

March 2026

5th Edition

Simply

SANT CUGAT



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2. Association Spotlight: XDESC
3. Are You 1 of the 42?
4. Out & About: The Mines of Gavà
5. Jokes, puzzles, reviews and much, much more

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**Simply SANT CUGAT®**

Fifth Edition: March 2026

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Welcome from Aston & Ian.....	3
A Simple Guide to your 'Big Four' Documents	4
Form 720: Not a Tax Bill, But Still Important.....	6
A Day In The Life: Nacho, the Estate Agent	8
Why Do We Say That? It's About Time	10
Meet-up: Kvass, Pizza and New Friends	11
Association Spotlight: XDESC	12
Bons Mots: Qui Vulgui Peix.....	14
Simply For Kids (pull out)	15
Culture Corner: Experiències Úniques.....	19
Local Entrepreneurs	20
Simply Sport: Flashh	22
New Restaurant Review: Dionisos	24
Are you one of the 42?	25
Bilingual Crossword.....	26
Hairy Henry's (Totally Reliable) Horoscope	27
Out & About: The Mines of Gavà	28
Language Learning Hacks.....	30
Classifieds.....	31

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Welcome to March

March always feels like Sant Cugat taking a deep breath and starting to wake up. The light shifts, the clocks change, and suddenly you realise: ah yes... spring again!

That's why this month we pay attention to that 'rebirth' stage of settling in. You know the feeling. You're discovering your favourite bars. You learn the supermarket routine. But of course, there are still lots of loose ends: paperwork, language goals, social circles, the big "how do I actually build a life here?" stuff.

That's the thread running through this issue. Getting yourself organised, yes, but doing it the Sant Cugat way: through people.

Our interview with Mireia, the president of XDESC, really brought this home for me. Again and again, the message was simple: strong networks don't just make life nicer, they make it easier. They're where advice travels, opportunities appear, and problems get solved before they become headaches. If you're new here, or even if you've been here for years but still feel a bit "on the edge," this is your gentle nudge: don't do it all alone.

Inside, you'll find Sue Harrand's new restaurant review, William Graham Stewart's Hitchhiker's Guide to Sant Cugat project, and a timely feature on declaring overseas assets – something many people may need to tackle before the end of the month. And, yes: our

first bilingual crossword, because settling in should include a bit of play too.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to our advertisers – without whom this magazine simply wouldn't exist – especially Signature, Easy-Talk, Talenom, Smakelig and Dionisos. You're helping keep this little community of communities alive.

SSC ANNOUNCEMENTS

Scan here to join our Announcements WhatsApp group – no chat, just quick updates on meet-ups, local events, offers and important Simply Sant Cugat news.



ANNOUNCEMENT

19:15h, Monday 2nd & 16th March SANT CUGAT TOASTMASTERS

Want to speak with confidence? We invite you to come as a guest and experience it for yourself.

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SIMPLE GUIDES

A Simple Guide to getting your ‘Big Four’ Documents

Your friendly starter pack for ‘gestions’ in Sant Cugat

Moving to Sant Cugat is the fun part. You find your favourite coffee, you learn which train carriage is “best” for *Plaça Catalunya*, and you discover that a “quick errand” can take... a while.

That’s because here in Sant Cugat there is a special genre of life called *gestions* (admin tasks). The good news: once you’ve got the basics in place, day-to-day life gets substantially easier. The trick is knowing which documents matter, what they’re for, and how they connect.

So this month, we have a friendly “admin starter pack” - just the fundamentals most international residents need.

The golden rule: admin is a chain, not a list

A lot of frustration comes from trying to do Step 6 without Step 2.

In Spain, many systems “talk to each other” (or try to), and one missing piece can block everything: renting, healthcare, registering a car, setting up direct debits, even getting an appointment for the thing you need to get an appointment for.

So think in terms of building blocks. The common ones are:

NIE/TIE - your identity as a foreigner

Empadronament (or just *Padrón*) - proof you live here, at this address from this date

CatSalut card - your access card to the public health system

Cl@ve (Digital certificate) - so you can actually do things online

Get these lined up, and a surprising amount of life becomes... effortless (well, almost).



NIE vs TIE

These two get mixed up constantly, so let’s clarify:

NIE : This is your foreigners’ identification number. It’s a number (not a card) in the format X1234567Y. You’ll use it for everything: contracts, bills, banking, taxes, buying a car, signing up for services.

TIE: This is the physical residency card with your embarrassing mug-shot for non-EU citizens (and some specific situations). It includes your NIE.

Simple takeaway: Most people need a NIE number. Some people also need the TIE card. If you’re not sure, ask your network or gestor - your nationality and residency route matters here.

The Padrón: your proof of address

The *padrón* is your registration on the municipal census: basically, “this person lives in Sant Cugat at this address from this date.”

Why it matters:

- It’s required for healthcare registration



- It is required for school processes
- It can be used as official proof of address
- It helps the municipality plan services (and yes, it's normal to be asked for it)

Practical tip:

If you move house, update your *padrón*. Admin systems love consistency, and mismatched addresses cause slow-motion headaches later.

CatSalut card

In Catalonia, the public health access card is the CatSalut card (often called the TSI - *Targeta Sanitària Integral*).

Once you're registered, you can:

- Get assigned to a CAP (primary care centre)
- Book a GP appointment
- Access referrals, prescriptions, and public healthcare pathways

Practical tip:

Your first visit is often about paperwork. Bring your ID, proof of address, and whatever documents you've been told to provide. This is normal.

Cl@ve and the digital certificate: the “skip the queue” tools

This is the one people wish they'd done earlier.

Spain increasingly expects you to do things online: taxes, appointments, forms, notifications. Two common ways to access services are:

- Cl@ve (for identifying yourself online)
- Digital certificate (an ID stored on your device)

Once you have one of these working, life improves because you can:

- Download certificates
- Check tax status
- Access official notifications
- File certain forms without printing your body weight in paper

Practical tip:

When something feels “impossible,” it's often because you don't yet have digital access set up. Doing this early saves hours later.

The Art of Appointments (Cita prèvia)

A lot of local admin is appointment-based. The stress usually comes from one of these:

- Booking the wrong type of appointment
- Arriving without the required documents
- Discovering you need a photocopy of something you didn't know existed
- Getting a date that's weeks away, then realising you booked the wrong office

How to win at appointments (most of the time)

- Screenshot the appointment confirmation
- Take originals + copies (yes, really)
- Take a pen (extra points for one that says “I hate bureaucracy”)
- a book, a phone charger, water, snacks (comfy pillow optional)
- If possible, arrive 10 minutes early

Remember: the person is overworked, underpaid, and has to deal with a lot of difficult people. Just by starting with a friendly smile and a genuine ‘*com estàs?*’ and they like you immediately.

And if Spanish/Catalan admin language makes you nervous, take a friend or ask for help. It's not a test of intelligence; it's a test of perseverance.

Final thought: If government admin feels confusing, it's not because you're doing life wrong. It's because you're learning a new system (often in a new language) while also trying to build a life.

Do the basics early. Keep your “admin folder.” Set up digital access. And when your situation gets complex (freelance income, multiple countries, property, big moves), hand it to a professional and let yourself get back to enjoying Sant Cugat.



BUREAUCRACY WORTH KNOWING

Form 720: Not a Tax Bill, But Still Very Important

By Leticia de Ponga - Asesora of Talenom in Sant Cugat

If you've moved to Spain and you still have stuff back home - a house, savings, stocks and shares - you may have heard people mention "Form 720" in tones that range from calm to mildly panicked.

