

April 2026



Simply

SANT CUGAT



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INCLUDING:

- VALLDORREIX
- LA FLORESTA
- LES PLANES

This month...

1. A Simple Guide to doing your RENTA
2. Inside The Tunnels of Vallvidrera
3. Young Voices: New Kids On The Block
4. Out & About: Món Sant Benet
5. Jokes, puzzles, reviews and much, much more

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**Simply SANT CUGAT®**

Sixth Edition: April 2026

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Welcome to April

There is something about April in Sant Cugat that feels full of promise.

After one of the wettest winters in recent memory, the town seems ready to breathe again. The days are getting longer, terraces are filling up, and there is that unmistakable feeling that people are stepping back into the streets and into community life. It is a lovely moment to be putting together this edition.

April also brings us Sant Jordi, one of the most beautiful moments in the Catalan calendar - a celebration of books, roses, love and culture. In that spirit, this edition leans strongly into stories, voices and discovery.

We are especially pleased to feature an article on Sant Cugat's Multicultural Day, an event that reflects something we care deeply about at Simply Sant Cugat: building bridges between the many communities that make up this town.

This month also brings several new features. We are delighted to launch International Life & Family with Elena Liqueste, and Young Voices, where three teenagers share what it is like moving to Sant Cugat and finding their place here. By popular demand, we also publish our first bilingual short story, along with a double-page Culture Corner special for Sant Jordi packed with book recommendations.

Alongside these, you will also find our established sections: A Day in the Life, Local

Hero, Out & About and New Restaurant Review.

And yes, this is also the start of Renta season. Tax returns may not be as romantic as roses and novels, but they too are part of spring life in Spain.

As always, thank you for reading and supporting the magazine. We hope this edition helps you enjoy the season, discover something new and feel even more connected to the town we share.

We hope you enjoy this edition,

Aston & Ian.

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SIMPLE GUIDES

A Simple Guide to Doing Your Renta

Key dates and common mistakes

Disclaimer: We've written this as a practical overview for international residents, but every situation is different (especially if you have income or assets abroad). Please treat it as orientative and confirm your specific case with the AEAT and/or a qualified tax advisor.

If you live in Sant Cugat long enough, “doing the Renta” becomes a spring ritual (just like calçots, but with much more paperwork). The good news: for many people it’s fairly straightforward. The bad news: the draft document (“borrador”) is not a mind reader. International residents are especially likely to have missing info (foreign income, overseas accounts, cross-border deductions etc...), so a calm, methodical approach can save you money as well as stress. You might be liable for other declarations. Best to check with your gestor.

1) Know the calendar (Renta 2025, filed in 2026)

- Online (Renta WEB): 8th Apr - 30th Jun.
- Phone help: 6th May - 30th Jun (book from 29th Apr)
- In-person help: 1st Jun - 30th Jun (book from 29th May)
- If you pay by direct debit, the deadline is 25th Jun.

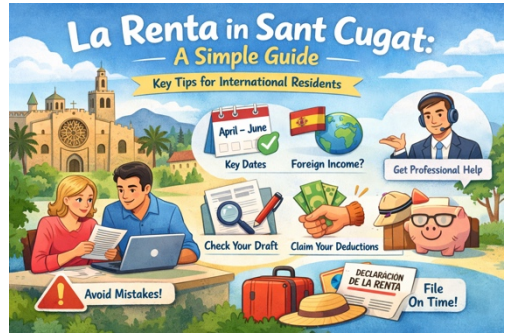
2) Your first question: are you a Spanish tax resident?

This guide focusses on tax residents. Typically, people who spend over half the year (183+ days) in Spain, or whose main base of life is here. If you’re not, you’re usually in a different system (non-resident tax). If you’re unsure, especially if you moved mid-year, this is where a gestor can pay for themselves.

3) Do you have to do it?

The rules about whether you need to do your Renta are full of exceptions, but the common ones are:

- Employment income over 22,000€, unless you received over 1,500€ in total from additional employer(s) in which case the threshold is



14,000€. E.g. 10,000€ from one employer and 5,000€ from another means you have to file.

- Some types of investment income have a combined limit of 1,600€.
- Other income like imputed property income, public aids, etc. have a combined limit of 1,000€.

Even if you’re not obliged, filing can be worth it if you expect a refund.

4) Before you log in: collect your “international” pile

International residents often miss refunds because the draft doesn’t automatically pull everything in. Try to get together:

- NIE/NIF details and current address (make sure AEAT has your correct details).
- Salary certificates (Spanish employer) and withholding info.
- Foreign income documents: overseas payments, dividends, interest, rental income, pensions, stock sales - whatever applies.
- Mortgage/rent documents. Landlord ID info.
- Donation certificates, union fees, pension contributions, childcare, etc.

