. You can't manufacture it with décor. You earn it by living the thing you're offering... and then making it easy for others to step inside.

Greg ends on a surprising confession. Becoming a restaurant owner meant letting go, little by little, of being a touring musician... and that took adjustment. But eventually he realised his purpose hadn't changed. As a musician, he enjoyed the feeling of making people happy. At El Barn, he's still doing the same job but instead of guitars, his instruments are now food, dancing, and atmosphere. People come looking for a few hours of entertainment. If they return, he says, it means you're doing something right.

In a world full of copy-and-paste products, that kind of business model is rare. And in a warehouse on an industrial estate in Rubí, it just happens to come with a dance floor.

### How to get the best Barn experience

- Come Friday or Saturday for the full build-up
- Arrive early for dinner, stay for the dancing surge (around 22:30)
- Wear comfortable shoes for dancing
- Say yes if someone offers you an "easy first dance"
- Book ahead (weekends get busy)

### Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> March

If you'd like to try Greg's Barn, but would prefer to be part of a friendly group, our Simply Sant Cugat representative, **Helena Fernandez** is organising a dinner (and dance!).

WhatsApp her **606 227 144** to book a place.



## SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

# 5 Tips For Successful First Dates

by Marshal Montgomery

Humans have always wanted the same things: companionship, a bit of entertainment, and someone who doesn't put you off eating your food.

Dating is essentially two people trying to appear charming while keeping their bodily functions under control. Here's how to do it properly without losing half your salary, your evening, or your dignity.

### 1: It's a 'test flight', not a 'full offensive'

A first date should be a small trial run. Low expense. High reconnaissance. Start with one simple drink, preferably somewhere you can hear each other. If it goes successfully, you can extend it. If it doesn't, well... let's get to that in a bit.

### 2: Dress

Authenticity isn't just a word in the dictionary, it's the foundation of a solid relationship. No one likes being fooled. Trust me, spending the evening with a Hollywood star can be nice but discovering they are really closer to something from a horror film can be an unpleasant shock. So don't try to fool anyone and turn up to your date as you really are, not artificially groomed and manicured. If your date is still interested after seeing you 'warts and all' you know you're onto something.

### 3: Ask the right questions

First dates are essentially fact-finding missions. You need to get as much information as possible before you have finished your drink. So encourage your date to do most of the talking. Don't forget to subtly steer the conversation towards the important things like allergies, mental health issues and next of kin. If you're not confident, I suggest you prepare a list, or even better, a questionnaire (2 pages maximum) that you can fill in together.

### 4: Escaping with dignity

Remember, the chance of it going well is minimal. I speak from experience, I went on many dates and they all went Charlie Foxtrot. But you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. So, here's the trick. Set an alarm that sounds like your phone to ring 15 mins



into the date. Then you can answer it and pretend to be speaking to your doctor, your boss or your babysitter, any of whom can justify a swift exit.

### 5: The bill

This can be tricky with all the "Who's going to pay?" business. I recommend letting them pay is the best option. You're letting them feel good by accepting their generosity. Obviously, it also saves you money, too. The best way to make sure you don't backtrack is to leave your money/purse/wallet at home. If they get stropo, send them a Bizum.

So remember: First dates are all about establishing compatibility, your Mr. or Ms. Right won't need a three-course meal to show it.

### Recommended Places To Meet

**McDonald's:** A place designed for short stays

**Repsol service station bar:** Convenient for picking up last minute shopping, too.

**Parc Central:** Impress your date by taking a thermos flask of tea and an extra cushion.

**Train Station Café:** Ideal for a sudden escape.

**Hospital General de Catalunya:** The vending machine does a decent coffee and you can save time while waiting for your number to appear.



## HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) HOROSCOPE

100% February... 100% accurate

### ♈ Aries

You'll start February confidently, then forget why you walked into the kitchen. A mysterious neighbour returns something you didn't know you didn't have. Avoid gherkins after midnight. Don't trust pigeons, they know what you're thinking.

### ♉ Taurus

A calm month until someone steals your favourite mug "accidentally on purpose." You might consider moving to Andorra. Unexpected romance with someone who mispronounces your name. Be more.

### ♊ Gemini

Chaos looms: double-booked afternoons, triple-booked feelings. Someone will compliment your attire. Don't agree to anything involving rubber. Your lucky number is 2, or 7 or perhaps 15.

### ♋ Cancer

Emotions run wild when you discover your plants are watching you. A scented candle unlocks forgotten memories. Say yes to soup. Avoid anyone called Kevin, or Claud, or Cleo asking favours.

### ♌ Leo

February begins with applause (mostly your own), but spirals when you try cutting your own fringe. You join the dance but then you don't. A small miracle happens on a Tuesday. Beware cheerful strangers dressed as the eternal suffering of mankind.

### ♍ Virgo

You will attempt extreme organisation, then remember you're tired. A forgotten boiled sweet in your coat pocket will change everything. Don't argue with delivery drivers... Henry foresees trouble.