The good news: The 720 is an informational declaration, not a tax bill. But it does matter and it's worth understanding early so it doesn't become a last minute stress

If you are here under the "Beckham Law" benefiting from the special tax regime for up to six years from arrival, you are exempt.

Otherwise, it's for everyone. If you are local and have opened a bank account in Andorra or a pied-a-terre in Amsterdam – it applies to you too.

What is Form 720?

It is a Spanish reporting requirement for tax residents who hold certain assets or rights outside Spain above a threshold. It allows Spanish tax authorities keep track of overseas assets.

Filing does not automatically mean you owe more tax. It is simply a declaration of what you have abroad and its value. But it is cross-checked to your other tax returns so make sure they are consistent.

Who needs to file it?

Spanish tax residents holding overseas assets over the threshold on 31st December.

If you are new to Spain, the phrase "tax resident" is the key: it does not always mean the same thing as "registered" or "living here most weeks". If you're unsure, that question should be checked first.

The €50,000 limit - and the bit people often miss

The headline figure is 50,000€ but it applies separately to three categories (sometimes called "blocks"). You don't add everything together into one global total.

What types of assets are included?

Form 720 groups overseas assets into three main categories of assets held outside Spain:



1) Bank accounts

2) Investments: Shares, funds, bonds, life insurance etc. Also if you are a Trustee of asset.

3) Property

Important practical point: if a category is reportable, you declare all the relevant items in that category, i.e. every bank account, every property, every company share you own - not just the amount above 50,000€.

A couple of quick examples

- You have two bank accounts in Australia with 25,000€ and 30,000€ → declare both accounts.
- You have 30,000€ in overseas banks and 60,000€ in investments → the investment block is reportable even if the bank-account is not.
- You own a flat abroad that cost (not current value) more than €50,000 → the property block is reportable even if the mortgage brings it to below 50,000€.

When do you file?

Between 1st January and 31st March, for assets held as of 31st December. So, the deadline is 31st March for your assets held at 31st December 2025.

Form 720 is submitted electronically via the Spanish Tax Agency's online system, using a digital certificate, Cl@ve, or through an authorised representative (such as a gestor/a or tax advisor).

Do you have to file every year?

No. After the first filing, you file again only if something changes significantly - for example, if the value in a block increases by more than 20,000€ compared to what was last declared, or if assets are sold, transferred, cancelled, or accounts are closed. Note if the asset is not held in euros, then currency fluctuations can trigger a new declaration (e.g. US dollar strengthens against the euro).

This is one reason people keep a simple annual checklist: a screenshot or statement showing year end balances, and a note of any major changes. It makes future years much easier.

What about penalties?

Penalties used to be scary, but following a ruling by the EU, they were modified. Even so, penalties are still steep. Sleep easy and avoid being investigated!

A quick pre-March checklist

- ✓ Are you Spanish tax resident for the year?
- ✓ List overseas assets (accounts, investments, property) and the 31st Dec 2025 values in euros using Bank of Spain rates.

- ✓ Group into the three blocks and check whether any block exceeds 50,000€.
- ✓ If filed before, check whether any block has increased by more than 20,000€ or whether anything was closed/sold/transferred. If yes, re-file.
- ✓ If in doubt, get advice.

A practical takeaway for Sant Cugat expats

If you have a house “back home”, a bank account, or savings, put Modelo 720 on your radar early. Most stress comes from trying to reconstruct values and paperwork at the last minute.

If anything about your situation is complex (multiple countries, trusts, inherited assets, joint ownership, currency, or uncertainty about tax residence), speak with a qualified professional who can review your case.

Note: This article is general information for readers and is not legal or tax advice. Rules and interpretations can change, and the correct approach depends on individual circumstances. If in doubt, take advice!

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A DAY IN THE LIFE

Nacho, the Estate Agent

Understanding the property market in Sant Cugat (interview by Aston Swift)

Sant Cugat is not cheap. Everyone knows that. But as I'm reminded while talking to Nacho García, expensive doesn't always mean overpriced. Sometimes it simply reflects reality: demand outstripping supply, good quality of life and a town that keeps attracting people.

Nacho is a real estate agent and the founder of Signature Luxury Homes. I meet him in his offices in the Business Centre here where he started the company 13 months ago. And since then, expanded into Barcelona and Madrid and beyond buying, selling and renting to wealth management and advice with a cohesive team of only 15 people. That's rapid growth in a competitive marketplace. In conversation, it feels more like something carefully built, one relationship at a time. The "Luxury" shows where he is aiming and this includes international clients, but perusing his stock online for rent and sale shows it's not only high end.

Property, he tells me, is in his blood.

"I was born into a family involved in construction and real estate," he says. "Meal-time conversations were about property. I loved it then and I love it now."

Nacho is born and raised Sant Cugat. He joined the family firm at 16 while studying property and law at university, then at local firms such as Proddigia, aProperties and Lucas Fox, before deciding it was time to build something of his own. Signature was born with a clear idea: boutique service, absolute transparency and putting client objectives ahead of transactions.

That philosophy runs through everything he does. Despite being the founder, Nacho is still on the front line: sourcing, viewings, negotiations, managing the team and strategy. "It's 360" he laughs. It's all hours, early mornings, late Friday nights and weekends if that's what our client wants. "But I wouldn't want it any other way."



A market that's hot for good reason

Sant Cugat ranks amongst the highest income municipalities in Spain. We all know why: it's nice, fun, active, friendly, clean, safe, green, well connected with good schools, universities and companies. Beaches one way, mountains the other. The result? Pressure. Lots of it.

"Housing supply simply hasn't kept up," Nacho explains. "That's the core issue. Demand keeps rising, but there's very little new stock, especially in the centre."

Properties priced correctly sell in days, sometimes hours, not even making it to a property website. But overpriced homes can sit for years. Signature's approach is unapologetically data driven. In valuations, they use official Land Registry data, analysing previous transactions. No inflated promises. No emotional pricing.

"Giving a seller false expectations helps no one," Nacho says. "If a buyer insists on a set price, we will oblige of course and then reset if necessary."

Foreign buyers

According to the Spanish Notaries Association, foreigners accounted for 20% of all property purchases in Spain in 2025, underlining Spain's ongoing appeal. And for Signature around 70% of their buyers are international.



Nacho's team works very hard to support these foreign clients with a team that speaks English, French, German, Russian, Ukrainian and some Asian languages.

Foreign buyers often arrive confused by the process. "Transparency before money," he insists. "Before a reservation fee (*senyal*) that accompanies a written price offer to a seller, I make sure they understand the legalities and a full understanding of the commitment. No regrets. And being a small owner managed business, I must be very careful with our own reputation, so it is as much in our interest as our clients that a transaction is a success."

Rentals: tight and regulated

If buying here is competitive, renting is brutal. Signature's business reflects that: 70% is sales "*compra-venta*" and 30% rentals and he believes this is typical for here.

"Rental supply is extremely limited," Nacho explains. "There are many regulations and increasingly tenant friendly. Most of Sant Cugat is classified as an area of "high rental tension" where restrictions apply including rent caps. Most rental properties here are owned by private landlords and they depend on this rental income. Faced with rent caps and uncertainty, many are opting for short-term rentals or choose not to rent at all adding to the empty housing stock. Professional landlords, meanwhile, are increasingly investing in Malaga, Madrid or Valencia, where taxes and regulations are lighter and the market is more liquid.

For tenants here, that means fierce competition to find somewhere to rent. For landlords, it means advice really matters."

More than property

What comes through strongest in talking to Nacho isn't legal and market knowledge, impressive though that is, but how personal the job is for him.

"I love helping people through big life moments," he says. "Upsizing, downsizing, moving to a new country. All that needs empathy. These are emotional decisions and we recognise that."