If you own property abroad or have complex investments: consider professional advice (the reporting can be separate from the Renta itself).

5) Log in to Renta WEB (and don't panic)

You can access Renta WEB with CI@ve, a digital certificate, or a reference number.

Tip: Start by checking your “*datos fiscales*” (tax data) before confirming anything.

6) The golden rule: the borrador is a draft, not a verdict

Many people click “confirm” because the number looks plausible. That’s exactly how you easily lose money. Review and validate, because the draft is only as good as the data AEAT already has.

7) The 10-minute checklist (especially for internationals)

Work through these screens slowly:

1. Personal and family details: marital status, children/dependants, address changes.
2. Residency & double-tax logic: if you have foreign income, check it’s correctly included and whether any double taxation relief applies (often relevant for cross-border salary/dividends).
3. All income sources: Spanish salary is usually pre-filled; foreign income isn’t.
4. Property: rented out? Empty property with imputed income? Changes of ownership?
5. Deductions: national + regional (Catalonia).
6. Individual vs joint filing for couples: sometimes one is clearly better-simulate both if relevant.

8) Catalonia deductions worth knowing

Catalonia has its own deductions on the regional portion. Two that commonly get overlooked:

- Renting your home: a deduction of 10% of rent paid, up to 500€ (1,000€ joint) if you meet conditions (≤ 35 , unemployed ≥ 183 days, disability $\geq 65\%$, or widowed 65+) and income limits. You must include the landlord’s NIF (or foreign tax ID).
- Birth/adoption: 150€ per parent in individual filing (or 300€ joint), and single-parent cases are treated differently.

There are more, but these are the ones that pop up most often for Sant Cugat residents.

9) Common mistakes and how to avoid them

- Accepting the draft without checking: use “validate,” read the warnings, and confirm the underlying data.
- Forgetting “small” income streams: side gigs, rentals, foreign interest, investment sales. Make a list and tick them off. A tax-free investment vehicle abroad might not be the same here.
- Missing deductions: rent deductions, donations, family-related items - review systematically.
- Not fixing errors after filing: if you spot a mistake later, it can often be corrected by modifying the return - don’t just hope nobody notices.

10) When to call in help

If you have multiple countries, self-employment, stock/crypto activity, foreign property, or you arrived/left mid-year, getting advice can prevent expensive “oops” moments. For everyone else: take it step-by-step, and you’ll likely be fine.

So don’t put it off. It takes longer than you think. You also might need to visit a tax office to get the relevant digital certificates to be able to file online and these appointments take time to obtain. You might need to write to your landlord for their NIF or overseas bank for information. If you are a UK resident here with UK income, it is complicated as the UK tax return and payments are for each year ending 5th April and Spanish is a calendar year. If you are worried, ask a Gestor to help, but ask early, as they are very busy this time of year and some refuse to take more clients on.



Happy Renta!



WHY DO WE SAY THAT?

Why Is English ‘English’?

An etymological look at the story behind the language

At first glance, the reason why we call English “English” sounds obvious: it’s the language spoken by the people who live in England. But then historically, why is England so called?

You might already know that the name goes back to Old English (the language as it was spoken before the Normans took over) and the name “Angla land” or Englalund, unsurprisingly meaning “land of the Angles.” But the Angles (who originated from what’s now northern Germany) were just one of several Germanic peoples who settled in Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries, alongside the Saxons (from North-western Germany) and the Jutes (from Jutland/Denmark) after the Roman Empire collapsed and all the Romans packed up and went home, leaving a lot of ungoverned real estate.

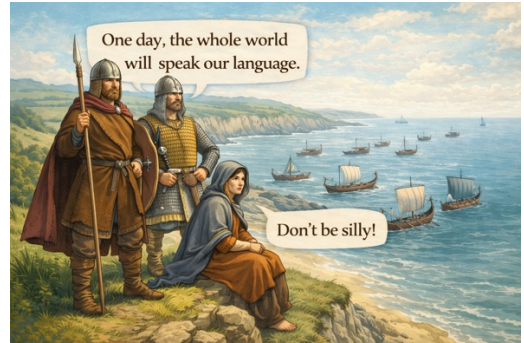
This raises an obvious question: if Britain was settled by Angles, Saxons and Jutes, why did the country become England rather than something like Saxonland or Juteland? The honest answer is that there is no single definitive reason. But there are a few points that stand out.

Firstly, Juteland or Jutland already existed back home, so that name wasn’t an option.