### ♎ Libra

Balance collapses when you binge-buy cushions. Someone offers cryptic advice involving socks. You'll pretend to understand. Let destiny handle laundry this month. Don't chase buses.

### ♏ Scorpio

A secret crush reveals... absolutely nothing. Typical. You'll gain power through a lost receipt. Dreams of sandwiches hold meaning. Your magnetism rises. Be extra patient, especially when a part of your body misbehaves.

### ♐ Sagittarius

February blesses you with energy, which you waste reorganising your underwear drawer. Embrace multitudes. A stranger with a scarf predicts your future in Lidl. Listen, unless they mention llamas.

### ♑ Capricorn

Huge breakthrough imminent. Sadly Henry fell asleep during the vision. Something about keys, an onion, and acute pain. Expect small victories and one dramatic exit from a room.

### ♒ Aquarius

Someone from your past reappears offering sustenance. Suspicious. You will suddenly crave adventure or pasta. A broken pen teaches you humility. Avoid emotional conversations before coffee. Try to lick your elbows.

### ♓ Pisces

You'll get sentimental about an advert for batteries. Henry says it's fine. Artistic urges peak mid-month: paint, dance, rearrange cutlery. A fish-related sign will appear. Go with the flow.



OUT & ABOUT

## Crossing the Pont del Diable

The most historic bridge over the Llobregat river



*Once upon a time, the townspeople urgently needed to build a bridge across the river. But the river was too wide, the job too hard, the time too short. Suddenly the Devil appeared and offered to build the bridge himself overnight. The only problem was the price: the first soul to cross it.*

*Nevertheless, the townspeople agreed.*

*Thus, the next morning dawned to reveal a beautiful new bridge. An old woman stepped forward, basket in hand, and walked towards it. But just before she set foot on the stones, she bent down and let a cat out of her basket. The cat padded across without a care in the world, becoming the "first soul" and neatly fulfilling the terms of the contract without losing a human life.*

*The Devil, outsmarted by this loophole, vanished in a puff of fury and never returned. The moral is clear: if you're going to deal with the Devil, bring a cat.*

This is the legend of the Devil's Bridge in Martorell, as depicted by a large engraving next to it. But the real wonder is that this amazing bridge is still standing at all.

This crossing of the Llobregat has been important for a very long time. The original bridge was first built by the Romans around 10 BCE, at the point where the old Via Augusta trade route crossed the river - at the time, the only land crossing in the lower Llobregat valley. In Roman times this wasn't just a crossing - it was Ad Fines, 'the place at the boundaries'. The honorary arch at the far end of the bridge marked the limit between the territories of Tarraco and Barcino.

Its geographical importance hits you the moment you arrive, because the Pont del Diable isn't set in some romantic valley with birdsong and a distant monastery bell. It's wedged between the AP-7, the A-2, and the train line. The modern infrastructure dominates the scene - huge, noisy, unapologetic.

And then, right in the middle of that asphalt-and-iron sprawl, sits this bridge - tiny in comparison, but somehow tougher-looking in contrast. It's a little oasis of history surrounded by modern movement. Not a museum piece behind ropes, but a survivor, still insisting on its right to exist.



My wife and I parked on the south bank next to the bridge, did a quick reconnaissance of the information signs and engravings, and then walked up the steps to the *capella* (chapel) built on top of the huge main arch. Apparently the extra weight helps stabilise it. From there you get the view: to the west, the calmer scene - the river winding gently upwards towards Esparreguera, with Montserrat beyond. To the east, you get the noisier one: movement, velocity, industry - the AP-7 flyover rising like something from a sci-fi film, held up on massive cylindrical pillars, towering above the bridge and the town.

The best thing about the Pont del Diable is that it's not just something you look at. It's a working bridge. Even after the central arch was blown up in 1939 during the Civil War, it was rebuilt (without diabolical support). It's regularly maintained and well looked after. Now exclusively for pedestrians, it's still used. You can walk it, pause halfway, admire the view, and feel that you're part of the bridge's ongoing job description.



On site relief of the Devil's Bridge legend

One of the information signs refers to the flood of 1971. The water rose a stunning 12 metres - high enough to cover the side arches of the bridge ... and yet it remained standing. This was largely thanks to the 1963 reconstruction, when the central pillars were removed to give it a single-arched Gothic design. That helped it survive by offering less resistance to floodwater than the multi-arched structures of the past. In other words, it wasn't just "lucky" - its shape was part of its resilience.

On the north side, the bridge almost brushes up against the railway, which makes the contrast feel

even sharper: stonework and steel, footsteps and freight, legend and timetable.

On the south side there's a small park area with more Roman ruins, which encourages you to linger. It's not a long visit in terms of time or distance - but it becomes a longer visit in terms of thought. You start noticing how the whole site is a collage: Roman traces, medieval drama, 20th-century war, and 21st-century infrastructure all sharing the same square kilometre.