Nacho and his team can also help their clients with airport pickups, school meetings, NIE's, *empadronamiento*, currency as well as preparing the house for move-in day. Nacho has even advised clients not to buy or sell when timing was not ideal or he has heard rumours of a development next door. Success, for him, isn't just signing a deal. It's knowing the client feels informed and supported, making the right decision at the right price.

"And it's important to me that our whole team feels ownership of the client and our success. We avoid rigid hierarchy at Signature. Everyone is in it together."

"I genuinely love my job," Nacho says. "Eighteen-hour days don't feel long when you care." And in a market as intense as Sant Cugat's, that kind of care may be the most valuable asset of all.

Buying a home in Spain: the simple timeline

1) View + shortlist

Decide your non-negotiables (area, light, parking, outdoor space, commute).

2) Make an offer

Often put in writing with a proposed price and timeline.

3) Reserve ("*senyal*")

A payment to take the property off the market. It can come with real commitments - make sure you understand the terms before you transfer anything.

4) Checks + paperwork

Documents are reviewed, conditions clarified, and potential surprises reduced.

5) Contract stage (often "*arras*")

A more formal agreement sets out the price, timing, and what happens if either side pulls out.

6) Notary + completion

You sign in front of a notary, ownership transfers, and then it's keys, utilities and move-in admin.

Note: Terminology and steps can vary. A good professional should explain each one in plain language before you commit.



WHY DO WE SAY THAT?

It's About Time

An etymological look at the story behind the language – by Ian Gibbs

As we'll be changing the clocks on the 29th of March this year, it only seems fair to talk about hours, years and time in general. After all, time is such an integral part of everyday life that it's hard to imagine not knowing it. Imagine... no phone, no watch, no clock on the wall. Just a vague feeling it's getting late. For most of human history, if you were out in the fields or hunting in the woods, "what time is it?" was basically "how far is the sun from doing that disappearing act?"

Which is why the village bell was such a big deal. Church bells didn't just call you to prayer - they were the original public notifications: ding... it's an hour. So here's that lovely linguistic bit: the word **clock** is nothing to do with our current concept of what you see on the wall, its original meaning was bell (via medieval Latin for bell: **clocca** - possibly borrowed from the similar Celtic **klokkos**). So when we say "two o'clock," we're really saying "two of the bell," and that tiny apostrophe is just the spectre of the missing "the." The ghost in the clockwork.

Now, **hours**. We treat them as fixed, obedient chunks - but did you know they weren't always so well-behaved? The ancient Egyptians are widely credited with formalising the idea of dividing the day into 24 parts, but in a way that would horrify modern commuters: it was 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of night-time... regardless of season! That means a summer daylight "hour" would be longer than a winter one. On the one hand: wonderful for not having to get up in the dark. On the other: a nightmare for working out train timetables.

The word **hour** itself comes down to us through Latin from ancient Greek **hōra**, meaning a "season" or "period" of time - not necessarily a neat sixty-minute box. Meanwhile, the equivalent in Old English was **tīd** (pronounced roughly "teed"), and it still pops up today as tide in the expressions: high tide / low tide (a maritime cycle), Yuletide (winter



festival season), Whitsuntide (Pentecost season), and tidings - literally "news of the times."

Then there's our chronological obsession with 12 and 60. The Egyptians loved 12 (months, zodiac-style divisions, and so on), while the Babylonians preferred 60, which is why we have 60 minutes in an hour, in Latin if you divided an hour by 60 you got little pieces of time adoringly called '**pars minuta prima**' ("first small part") simplified to **minutes**. However if you divided by 60 again you got '**pars minuta secunda**' ("second small parts") or **seconds**! And yes, there were even "third small parts" at one point (but society decided life was too short to bother with them).

Finally, the bigger chunks: a **month** comes from a 'moon', referring to its roughly 29-day cycle, and **week** comes from Old English **wucu**, linked to the idea of "turning" - as in the *turning* of lunar phases.

So this month when you're grumbling about getting up that one hour earlier, you're not just rejigging a number. You're hearing bells, watching moons, borrowing Babylonian maths, and carrying around a pocketful of ancient languages - one tick at a time.



MEET-UP

Kvass, Pizza and New Friends:**A Night at Fermenteria Smakelig**

On a cold and damp January evening, Fermenteria Smakelig opened its doors (and its jars!) to host our Simply Sant Cugat January Meetup, and what followed was exactly what these gatherings are all about: good people, great conversation, and a shared sense that community doesn't just happen... we make it.

Around 35 of us came along, a joyful blend of familiar faces and first-timers. If you ever needed proof that Sant Cugat is beautifully international, this was it thanks to **Steve, Sonya, Steve, Lynn, Gabi, Katrien, Ines, Johannes, Jude, Helen, Virginia, Dani, Candela, Jinguo, Charlie, Sharon, Toby, Aurora, Rohit, Karen, Millie, Johan and Inga** - a wide range of nationalities including Catalan, Spanish, English, American, Norwegian, Russian, Ukrainian, German and Dutch voices - the kind of multilingual hum that instantly makes you feel you're in the right place.

We began with a little moment of excitement: the February edition of Simply Sant Cugat, still hot off the press. There's something oddly magical about seeing a new issue revealed for the first time - real paper, fresh ink, and a room full of people who are genuinely curious about what's inside. It turned into a perfect conversation-starter: what people read first, which articles they were excited about, and what they'd love to see in future editions.

But the true headline experience of the night was, when Mariia and Joachim, our gracious hosts, laid out a generous sampling of fermented foods and drinks that felt like a guided tour through Smakelig's world: different ferments, breads, and even their speciality pizza. And yes... the Navideño Kvass, a naturally fizzy drink, earned its own mini fan club. It was one of those tastings where every new bite led to another question, another recommendation, another "try this one!"

Alongside the food and drink, Mariia also gave a short presentation about what Smakelig does - and it was inspiring to hear the story and craft behind



the flavours. The rest of the evening unfolded naturally into what meetups should be: relaxed networking, introductions that turned into real conversations, old friends catching up, and new connections being made without any awkwardness.

People summed it up simply and perfectly: "A great idea", "Lovely to meet people", and many mentioned how welcoming Mariia and Joachim were as hosts.

If you missed this one, come to the next. The next Simply Sant Cugat Meetup will be Wed 25th March at Casa Parra (Rbla. Ribatallada, 4). Bring your curiosity (and maybe a friend) and leave with a few new contacts, fresh local ideas, and that lovely warm feeling that Sant Cugat can feel more like home when you meet the people in it.

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ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT

XDESC: 10 Years of Not Doing It Alone

Successful networking without the myth



Mireia Cudinó (far right) and the board of XDESC: Xarxa de Dones Empresàries i Emprendedores de Sant Cugat

It started with a simple coffee

A few women in Sant Cugat realised they almost never talked about what they did professionally - at least not in a way that sparked ideas, collaboration or confidence. So they organised another meet-up. The second time, 70 women turned up.

"That's when it became obvious," says Mireia Cudinó, president of XDESC (Xarxa de Dones Empresàries i Emprendedores de Sant Cugat). "Why don't we form a group?" Ten years later, that coffee has become a network of around 100 members, and 2026 is a milestone year: their 10th anniversary, which they plan to celebrate with the Town Hall.

It's a lovely origin story. But it matters now because XDESC has become something practical: a fast-track into community and professional life, especially for women who arrive in Sant Cugat from elsewhere and don't yet have a network. And Mireia is clear about one thing: networks don't work by magic. You have to show up.