Secondly, some of the early kingdoms, such as Mercia (in the centre of England), Northumbria (the northern bit), and East Anglia (the round bit that sticks out on the right) were all run by the Angles, and they were all quite powerful.

Thirdly, the great monk-historian Bede the Venerable wrote (in Latin) about the “gens Anglorum,” usually translated as “the English people,” an early piece of marketing that helped establish a wider shared identity beyond separate tribes and kingdoms.

But finally and possibly most importantly, the Saxon kings from the bottom bit of England known



as West Saxony (later simplified to Wessex) wanted to take over the whole country. In the 10th century, the Saxon king Æthelstan did the Angles a great favour by ridding them of the last Viking invaders who had settled in York. As he was seen as a successful leader, he made his move at the right time and was able to become the first king of all England, showing that the name had become political as well as ethnic. It’s quite likely that Æthelstan prioritised the name Angleland to downplay his own Saxon heritage and appease the more powerful Anglian nobles of the time.

So the next time someone says English is just called English because people of England speak it, you can set them straight: it is really the language from a land shaped by the migration of the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles, and by their developing kingdoms, political unions, and a bit of nomenclature spin-doctoring.

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.



BONS MOTS

Qui Savi Es Vulgui Dir**An opportunity to impress the locals by learning one saying at a time**

In recognition of the beautiful tradition of Sant Jordi, this month we take a look at the striking Catalan saying...

Qui savi es vulgui dir, molts llibres ha de llegir.

(Whoever wishes to be called wise must read many books.)

Unlike previous sayings, it's not sentimental, not decorative, but more challenging. It does not say that books entertain us, relax us or make us look cultured on a coffee table. It says something a bit more profound - if we want to be wise, we must read.

That raises an important question. In a world of constant updates, YouTube shorts, and endless digital distractions, are we still becoming wiser? Or are we just more stimulated? We consume words all day long, but consumption is not the same as reflection. To read a book is to submit to a longer train of thought, to follow an argument, inhabit another mind, sit with uncertainty and resist the urge to skip ahead. That kind of reading demands attention, and attention has become one of the rarest (and this most valued) commodities of modern life.

Maybe this is why the saying feels so relevant. Wisdom has never been the same as information. Knowing more facts does not necessarily make us more thoughtful, more balanced or even more humane. A society can be permanently connected and yet increasingly shallow. We can be surrounded by content and still be starved of meaning. Would you agree?

This is what gives Sant Jordi its value. Beneath the roses and celebration lies a tiny act of resistance. To give someone a book is to say: here is something worth your time. Here is something with depth instead of speed, reflection instead of reaction, complexity instead of clickbait. A book asks more of us, but it also gives more back.



So maybe the question is not whether reading is dying, but whether we still value the kind of inner life that reading helps to build. Sant Jordi seems to suggest that, at least once a year, Sant Cugat does. The streets fill with people choosing stories, ideas, and voices to carry home.

And maybe that old saying still has the power to nudge us in the right direction. If wisdom really does begin with reading, then every unopened book is not just a missed moment of pleasure, but a missed chance to become a little more fully human.



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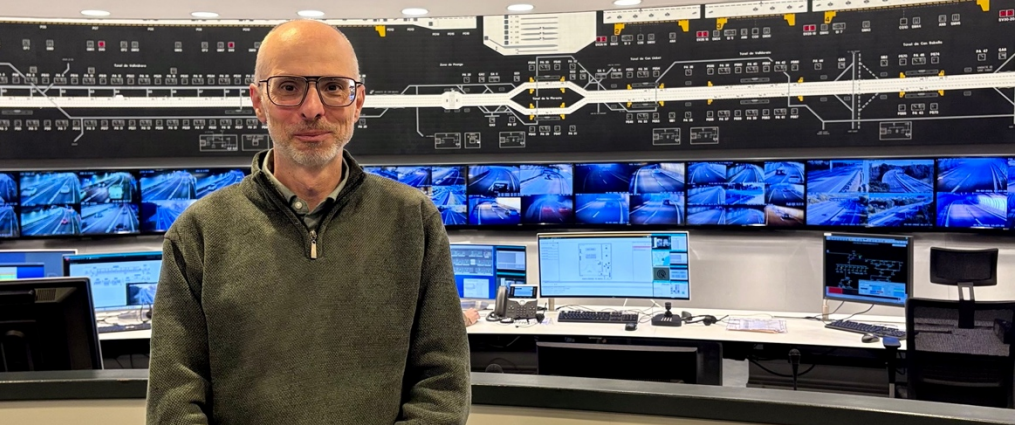
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A DAY IN THE LIFE

Jordi Quevedo: Operations Manager of the Tunnels of Vallvidrera**“More than just a hole in the mountain”**

Most of us treat the Tunnels of Vallvidrera like lifts: we use them, trust they'll work, and only notice them when they stop working properly.