You can get here by road or rail (the Martorell Vila station is just a four-minute walk away). It's also threaded into the walking culture of the region: the bridge is part of the hiking trails GR 270 and GR 97, which adds to the sense that it's still a route, not just a relic.

If there's a downside, it's a human-necessity one: the Pont del Diable has no visitor centre and not even a convenient café right there to warm your hands after a wet walk. Fortunately, we were able to take refuge from the drizzle at the nearby Hotel Manel, where friendly bar staff rescued the morning with some very welcome *xocolata amb xurros*.

Driving back home, I couldn't stop thinking about the strangest part of all: I've driven past this bridge hundreds of times over the years, usually at motorway speed, glimpsing it through barriers and pillars and not really seeing it at all. It has taken me thirty years to actually visit. But now, the next time I pass, I'll know what it is: not just a dramatic arch you glimpse from the car. Not just a legend engraved on a fountain. But a stubborn pocket of history, holding its ground in the middle of modern chaos - and still, miraculously, doing its job.

#### Pont del Diable: Key details

- c. 10 BC:** crossing established on the Via Augusta
- 1283-95:** Iconic Gothic rebuild (pointed-arch)
- 1768:** Major restoration under engineer J.M. Cermeño
- 1925:** Officially protected as a historic monument.
- 1939:** Destroyed in the Spanish Civil War.
- 1963-65:** Reconstructed in the Gothic style.

**Total length:** ~130 m

**Main arch (clear span):** 37.3 m

**Coordinates:** 41°28'30"N 1°56'16"E

## LANGUAGE LEARNING HACKS

## Beating the Embarrassment

### Simple Tricks for Faster Progress

The hardest part of learning Catalan or Spanish isn't the grammar. It's the moment your brain says, Don't open your mouth - you'll sound stupid!

I know that voice well. I've stood at the bar with a perfectly good sentence in my head... and then ordered in English because it felt safer. I've walked into a shop, rehearsed *"Bon dia, em pots ajudar?"* and then panicked because I couldn't remember the next word. The embarrassment barrier is real, and it's dangerous, because it stops you from practising before you even start.

Here's the shift that changed everything for me: in real life, effort matters more than perfection.

Most bartenders and shopkeepers aren't grading you. They're busy, they're human, and they can usually tell within two seconds whether you're making an effort. That attempt - the *"Hola, una canya, si us plau"* or *"Perdona, busco..."* - does something important. It signals respect. It builds goodwill. It opens the door for tiny corrections and little wins.

So I started collecting "micro-moments" instead of waiting for fluent conversations. One sentence at



the bakery. Two at the supermarket. A brave attempt at a joke that lands badly but still earns a smile. Sometimes, I add a simple safety net: *"Ho estic aprenent"* / *"Lo estoy aprendiendo"* (I'm learning). Or: *"M'ho pots repetir més a poc a poc?"* / *"¿Puedes repetirlo más despacio?"* (Can you repeat it more slowly?). Suddenly, I'm not failing, I'm training.

And yes, occasionally someone replies in English. That's not a defeat. That's data. Smile, keep your sentence short, and try again next time.

If you're waiting to speak until you're "ready," you'll be waiting forever. Speak now, imperfectly. Let it be messy. The goal isn't to sound like a local today - it's to become someone who isn't afraid to try.

### CALLING LOCAL LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

If you're learning Catalan or Spanish, or English, you don't have to do it alone. Sant Cugat (and nearby towns) has plenty of excellent language schools, conversation groups and private teachers who can help you build confidence - especially for real-life situations like cafés, shops and appointments.

We'd love a local language school to **sponsor this page** and support the magazine (logo + short intro + call to action). Interested? Get in touch and we'll share simple options.

[info@simplysantcugat.com](mailto:info@simplysantcugat.com)  
or Whatsapp 722 228 716

### Your 'Beat-the-Embarrassment' Challenge:

For the next 7 days, speak **1 sentence** a day in Catalan or Spanish (bakery, bar, supermarket).

One sentence.

No excuses.



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### ANNOUNCEMENT

#### B1 Area Toastmasters Contest 2026

Want a fun, energizing Saturday morning that will leave you *inspired* (and maybe a little braver)? Come and join us for the **B1 Area Toastmasters Contest 2026** - a friendly, high-quality speaking event where you'll see confident speakers, sharp evaluators, and plenty of supportive community spirit.

Whether you're **thinking of joining**, or simply curious about public speaking, you're warmly invited. Bring a friend. Bring family. Bring your curiosity.

**Venue:** Casa de Cultura de Sant Cugat

**Date & time:** 21<sup>ST</sup> February, 9:30h

#### What you'll see

**Prepared Speech Contest** (English & Spanish)

**Evaluation Contest** (English & Spanish)

Expect real talent, real learning, and a brilliant atmosphere. If you've ever thought, "*I'd love to speak more confidently...*" this is a perfect way to discover what Toastmasters is all about - no pressure, just inspiration.

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