A soft landing for women arriving from abroad

If you've ever moved to a new place - new language, new admin, no contacts - you'll recognise the

feeling: you can be capable and motivated... and still feel stuck. That's exactly the gap XDESC wants to fill.

"What would I say to someone who comes from outside, even from another country, and wants to start a business but doesn't know anyone?" Mireia repeats my question, then answers without hesitation: "If she comes to the network, we pick her up. We say: 'Don't worry - what do you need?'"

It's not just encouragement. It's a connector mindset. Need help with a website, brand basics, photos, legal or fiscal questions, finances? "We have different profiles," she says. "You can need them at any moment."

And because not everyone is ready to network in Catalan or Spanish on day one, XDESC also runs a Xarxa Internacional session every two months, 100% in English, hosted at Casal Torrelblanca. The idea is simple: arrive, meet people, and leave with at least one useful next step.

Crucially, XDESC isn't isolated from the town. They collaborate with the Ajuntament, and sometimes municipal staff attend meet-ups. Mireia recalls a



moment that captures the value: a foreign woman had opened a physiotherapy centre and wanted to explore working with the Town Hall. A municipal technician was present at the same event - so Mireia simply introduced them on the spot.

Sant Cugat is full of opportunity, but knowing the pathways - who to speak to, which doors exist, how to get started - can be the hard part. A network that helps you navigate that is priceless.

From coffee meet-ups to real collaboration

Ask Mireia what XDESC is for, and she outlines a clear mission: create networking spaces that lead to collaboration; build alliances with other women's networks in nearby towns; increase visibility for members; and offer workshops and training that help women grow.

But the most important word she uses is support.

"Starting a business is lonely," she says.

"You're often on your own. Finding women in the same situation - some who've already been through it - is enriching. You feel supported. They can give you advice."

If she comes to the network, we pick her up. We say: 'Don't worry - what do you need?'

That support isn't only about referrals. It's also about confidence. Mireia joined four or five years ago as a member. Later she was invited onto the board, and when the previous president stepped back to refocus professionally, Mireia took the role (around February). She describes herself as a "connector": listening, spotting links, and putting the right people in touch.

It's also worth remembering that XDESC is run by volunteers. "The women who make the network function do it altruistically," Mireia explains. They meet regularly, organise events, host trainings, and keep the momentum going because they believe the project genuinely adds value.

The myth-busting truth: you don't get results by joining... you get results by participating

Now for the part of Mireia's interview that will be most useful for readers.

Yes, XDESC is welcoming. Yes, it can open doors. But she's direct about a common

misunderstanding: some people join expecting the network to deliver business automatically.

"That's difficult," she says. "You have to be proactive. You have to come to events. You have to make yourself known."

She describes a familiar pattern: someone signs up, doesn't attend anything, doesn't build relationships, then complains they "got nothing" and leaves. "But they didn't participate," she says. "You haven't seen them. You don't even know who they are."

In other words, the network isn't a vending machine. It's a living community. It works when you show up, introduce yourself, listen, ask, offer help, follow up - and keep coming back.

To support that, XDESC shares opportunities actively, including a WhatsApp group where they post events they're invited to, and connections into wider business life in the area. For someone new to

town, that flow of invitations can be the difference between "I should network" and "I actually met people and something started happening."

10 years old, still growing

The 10th anniversary celebration will be a moment of visibility: a chance to honour what began with a coffee and to show what the network has become. Mireia hints at a larger event with the Town Hall, with speakers, a roundtable, and presidents of other women's associations - plus, naturally, networking.

There's also a nearer date in the diary: 8 March, International Women's Day, which XDESC will mark with a simple toast at Somewhere café.

Their ambition is straightforward: grow the network, grow its visibility, and attract more talent. Their goal had been to end 2025 with 100 members. They began 2026 with 100. Now Mireia's looking ahead: "If we could reach 150 this year, that'd be great."

If you're a woman in Sant Cugat thinking about starting something - especially if you've moved here and don't yet have your people - the invitation is simple: come along, meet others, ask for what you need, and most importantly, participate. Because sometimes, all it takes to change your professional life is... a coffee.



BONS MOTS

Qui vulgui peix

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

One of our favourite Catalan sayings is...

Qui vulgui peix que es mulli el cul.

(Whoever wants fish, has to get their backside wet.)

It's cheeky, blunt, but above all, it's wise. Because behind the image of someone wading into cold water for dinner is the fact that most of the things we say we want are on the other side of discomfort.

In Sant Cugat, it's easy to build a life that's comfortable on the surface but rather narrow. You know the routine: familiar cafés, familiar faces, familiar language. Comfort isn't the enemy, it's a human need. The problem is when comfort becomes a cage with velvet bars. That's when the proverb turns from a rude joke into a personal challenge.

Think of what "getting a bit uncomfortable" actually looks like. It's walking into a room where you don't know anyone and saying hello anyway. It's trying Catalan (or Spanish) in the bakery even if your grammar is wobbly and your accent feels like it's wearing fancy dress. It's joining a club, volunteering, showing up to a meetup, putting your hand up in a meeting, sending the email you're overthinking, or asking the "stupid" question that turns out to be the important one.

The funny thing is: we often imagine discomfort is a sign we're doing something wrong. But discomfort is frequently a sign we're doing something new. And "new" is where life expands. New skills. New friendships. New confidence. New stories. The price of entry is that slightly sweaty moment when your brain whispers, "Don't. You'll look silly."

This isn't a call to become fearless.

Fear is normal.

The proverb isn't saying "be brave"; it's saying "be willing." Willing to look a bit awkward. Willing to be a beginner. Willing to be misunderstood for ten seconds so you can be understood for the next ten



years. Willing to trade a little dignity today for a lot of freedom tomorrow.

There's also something wonderfully realistic about it. It doesn't promise shortcuts. It doesn't flatter you with "manifesting" and "positive energy." It says: if you want the fish, you have to step into the water. That's it. Not punishment, just reality. Effort is not a moral failing; it's the natural companion of anything meaningful.

So here's a little experiment for this month. Pick one small thing you want - a stronger sense of community, better language confidence, a healthier habit, a bolder creative project - and then choose one small discomfort that matches it. One conversation. One class. One invitation. One honest question. One early morning. One awkward first attempt.

Because the proverb's real gift isn't the fish. It's the person you become on the way to catching it.



SIMPLY 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?

Something is
in the air.

Romance?

Pollen.

My eyes!

Stop doing
that.

I can't!

Oh, no...

WACHOOOOOOO!

Sorry.

Welcome to
spring.

AN EASTER BUNNY STORY

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?

ZOEYCREPTINTOTHEKITCHENBEFORESUNRISEALREADYIMAGIN
INGCHOCOLATEEASTERALWAYSFELTLIKEMAGICAQUIETHOUSEH
IDDENEGBSANDTHEMYSTERYOFHOWTHEYARRIVEDBUTTHISYEAR
ONTHETABLEWASATINYSIGNNEXTTOANEMPTYPLATEEASTERBUN
NIESONSTRIKETOOMANYHOUSESNOTENOUGHCARROTSSMALLMUD
DPAWPRINTSCROSSEDTHETILESANDVANISHEDBEHINDTHECUR
TAINZOEYDIDNTPANICSHEWASHEDTHEBIGGESTCARROTSCHECOU
LDFINDANDPLACEDITONTHEPLATELIKEANOFFERINGMINUTESL
ATERANEATPILEOFEGGSAPPEAREDPLUSAFEWHIDDENINHERFAV
OURITEPLACESINSIDEHERMUGUNDERTHEFRUITBOWLBEHINDTH
ECEREALONTHETOPEGGWASACARROTSHAPEDSTAMPHOUSEAPPRO
VEDBYTHEDOORSHEFOUNDTHECARROTSTALKZOEYSMILEDTHEMA
GICHADNTVANISHEDITHADSIMPLYASKEDTOBETREATEDKINDLY

SIMPLY COLOUR

Pau, Anna and Maria are out looking for Easter eggs, but they have been surrounded by more Easter bunnies than they were expecting and they don't have enough carrots for all of them. Things might turn nasty. Can you help by adding some colour to the picture?