But talk to Jordi Quevedo, the tunnels' operations manager, and it becomes clear that the tunnels are not just a geographical feature. They are more like a living system, run round the clock by people, for people, beneath the Parc de Collserola.

First, to get thing clear, “Vallvidrera” isn't just one tunnel. It's a set of tunnels that run along the C-16 from the Ronda de Dalt (exit 9) all the way to the AP-7. The main Vallvidrera Tunnel (2.5 km long) is supported by others such as La Floresta, Can Llobet, Valdoreix and Can Rabella. Almost half the route is underground. Add to that an emergency evacuation ‘galería’ and 10 emergency exits, and you begin to see why the team get a bit irritated when someone calls it “just a hole in the mountain”.

You might think that as Operations Manager (Gerente de Explotación) Jordi's role sounds like a desk job until he describes it. His team is responsible for keeping the road operating safely every day of the year, coordinating traffic control, maintenance, upgrades, compliance with legal requirements, and what drivers experience in real

time: information panels, quick responses, and help when something goes wrong.

And that word “something” covers a huge range. There are breakdowns and minor hiccups, but the scenario everyone fears is a fire inside the tunnel, especially during peak hour. That's why the tunnel is managed like a system, not like a structure.

You can't watch 100 screens

The control centre has over 100 cameras, but you'll rarely find more than one or two operators on shift. Nobody can stare at that many screens and still catch the important moment.

So the tunnels use automated detection that flags unusual situations (like a stopped vehicle, a pedestrian, something dropped on the road, or a car going the wrong way) and gets the attention of the operator instantly.

Jordi's friendly warning is simple: if you plan to do something you shouldn't (an illegal manoeuvre, a U-turn, or anything “private”) don't do it on our patch. You'll be seen.

Which matters because during heavy traffic some drivers pull into the emergency lay-by and hop out



for a quick ‘comfort break’, apparently assuming nobody is watching. They are. The tunnel doesn’t judge; it just records.

Keeping your commute boring

Ask what makes the tunnels so reliable, and Jordi’s answer is immediate: people.

The operation runs 24/7, including Christmas and New Year. There are about 50 staff, with the majority in operational roles (control centre, roadside response, maintenance and customer support).

When something happens, the “brain” coordinates the response while the team moves fast to protect drivers and restore flow.

That human side is easiest to understand when the incidents aren’t mechanical. Over the years they’ve dealt with heart attacks, people who have died of natural causes, and births (yes, really), babies born on the way to hospital, sometimes in the tunnel itself. In those moments, the tunnels stop being “a route” and become a place where the staff provides initial roadside assistance until emergency services arrive (all their personnel are trained in first aid and in emergency care and management).

Why you sometimes pay to wait

Here’s a reality many drivers don’t love: Vallvidrera is an urban access tunnel into Barcelona, and rush hour is intense. From roughly 7:00 to 9:30 the Ronda de Dalt and Via Augusta become a bottleneck, and the queue backs up into the tunnel.

That’s when the team makes a decision that seems counterintuitive: they sometimes stop vehicles from entering the tunnel to control the number of cars inside. It can happen repeatedly during the peak window. To a driver it feels like, “I’m paying for a fast road and being stopped.” Operationally, it’s about safety: dense stop-start traffic inside a long tunnel is exactly when a minor incident can become a major problem.

What causes the congestion?

The tunnels don’t cause the traffic jams. The main causes are an overburdened Ronda de Dalt and the

Via Augusta bottleneck where lane reductions, roadworks, and bus stops can also squeeze flow to a single lane.

The concession tries to help with incentives, like discounts for high-occupancy vehicles (three or more people) and lower prices outside peak times. But school and work schedules are stubborn. The biggest improvement, they say, would come from better access and distribution on the Ronda and Via Augusta (both outside the tunnels’ direct control).

The less common problems

For all the seriousness, the tunnels also collect stories that sound made up. Wild boars from Collserola are regular visitors, clever enough to find weak points in fencing. But the all-time favourite is the escaped ostrich that once wandered onto the motorway near La Floresta, prompting the kind of call you can imagine nobody believing: “I’m being serious. It’s an ostrich!”

Then there are the drivers who simply shouldn’t be there, especially heavy trucks that can’t enter Barcelona via these routes. At the toll, a laser detector identifies them and staff have to intervene, explain, and reroute - sometimes with language barriers and rising stress levels. It’s a reminder that “traffic management” is often just... people management.