Simply Jokes

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

Why was the fluffy rabbit miserable?

How can you find out the Easter Bunny's location?

It was having a bad hare day.

Why do rabbits make the best mathematicians?

I think I'm a spelling mistake

What do you get if you cross a rabbit with an elephant?

To get to the hopposite side.

Where do rabbits go after their wedding?

A receding hare line

What's a rabbit's favourite type of music?

They are great at multiplying.

A hoptimist!

What did the rabbit say to people in the synagogue?

What do you call a bunny who always sees the glass half full?

Hip-hop

A flat rabbit.

What do you call a queue of rabbits hopping backwards?

Why did the rabbit cross the road?

On their bunny-moon.

Eggs mark the spot!



CULTURE CORNER

The Return of 'Experiències Úniques'

Four days of behind-the-scenes guided tours



Our monthly cultural recommendations have been spectacular. We've dressed up for Beethoven's Ninth, been enchanted by *El Cant de la Sibila*, chilled out to Sunday night jazz at the *Auditori*, sighed through *La Traviata* and even rocked out with Elliott Murphy. Big stages, velvet seats, standing ovations.

This month, however, we're swapping the auditorium for something even more exciting: access.

From Thursday 19th to Sunday 22nd March, the *Ajuntament de Sant Cugat* once again throws open the doors of the city for the fifth edition of *Experiències Úniques*. For four days, we can sign up for free, expert-led tours of some of the most fascinating and usually off-limits places in town.

Last year's edition had 21 organisations and 43 tours including visiting our own particle accelerator at the ALBA Synchrotron, submarine engineering at Triton and an inside view of pharmaceutical innovation at Uriach

and Boehringer Ingelheim. We also expect to see included this year high-tech innovation at HP, the infrastructure backbone of Oxigen Data Center, to food production at Europastry and the studios of RTVE. Add in the tours of public institutions like the *Ajuntament* and the *Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya* and there is enough activity to give you four days of interest, learning and exploration.

The best part? These aren't superficial visits. They're guided by experts and are real.

Details and sign-ups are available from the Tourist Office by the Monastery or on the official site:

<https://visit.santcugat.cat/es/experiencias-unicas/>

Or simply search *Experiències Úniques Sant Cugat del Vallès* and prepare to see your town differently.

(Note: Tours are offered in different languages depending on the venue; check the 'Idioma' field on each visit when booking.)

Picture Crossword Answers

Rose	Pansy	Thistle	Buttercup
Broom	Poppy	Daffodil	Dandelion
Daisy	Tulip	Geranium	Sunflower

Find Gimby Answer

If you haven't been able to spot Gimby, our paranoid pig, try looking on page 26 again.



LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

Community Beats Convenience**3 Entrepreneurs Share what it's like doing business in Sant Cugat**

Inez del Prado



Maria Arango



Christin Jaesch

Every year, the 8th March reminds that “professional women” isn’t a niche category - it’s half the town. So this month, we asked three women about what it’s really like to build a working life in Sant Cugat.

Why?

Because even if most of our readers are not about to set up a business here, these answers reveal something bigger: how Sant Cugat works - how trust is built, how people connect, and why “quality of life” here is about far more than just green spaces and good coffee.

Inez del Prado is a freelance **photographer** specialising in branding photography and events. She helps people and organisations show their best side - capturing moments worth keeping and images that help a business feel real and human.

Maria Arango, founder of WISE Barcelona, helps companies and entrepreneurs build **marketing and communication strategies** with clarity, consistency and purpose - sustainably, without the padding.

Christin Jaesch is a **chiropractor** and owner of Centre Quiropràctic Sant Cugat, focused on spine and nervous system care through gentle chiropractic adjustments - supporting patients who want to feel better in their bodies and live with more ease.

Three very different professions. And yet, their answers resonate in harmony. Which brings us to the first big lesson.

1) In Sant Cugat, trust crosses the town before advertising puts its coat on

If you’re ever wondering why one local business seems to have a queue of customers and another has a loud Instagram but no footfall, we get a clear explanation: Sant Cugat is a trust-driven town.

María puts it bluntly: here, “reputation carries more weight than any campaign.” You can spend money polishing your image - but if your work doesn’t match it, the town will notice. Sant Cugat is connected. The same names come up in school playground conversations, sports clubs, and, of course, WhatsApp groups.

Christin sees this daily. About half her clients arrive through personal recommendations: family members, neighbours, parents groups. The other half often come via Google reviews - another form of public word-of-mouth. Either way, the message is the same: people choose based on other people’s experience.

Inez echoes this too, describing Sant Cugat as social and relationship-based: it’s “not what you know, but who you know.” That can sound a bit cynical, but her point is more human than political. People want to feel safe. They’d rather trust a recommendation than a sales pitch.

What this means for all of us as residents: If you’re looking for a reliable service (whether it’s a dentist, a plumber, or a language teacher) ask someone. A



neighbour. A workmate. A parent at your school. Then cross-check with reviews. In a town like this, trust is rarely accidental.

2) The village-city paradox: friendly, charming... but a little hard to “enter”

Inez says it perfectly: Sant Cugat “acts as a city but has the feel of a village.” That’s the magic. It’s also the challenge.

On the plus side, the town has the services and professional standards you’d expect from somewhere much bigger. It attracts new businesses, multinationals, and people with serious skills. María describes a “highly skilled and demanding professional ecosystem”, which is a polite way of saying: people here notice quality.

But the village feel also means there’s a “core” community that can feel hard to enter, especially if you’re international or new. Inez is honest about this: it’s not always easy to break into the local business community, and the only solution is to step out of your bubble. Her advice isn’t glamorous, but it’s real: mingle through school, sports clubs, and local networks. In other words, don’t just live near Sant Cugat - live in it.

María describes the same dynamic in different language: closeness and immediacy are valuable, and you lose something essential if you move away - even just 10 km. It’s not only about geography. It’s about density of relationships.

What this means for all of us: If you’ve ever felt like “Everyone seems to know everyone and I’m not sure where I fit,” you’re not alone. The town can be warm and closed at the same time. The “door” tends to open through repeated contact: being a regular somewhere, joining one group, or showing up consistently. Not with pressure. With patience.

3) Language isn’t a test, it’s a connection

A lovely thread running through these interviews is how language signals belonging.

Inez says English helped her professionally because not all local photographers are confident in it. But she’s equally clear that she wouldn’t be where she is without Catalan. She remembers celebrating her first Catalan client “big time.” That’s not only a business milestone; it’s a belonging milestone.

Christin experiences the same from the other side of the counter: her Catalan patients enjoy it when

she speaks to them in Catalan. It makes them feel seen. And her practice is proudly international. So she’s constantly switching languages to connect better.

María, working naturally in Spanish and Catalan and often in English, highlights something subtle but important: local culture values keeping one’s word. That is also a form of language - behavioural language. Reliability communicates.

What this means: You don’t need perfect Catalan. You need intention. A few phrases, used kindly and regularly, change the temperature of everyday life. It’s not about passing a test. It’s about opening doors that would otherwise stay closed.

4) Community is the real luxury

This may be the most surprising takeaway: the real “premium feature” of Sant Cugat isn’t just the location. It’s the community infrastructure (formal and informal) that makes life smoother.