So what are you really paying for?

Jordi’s closing point is the one most readers will recognise: users aren’t paying “to pass through a tunnel.” They’re paying for a managed service - monitoring, maintenance, fast response, trained staff, and systems designed to stop small incidents becoming big ones.

Or as Jordi puts it more simply: their job is to make your journey safer and easier - and if something goes wrong, to help you quickly.

And maybe that’s the highest compliment: when Vallvidrera works perfectly, you don’t think about it at all. Behind the scenes, that “nothing happened today” feeling is the result of constant attention... and the occasional ostrich.



EVENTS

Many Cultures, One Sant Cugat

An invitation to discover, learn and connect on Multicultural Day

What does it mean to belong to a place without losing where you come from?

For many people living in Sant Cugat, that is not an abstract question. It is part of everyday life. You may work here, raise a family here, shop here, celebrate here and slowly build a sense of home here, while still carrying another language, another history and another set of traditions within you. You may want to integrate more deeply into local life, while also holding on to the roots that shaped you.

That small but important tension lies at the heart of Sant Cugat's Multicultural Day, which will take place on **18th April at 11:00** at the *Casa de Cultura*.

This is not just another event to put in the diary and forget about. It has the potential to become something genuinely valuable for the city: a chance to discover the many cultures that already live side by side in Sant Cugat, to meet the people behind them, and to reflect on what integration can and should mean in practice.

The day will include presentations, contributions from cultural associations, a short video about the city and an informal aperitif designed to encourage conversation. But there is another element that makes it especially attractive for visitors: there will also be stands and displays representing different cultures present in Sant Cugat. That means the event will not simply be about listening to speeches. It will also be about walking around, looking, asking questions, discovering and learning.

And that matters.

Too often, we live in the same town as people from very different backgrounds without ever really getting to know their stories, customs or perspectives. We may pass each other in the street, at school gates, in cafés, at sports clubs or in local shops, while knowing very little about one another. Diversity can remain something abstract - a fact of

Do you come from another country?
Do you want to meet other people who share your culture?
Did you know that there is an association in Sant Cugat that you could join and find friends?
Do you want to have your say at city hall?

Come to Casa de Cultura on 18th April
You will find organisations, a place to talk and a networking aperitif

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modern life - rather than something lived, shared and explored.

Multicultural Day offers a chance to change that, even if only a little.

For international residents, it may be an opportunity to find familiar faces, connect with others from similar backgrounds, or feel more visible in the city they now call home. For local residents, it is a chance to step closer to the many worlds that already exist within Sant Cugat and learn from them. And for everyone, it is a reminder that culture is not a museum piece. It is something living, carried by people, expressed in language,

traditions, values, memories, music, food and ways of seeing life.

According to councillor Carme Ardid, the initiative is a first step in an area that falls within her department's responsibility: multiculturalism. The aim is not only to bring people together, but also to gather concerns, encourage links between communities, give visibility to cultural associations and receive feedback from residents. The broader strategic goal is especially striking: to promote integration into Catalan and Sant Cugat life without losing one's own cultural identity.

That is a powerful idea.

Too often, integration is misunderstood as a process of becoming less yourself. The unspoken message can be: adapt, fit in, become like everyone else. But this event appears to start from a different belief: that joining the life of a city should not require cultural erasure. On the contrary, keeping alive the language, customs and memories of your origins can enrich both the individual and the wider community.

In that sense, the event is not only about multicultural residents. It is also about the kind of city Sant Cugat wants to be. A confident city does not ask people to flatten themselves into sameness. It invites them in, helps them understand local culture, and at the same time remains curious about what they bring with them.

That is why attending the event could be worthwhile even for people who do not usually think of themselves as "part of the multicultural community." This day is not only for those who feel new, foreign or in-between. It is also for curious residents, families, neighbours, educators, association members and anyone interested in understanding the real human richness of the city a little better.

There is something deeply healthy about going somewhere not only to support an initiative, but to learn. To stop at a stand. To ask where someone is from. To hear how a tradition is celebrated elsewhere. To discover what communities already

exist in Sant Cugat. To realise that what seems unfamiliar at first may, after a short conversation, begin to feel surprisingly close.

Our own magazine, *Simply Sant Cugat*, has also been invited to take part, which feels very fitting. After all, one of the magazine's aims has always been to help people discover the many communities, stories and voices that make up life here. In that sense, Multicultural Day connects strongly with a simple but important idea: a town becomes richer when its residents know more about one another.

Of course, one event alone will not solve everything. It will not automatically create deep integration, remove misunderstandings or guarantee lasting participation. But it can create a beginning. It can open doors. It can spark conversations. It can make people feel seen. It can encourage new associations to emerge and existing ones to feel more connected. And it can send a message that learning about one another is not a side issue, but part of building a stronger city.

Perhaps that is the most inspiring aspect of all. Multicultural Day is not asking people to choose between belonging here and staying true to where they come from. It is suggesting that both are possible. That you can immerse yourself in local culture while keeping hold of your roots. That you can discover others without giving up yourself. And that a city like Sant Cugat has everything to gain when its different cultures are not merely present, but visible, shared and understood.

So this 18th April starting at 11:00, the invitation is clear: go along, explore, ask, listen, discover.

Because sometimes belonging begins with curiosity. And sometimes the first step towards a more connected city is simply taking the time to learn who is already here.

INTERNATIONAL LIFE & FAMILY

When Love Crosses Cultures**Identity, Family, and everyday surprises – by Elena Liqueste**

When we fall in love with someone from a different culture, are we really aware of the implications of the step we are about to take? I certainly wasn't.

One of my first surprises after marrying an Englishman and moving to the UK was discovering that he said sorry constantly. If someone bumped into him, he said sorry. If he bumped into someone else, he said sorry. If nothing had happened at all, he sometimes still said sorry. I found it slightly infuriating. And when I pointed it out to him, his immediate response was, of course, "Sorry".

I soon noticed other differences: "el cambio de armario", the seasonal ritual of swapping summer and winter clothes, simply wasn't a thing. Nor was giving visitors a full guided tour of your home, including the bedrooms upstairs, when they came over for the first time. At work, I quickly learned that greeting colleagues with two kisses on the cheek was not standard practice, as I noticed people stepping backwards to avoid me.

Food provided its own cultural lessons. My mother is a wonderful cook, and her empanadas are legendary, but growing up we were never allowed to eat them hot because "hot pastry is bad for your tummy". Then I moved to England and discovered pies, eaten enthusiastically straight from the oven by perfectly healthy people.

Years later, living in Sant Cugat, these differences feel less like contrasts and more like daily reminders of how many ways there are to do the same thing. Walk into any café here and you will hear Catalan, Spanish, English and often more languages within a few minutes. It is a town full of mixed families, international schools, grandparents visiting from different countries and children switching languages mid-sentence without noticing.

The biggest cultural contrasts became clear when my first daughter was born. The dos and don'ts of parenting in each country were often not aligned.



"Children should be seen but not heard" is not something you are likely to hear a Spanish parent say. In Spain, when we don't hear the children, that's when we worry!

Despite these differences, I have always felt that growing up with two cultures and two languages is a tremendous gift. My daughters were born in England, and from the beginning I was determined to raise them bilingual. As many parents in similar situations discover, the language of the environment quickly becomes dominant. By the age of two, my eldest daughter was perfectly bilingual, but soon she began speaking to me only in English.

My strategy was simple: I pretended not to understand her. This worked well until one day, from the back seat of the car, she asked: "Mummy, when Daddy speaks English to you, you understand him, don't you? So why don't you understand me when I speak English?"

I explained that her grandparents did not speak English, and that speaking Spanish would allow her to communicate with them and be part of that side



of the family. She understood and continued speaking to me in Spanish.

Language and culture are deeply connected to identity. So, what happens when we grow up with more than one culture? Do we develop multiple identities? Yes, we do.

One way to think about identity is through what sociologists call identity theory, which suggests that identity develops through social interaction rather than being something we are born with. Our sense of who we are is incredibly important because it frames what we believe we are capable of and where we feel we belong. A talented musician who lacks confidence may never perform in public; a gifted student who feels out of place among high achievers may never apply to a top university.

“Feeling pulled in different directions does not mean you lack identity”

According to this perspective, we all hold multiple identities shaped by the groups we belong to, such as families, workplaces, and communities, the roles we perform, such as parent, colleague, volunteer, or friend, and the identities society assigns to us, including gender or social class. Our personalities add another layer. Culture influences how we understand all these roles. What it means to be a mother, for example, can be very different in Spain, England, or China, shaped by expectations about work, family and gender.

Cultural differences often appear in the way we define everyday concepts. I remember one small but revealing moment when I was working at a business school in England. My youngest sister happened to be visiting when the school organised a “family day.” I asked whether she could join, and the answer was no, the event was “for families.” In that context, “family” meant partners and children only. For me, family naturally included siblings. In the end, I brought her anyway!