Inez talks about spontaneous coffee meetups and after-work drinks with collaborators. Christin has built a one-person business model supported by an efficient system: online booking, WhatsApp follow-ups - structures that respect people’s time. María finds that sharing knowledge (through training and networks) builds trust faster than selling ever could.

Even the challenges (rent costs, competition, traffic, parking) become manageable when people are connected and helping each other. Coworking spaces become not just a practical solution, but a social one. Networks (like XDESC, see page 12) become both community and opportunity. Support from the town hall becomes meaningful because people actually use it.

So here’s a good question for 8th March: what if professional women’s day isn’t only about celebrating individuals (important though that is), but also celebrating the invisible structures women build (networks, systems, support, reliability) that make a town function better for everyone?

Because when you zoom out, the lesson from these three entrepreneurs is simple: In Sant Cugat, community beats convenience.

And if you go with that - trust, belonging, language, showing up - you don’t just find better services. You find a better life.

SIMPLY SPORT

Flashh**Sant Cugat's bouldering boom – by Aston Swift**

Bouldering has been climbing its way into gyms across the globe, and Sant Cugat has its very own indoor hub. Flashh Bouldering is a vibrant space for climbers of all levels. I spoke to my son Sebastian, a regular at the gym, to get a first-hand sense of what makes Flashh special and to understand why this fast-growing sport is proving so popular, especially among teenagers. I also spoke with Gerd Langhof, former professional climber and founder of the Flashh chain and Hamburg's first bouldering gym, Salon du Bloc.

"White, yellow, green, blue, red, black," Sebastian says, pointing to the colour-coded routes. "I'm usually on blue and red. If I'm lucky, they set a doable black that really tests me." The term flash refers to completing a new route on the first attempt, while the second h is Gerd's nod to Hamburg.

Bouldering may not yet rival padel in popularity in Spain, but it's gaining devotees. "Do you need to be strong, flexible or good with balance?" I ask. "A bit of everything. It's a mix of climbing, parkour and coordination. Beginners have immediate fun. You start on white, move on to yellow and off you go. Progress is clear and measurable. Maybe that's why bouldering attracts analytical minds. But honestly speaking, I think the geometry and dynamic movements are what hook you."

A glance around the gym confirms this: a maze of shapes, colours and angles. To newcomers, the walls look chaotic, but the colour coding is key. Each hold belongs to a specific route, carefully designed for its level. Routes begin with two triangles marking the starting handholds, and climbers follow that colour to the top, touching the final hold with both hands. Then it's back down or a controlled jump onto the mats. Repeat, refine, and eventually move up a level. "No cheating," Sebastian laughs. "Stick to your colours." I have tried it several times and can manage greens pretty



well with the occasional (easy) blue which gives me sheer delight and massive praise from Sebastian.

Are harder routes just about wider gaps between holds? "Not at all," he says. "That would be boring. Every route is unique. The route setter is the most important person in the gym. If routes aren't changed regularly, people lose interest." It's a skill Sebastian only truly appreciated after visiting other gyms. "Some just aren't as fun as Flashh. At my university gym in the UK, they haven't changed the routes in ages. And it's frustrating."

Climbers often talk about their projects. "I have one here I'm currently working on," Sebastian explains. "A project is just beyond your current ability. You might spend a whole session on one route, visualising the moves, watching others try it, especially the dynamic jumps." Staff members often step in with encouragement or tips, but the joy of completing a project is hard to beat. "There's often applause. I always repeat it to make sure it wasn't a fluke."

What about injuries? Gerd is pragmatic. “Like any sport, they can happen. But this is indoors, the walls are 4.5 metres and we have the best quality matting. Beginners rarely get hurt. It’s usually experienced climbers with finger injuries or Sebastian who refuses to stop until his skin starts to rub off and we have to give him plasters!”

So why is Flashh so special to you Sebastian? “It was the first place I learnt to boulder properly. I always loved climbing. If we were near the cliffs on the beach, I would head straight for them while others would go into the sea. My grandfather encouraged my mum to take me to Barcelona when I was 8 to learn parkour so I could learn to climb and jump safely. Bouldering was the natural next step. We found Flashh by chance. I’d never seen such a colourful and spacious gym that was not daunting to youngsters. It doesn’t smell of sweat, the music’s good and the people are so friendly. And every age, even your age, dad. But a lot of people my age. I loved it. Climbing isn’t a solo sport. You often go alone, but once there you are never alone. We watch each other climb, give tips and encourage one another.”

Some walls look easy. Others fearsome, with some overhanging at 45 degrees and they provide a mix of static and dynamic climbing challenges. “You’ve got dynos, where all four limbs leave the wall,” Sebastian explains, “and static moves that test patience and control.”

When I visited, there was Latin music playing softly in the background, adding a lively rhythm to the climbs and helping to set the cool vibe. There is no dress code and the only technical equipment you need are shoes, which you can hire and chalk to keep the holds grippy.

“They even have a ‘Boulder of the Week,’” Sebastian says. “If you make it, you get a free drink. You are meant to film it on one of the many tripods lying around, but I often forget and still get the drink.”

The gym is located just behind Mercantic. The warehouse used to make motorcycles. After

success in Hamburg, Gerd with wife Agnes and friend Henry, looked throughout Spain, Portugal and Italy for their first international expansion, settling on Sant Cugat in 2020. With local partners and over a million euros invested, Flashh Sant Cugat quickly became a reality. “The space was perfect for our community-focused approach,” Gerd explains. And what’s next? “Once Sant Cugat is stable, we’ll look at another gym. Anywhere is possible.”

Flashh attracts everyone from teenagers to retirees. “You don’t need to be a bodybuilder.” Says Gerd. “It’s about balance, flexibility and enjoyment.” The place is often busy hosting climbers as well as kids parties with a couple of dedicated safe children’s sections with fun routes and the soft landing zones for them to learn balance and confidence.

Globally, bouldering continues to grow. From its outdoor roots in the UK’s Peak District and Fontainebleau in France to iconic gyms like The Climbing Works in Sheffield and Sharma Climbing in Barcelona. The sport has surged in popularity, especially since climbing entered the Olympics in 2020. Athletes like Janja Garnbret and Adam Ondra are inspiring a new generation including Sebastian who follows them on social media.

For Sebastian and his friends, Flashh is more than a gym. It’s a playground, a mental and fitness challenge and a social hub. “The routes are creative, the space is amazing and the atmosphere is great.” You come for the climbing, but it’s the company that makes you stay.”



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NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

Dionisos: A taste of Greek street food

By Sue Harrand

Sant Cugat's international dining scene has a vibrant new addition with the opening of a Greek restaurant conveniently located near Sant Cugat Centre railway station. After weeks of anticipation sparked by the *Kalimera* sign outside, the restaurant officially opened its doors on 1st Feb. Led by a friendly and passionate Greek team, this is the fourth restaurant in the **Dionisos** family, the others are located in Barcelona's El Born and El Eixample, and another in Madrid.

The moment you step inside, the simple décor transports you to a Greek taverna: bright, clean, and inviting, with blue and white walls. The two large gyros at the entrance might trick you into thinking that this is just another kebab joint, but don't be fooled, the menu is far more ambitious, varied, and thoughtfully put together.

Disguised as regular customers to avoid special treatment, I visited with two Greek friends, perfect culinary companions to help judge authenticity. We were not disappointed! The experience felt charming and personal: our placemats encouraged us to write our names using the Greek alphabet and learn some simple phrases.

The menu itself is impressively varied, with something for everyone. From Greek classics, such as **Pita bread** filled with **Gyros** meat and **Moussaka**, and many dishes suitable for vegetarians.