Having multiple identities can be enriching, but it can also create tension. For me, the most difficult example was balancing my identity as a professional woman with my identity as a mother

when my children were young. At times, I felt I was failing in both roles. Looking back, I can see that what I was experiencing was not failure, but a conflict between these two important parts of who I was. Understanding that earlier might have made those years easier.

Living between cultures teaches you to be curious rather than to make assumptions. Is this a personality difference, a cultural difference, or simply a misunderstanding? That small moment of curiosity can change a conversation, and sometimes a relationship.

In a place like Sant Cugat, where so many people are building lives across languages and cultures, these questions are part of everyday life at school gates, in workplaces, in friendships and inside our own homes.

After many years of living across cultures, I see identity as something layered and evolving, shaped by language, relationships, and experience. And while cultural differences can sometimes be surprising, they are also one of the great gifts of building a life across cultures.

So the next time someone reacts in a way that feels strange to you, do pause before judging. Ask yourself what might be cultural rather than personal. And if you live between cultures yourself, try offering that same curiosity inward. Feeling pulled in different directions does not mean you lack identity. It often means your identity is richer than a single label allows.

Cultural differences will continue to surprise us, and help us grow, if we let them!



Elena Liqueste is a researcher, consultant and coach focused on identity, work and life transitions. She works internationally with universities and organisations, and writes about personal growth, purpose and change. Based in Sant Cugat, she enjoys contributing to the local community.



NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

Carlitos: A New Star in Torreblanca**Creative dishes, smart setting and a lively atmosphere - by Millie Swift and Johan Caballero**

Carlitos opened a few months ago in the prime corner spot previously occupied by Restaurant Saona in the lively Mercat Torreblanca parking area, that was remarkably unremarkable. And now we are delighted to have Carlitos come to our town, as it brings a fresh, fun and slightly adventurous twist to the traditional Catalan restaurant.

The menu is seasonal, regularly changing, keeping it interesting. We visited on a Friday night and discovered the long list of daily specials including creamy **pigs trotters**, **oxtail terrine** and an impressive selection of shellfish, including **oysters**, **scallops** and the deliciously sweet and wallet-blowing **Palamós prawns**.

We enjoyed every dish: the **croquetas** were crispy, the house speciality **avocado cannelloni stuffed with salmon** arrived looking like a small piece of art and was a pity to eat, but it tasted great. The **ensaladilla rusa** (potato and veg prawn salad) had a strong flavour, although we had to toss a coin to see who got the prawn. The **Galician octopus with paprika on mashed potato** was warm and gently smoked thanks to their use of the famous Catalan Jospser oven. The **steak and chips** were perfectly good, especially at only 23€, also finished off in the oven. Desserts were equally fun, imaginatively presented and our **chocolate truffles** were a delightful way to end the meal.

Sharing is very much the spirit of the place and we would have happily tried more of the kitchen's creative dishes like the **quail eggs in a steamed bao bun**, **calçots in tempura** and **mussels in green curry**. But for more traditional fare, there is plenty of choice, including **patatas bravas**, **calamares** and **hamburgers**. And maybe for lunch, **arroz del senyoret** which is basically a paella with all the shellfish thoughtfully peeled for you. Plenty of choices and a kids menu too.

The setting was pleasant, clean, airy, modern, stylish with generously spaced tables that made



conversation easy. The staff were efficient, smartly uniformed and helpful, even as the restaurant filled out on a busy Friday night.

We recommend it. The *menú del día* looks like excellent value at 17€. Our à la carte experience including a glass of wine each and shared dessert, came to 41€ per person. It felt like the sort of place you might choose for an occasion or to impress a date.

Carlitos leaves the impression of a restaurant that knows exactly what it wants to be: fresh, sociable, stylish and just adventurous enough. In a town with no shortage of places to eat, it succeeds in standing out, and we suspect many diners will leave already planning what to order next time.

CARLITOS

Avenida de la Torre Blanca, 2-8, Local 5

Opening Hours

Tuesday to Friday: 13:00 – 00:00

Saturday: 13:00 – 01:00

Sunday: 13:00 – 16:30

Monday: Closed

COFFEE BREAK

English/Catalan Crossword

Time to test your basic vocabulary

Meet our new English/Catalan 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.