We chose a mix of dishes so we could taste a bit of each. A firm favourite was **Melitzanosalata**, a smoked aubergine dip served with pita, which was delicious and satisfyingly chunky. Our Greek friends were particularly impressed with the **Spanakopita**, a feta and spinach dish they make at home very week. They described the Dionisos version as "excellent". The **Halloumi** was perfectly cooked, not overly salty, and packed with flavour, and the tongue twisting **Kolokithokeftedes** (fried courgette



and feta balls) were light and tasty. Almost every dish arrived with a beautifully prepared side salad, or some yoghurt **tzatziki** or delicious roasted cherry tomatoes.

The **Vegetarian Moussaka** didn't win us over, but the desserts made up for it. We tried a mixed selection, and for us, the **Greek yoghurt** was the undeniable star, closely followed by the homemade honey and pistachio **Baklava**, and the **Kataifi**, topped with shredded filo strands and drizzled with honey.

They were clearly having a busy night, with every table filled, so service was a little slow. But the staff's genuine kindness and attentiveness more than compensated and almost all members, including the chef, came by to greet us and genuinely wanted to know our thoughts. They were clearly proud of their food.

All in all we loved our evening at Dionisos, it was authentic, friendly with delicious fresh and tasty food and at 25-30€ a head it was good value for money. We'll definitely be returning. "*Kali Oreksi!*"

DIONISOS SANT CUGAT: c. Valldoreix, 73



NEW PROJECT

Are you one of the 42?

By William Graham Stewart

If you've ever read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and smiled at the idea that "42" might be the answer to life, the universe, and everything, you'll get the spirit of a new project arriving in Sant Cugat del Vallès this spring.

The Hitchhikers Guide to Sant Cugat is part of a wider international experiment called **Hitchhikers Guides to Earth**. It's inspired by Douglas Adams and supported by his estate and friends. The ambition is both simple and bold: bring people together to explore how we might live, relate, and even "do community" differently in a complex, uncertain world - without losing our sense of play.

In Catalunya, the goal is to gradually gather a group of 42 people who are willing to be "seriously playful" about collaboration. That might sound grand, but the real-life version is refreshingly down to earth: conversations, events, and shared projects, with a particular welcome for people who enjoy writing. The idea is to research, write, and publish guides - practical and reflective - about what we're learning as we listen to each other and try new ways of working together.

There's also a bigger backdrop for those who like their ideas with a bit of scaffolding. This local group would connect to an international network building an open-source, mutually owned "digital commons" - a shared space where what's created together stays accessible and belongs to the community, not a platform. You don't need to be technical to join; it's simply the long-term container for the stories, insights, and experiments that emerge.

And why Sant Cugat? I think it's an unusually rich place for this sort of thing: a town full of languages, cultures, and life stories, especially within its international community. That diversity makes it fertile ground for listening well, thinking together, and testing small prototypes that might help us live better - right here, and possibly beyond.



Open meetings (especially for those interested in writing) take place every **Tuesday at 20:00** at **Smakelig** from March. If you love writing or if you're just curious, intrigued, (or quietly wondering whether you might be one of the 42), message me, Graham on WhatsApp: 658 366 933.



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COFFEE BREAK

Simple Bilingual Crossword

Time to test your basic vocabulary

Meet our new Bilingual Crossword - a fun way to practise English and Catalan without it feeling like homework.

Across (Horizontals): the clues are in Catalan, and the answers are the English translations.

Down (Verticals): the clues are in English, and the answers are the Catalan translations.

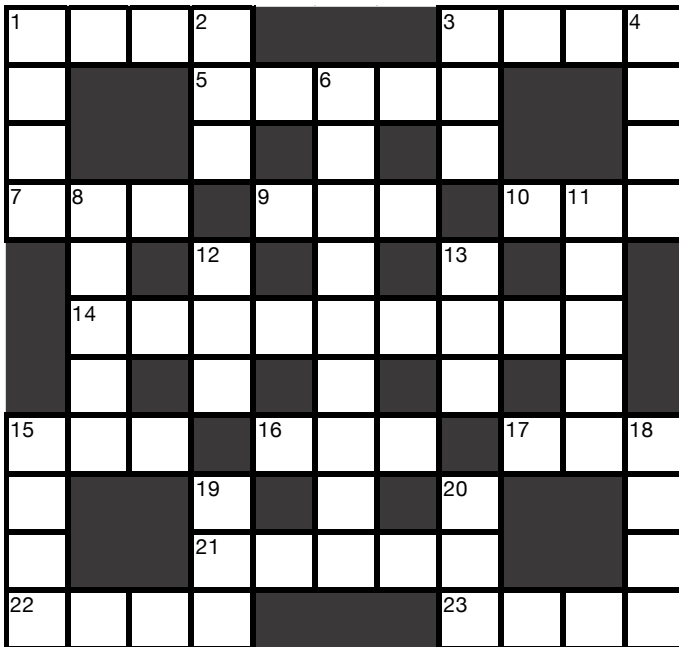
You don't need to be "good at crosswords" to enjoy it. Start with the words you already know, use the grid to help you guess the rest, and let a few new words sneak into your vocabulary. Do it solo with a coffee, or turn it into a mini-challenge with a friend (or a patient family member).

Most of all: expect a few "Ohhh, that's how you say it!" moments - which is the best kind of learning.

CLUES (PISTES)

Horizontals (Across): 1. Pàgina, 3. Nom 5. Gran 7. Cendra 9. Preguntar 10. Home 14. Microones 15. Agulla 16. Menjava 17. Pernil 21. Perdedor 22. Malvat 23. Mal (... de cap)

Down (Verticals): 1. Little 2. He 3. Clean 4. They were 6. Answers 8. Dream 11. Sand 12. Leisure 13. Head 15. Father 18. Mother 19. Eye 20. Anger



Across/Horizontals: 1. Page 3. Name 5. Large 7. Ash. 9. Ask 10. Man 14. Microwave 15. Pin 16. Ate 17. Ham 21. Loser 22. Evil 23. Ache Down/Verticals: 1. Poca 2. Ell 3. Net 4. Eren 6. Respostes 8. Somnit 11. Arena 12. Oct 13. Cap 15. Pare 18. Mare 19. Ull 20. Ina





HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) HOROSCOPE

100% March... 100% accurate... 100% Hairy Henry

Aries

Your patience will be tested by slow walkers and fast talkers. Solve it by carrying a card saying "I am calm!!!" in large red capitals. Avoid taking decisions for the month. Be like water... get drunk.

Taurus

You'll crave comfort, snacks, and moral superiority. Resist. Take one brave walk outdoors and pretend you're an explorer discovering "Trees" and "stones" and "Fresh Air." Wear more asymmetric clothing on even dates of the month.

Gemini

Two brilliant ideas will arrive at once, then immediately argue. Mediate like a tiny UN ambassador in your own head. Let the music guide you and relax. Your number this month is 8½.

Cancer

Your feelings will be so vivid they could be sold as theatre tickets. You will tend to talk too much. Lighten the load. Something intangible will influence you mid-month. Change teas.

Leo

Your charisma is set to "dazzle," but beware: you may accidentally start a cult. Use your powers for the greater good. Compliment three strangers and smile more. Buy less meat. Instead, invest in metal and small receptacles.

Virgo

March brings the unstoppable urge to over-organise. Chill out and be like a cloud. Celebrate your wins like you've conquered a continent. Make that call you've been putting off for ages. Save more paper.

Libra

Indecision will haunt you like a ghost. The again, it might not. When it comes to ordering, trust no one. Try looking at things from a different perspective. What do you notice? Lasagne is not your friend.

Scorpio

You'll notice hidden messages everywhere, including inside menus. Try to ignore them. Your intuition is sharp this month. Channel your ideas into action. Delete old photos. Get more sleep.

Sagittarius

Adventure calls, but money will be an issue. Focus locally. Investigate a new bakery. Spiritually this month will test you. Be nicer to the universe by listening more and eating with your mouth shut.

Capricorn

Your productivity will improve this month. Someone will confuse you for a celebrity. It's time to cut your toenails. Schedule one fun thing and treat it as sacred. A horse will show you the way.

Aquarius

Expect a sudden obsession for something niche. Lean in. You'll meet someone equally odd. You'll find something you didn't know you'd lost. Balance is the key for getting what you want. Spend your last 5 mins before sleep being good.

Pisces

Treat yourself this month. You deserve it. A misunderstanding will cause unnecessary suffering. Remember, age is just an attitude. Stay away from people in white coats. Eat rice.



OUT & ABOUT

The Mines of Gavà

Our bucket-list trip to Europe's oldest "gallery" mines - by Ian Gibbs



The Mines of Gavà have been on our bucket list for ages. I'd read enough to know they mattered - 6,000 years old, variscite, Europe's oldest underground galleries - and I arrived expecting something huge: mysterious caves disappearing into the distance, the kind of place where you turn a corner and whisper, "Wow."

That isn't what you get. The "wow" here isn't scale. It's time.

Small tunnels but a big story

After buying our tickets in the little souvenir shop, the visit begins with a guide's introductory talk. This, I realised, is the real spectacle: it frames what you're about to see. Without that framing, the tunnels risk feeling modest. With it, they feel like the visible tip of a much bigger human story.

We then listened to a short recording explaining the mineral that drove all this effort: variscite, a semi-precious grey-green stone used for ornaments. The visit is clearly trying to reset your expectations from "cave adventure" to "prehistoric ingenuity."

Handling 6,000-year-old problem-solvers

Next we sat on wooden benches for a show-and-tell session. The guide laid out replicas of the tools used thousands of years ago - digging, drilling, scraping - and handed them round for us to hold and pass along.

Oddly, this became the best part. There's something powerful about feeling the weight of a "solution" from a world with no metal, no electric light, and no second chances. You can't help asking: how do you mine rock with stone tools? How do you work underground when a mistake could trap you?

Helmets on, heads down

Then came the yellow plastic helmets and the underground section: a modest labyrinth replica, dimly lit with subtle lighting. I'm tall, and I can confirm the helmet earned its keep - I banged my head more times than I care to admit.

The tunnels do their job: atmospheric, occasionally tight, and just claustrophobic enough to make you notice your breathing. But for us there was no



cinematic moment. No chamber opening up. No sudden view down endless galleries. It's a steady sequence of low passages and small spaces designed to give you a flavour rather than overwhelm you.

Here and there, human bones and broken pottery have been placed in small recesses - quiet reminders that some mines were later reused as burial spaces. It's not spooky; it's simply sobering. The visit lasted about two hours, and we were 15 people - comfortable, not crowded, not rushed.

Our guide: knowledgeable, not magical

Our guide was a wiry older Catalan man nearing retirement who clearly knew his stuff. His facts felt solid and practised.

What he didn't do was paint pictures. I've had guides who can make you smell the smoke of a prehistoric lamp, feel the fear of a ceiling collapse, or imagine daily life around the mine: who worked, who traded, who wore the jewellery.

This guide delivered the knowledge. He didn't deliver the emotional film. And at Gavà, that matters, because the greatness is conceptual: people were doing complex underground mining here 6,000 years ago, in a world where life expectancy was around 30.

The vanishing concrete

One anecdote that stood out. The site, we were told, was rediscovered when modern builders poured concrete for the foundations of a block of flats...and the concrete kept disappearing into the ground. That's when they realised the earth below was riddled with voids.

It's a perfect collision of time periods: the 20th century trying to build over the Neolithic, and the Neolithic calmly swallowing the evidence.

The museum: artefacts and an "ugly" Venus

After the underground section, we explored displays of artefacts: bones, tools, ornaments. This is where the place becomes tangible again. It isn't just "a mine"; it's a social world of work, trade, belief, and death.

And yes, we met the star object: the Venus of Gavà. I'll be honest - she's an ugly little abstract ceramic figure, a distorted female form that might be interpreted as pregnant. But she's fascinating precisely because she isn't trying to be pretty. She feels like an object made to mean something, not to decorate a shelf.

Variscite itself, for anyone wondering, struck me as a muted greyish-green, lighter in the hand than I expected.

Our verdict, and how it could be better

Of the "Out & About" places we've covered so far, this was the least enjoyable - not because it isn't important, but because the visitor experience doesn't fully deliver the importance.

What would help: clearer expectation-setting (this isn't a giant cave adventure), more storytelling from the guide, and better-maintained displays (several buttons appeared to do nothing, which quietly breaks immersion).

I'm pleased we went - Gavà is only about 30 minutes from Sant Cugat - and the story is extraordinary. But if visitors are to feel full value for money, the *Ajuntament* of Gavà may need to decide what it wants this experience to be: facts delivered, or history felt.

What I'd tell a friend

Go for the 6,000-year story, not epic tunnels. Read a little beforehand so the history hits harder. And if you're over 1,80m ... wear the helmet proudly.

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LANGUAGE LEARNING HACKS

Language Exchange Group

The Best Free Teacher in Sant Cugat - by Ian Gibbs

If you're learning a language (especially Catalan, Spanish, or English) then one of the best language learning hacks is to join a language exchange group - a social group where people get together to test drive their new language.

Most language learners simply don't get enough real speaking practice. We read, we listen, we do an app, we tell ourselves we're "improving"... and then the moment comes to speak to a real living human and our brain goes into meltdown. Language exchanges fix that. Not in a stressful classroom way, but in a very human way: you're surrounded by people just like yourself who get it. They're sympathetic, supportive, and usually going through the same awkward phase as you are.

In an exchange group, you can control your pace. You can start small, keep it simple, repeat yourself, laugh at your mistakes, and gradually build up the confidence to say what you actually mean - not just what you can safely say.

That said, language exchanges have three classic obstacles.

First: turning up. The first leap is the hardest - like jumping into an outdoor pool. You hover at the edge, you overthink it, you imagine it will be painfully awkward... but then you're in, and it's absolutely fine. Honestly, once you've walked through the door, the hardest part is over.

Second: sticking to your own language. It's so tempting. You meet someone interesting and before you know it you're chatting away in the comfortable language, telling yourself it "still counts" because you're socialising. My fix is simple: agree a structure. Try 10 minutes in one language, then swap. Set a timer if you have to. It's not rude - it's respectful.

Third: not pushing yourself. If you only say what you already know, you'll keep making the same mistakes forever. The magic happens when you



stretch just a little: try a new tense, attempt a longer sentence, ask for a better word, and let people help you say it properly.

I've been part of several exchange groups over the years and they're always worth it - not just for language, but for meeting new people and making new friends.

So, if you're in Sant Cugat and want to give it a try, Simply Sant Cugat is supporting a new language exchange group set up by Elena Liqueste. The group meets every Tuesday in the bar of the Sant Cugat Hotel starting 18:30h. Come along. Take the leap. I promise you: once you're in the pool happily doggy-paddling, you'll wonder why you waited.

New Language Exchange Group

A safe & friendly place to practise your Catalan, Spanish or English

Sant Cugat Hotel (c. Cèsar Martinell, 2)

Every **Tuesday** from **18:30–20:00h**

Information: WhatsApp Elena 664 788 806



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