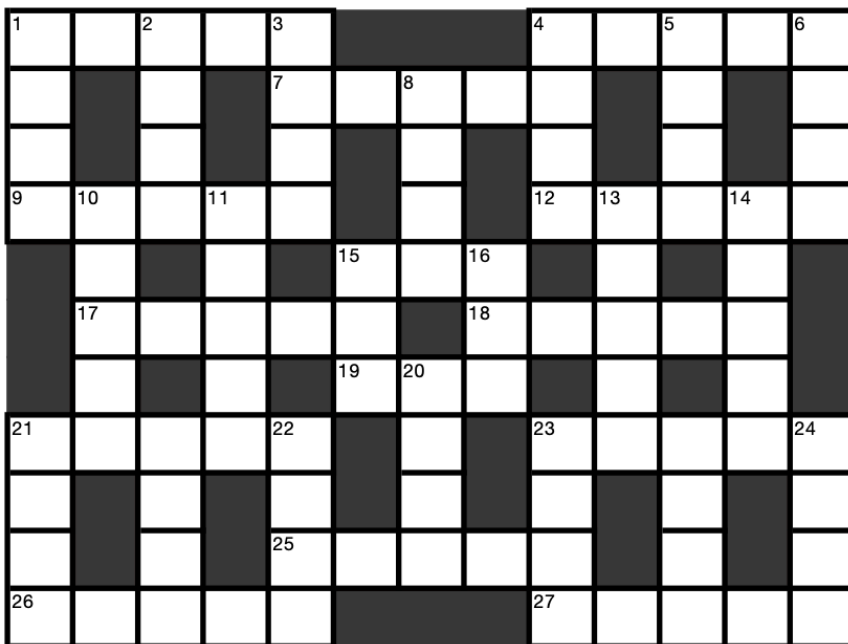
Down (Verticals): the clues are in English, and the answers are the Catalan translations.

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.

Horizontals (Across): 1. núvol, 4. barat, 7. suplement o de recanvi, 9. el mínim o menys, 12. ties, 15. bacallà, 17. un més dos, 18. imbècil, 19. permetre, deixar o llogar, 21. conífera gran, 24. una cançó, poema o pregària sagrada, 27. cadena, 28. gent del Pròxim Orient, 29. un gir (de llimona?)

Down (Verticals): 1. neck, 2. cooking pot, 3. tooth, 4. leg, 5. biblical garden, 6. feet, 8. I play (the piano), 10. between, 11. sand, 13. useful (pl.), 14. final amount, 15. sky or heaven, 16. said or finger, 21. an expensive face?, 22. date, 23. donkeys, 24. bridge, 25. today, 26. very



Across/Horizontals: 1. cloud 4. cheap 7. extra 9. least 12. aunts 15. cod 17. three 18. idiot 19. let 21. cedar 24. psalm 27. chain 28. Arabs 29. twist Down/Verticals: 1. coll 2. olla 3. dent 4. coma 5. Eden 6. peus 8. focó 10. entre 11. sorra 13. útils 14. total 15. cel 16. dif 21. cara 22. data 23. nucs 24. pont 25. avui 26. molt

SIMPLY FOR KIDS

FIND GIMBY

Hello again!

This month, little Gimby is happily enjoying the warmer weather and longer evenings. So he's out and about in search of interesting things to smell and eat.

Can you find him in this month's magazine?

(answer on page 21)



Gimby

SIMPLY COLOUR

It's Sant Jordi Day and Pau, Anna and Maria are exploring the market, but maybe it wasn't a good idea to invite their four-legged friends. Can you help improve things by adding some colour?



Simply Jokes

This month, Penelope, has found her favourite jokes about books and roses!
Can you tell which questions go with which answers?

Where do roses sleep?

She goes through them too quickly.

What's a rose's favourite music:

It had a wonderful scent of humour.

It's impossible to put down!

A book fell on my head.

It was a cliff-hanger.

I'm reading a book about antigravity.

How did the flower come back to life?

In flowerbeds

Someone keeps sending me roses with the heads cut off.

It rose from the dead.

I think I'm being stalked.

Why does an elephant use his trunk as a bookmark?

Heavy petal!

I just finished a book about Mount Everest.

Why does the ghost always need more books?

I can only blame my shelf.

Did you hear about the rose comedian?

So he NOSE where he stopped reading.

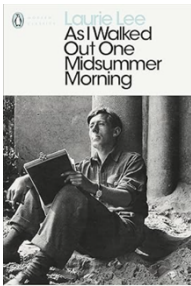


CULTURE CORNER

Our Sant Jordi Book Review

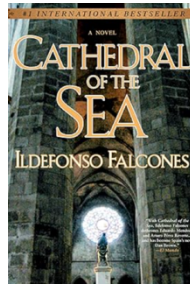
By Sue Harrand

Sant Jordi, celebrated on the 23rd of April, is a magical day of love, roses and books. Yet when you're standing in front of the busy bookstalls, choosing a book for someone special, or perhaps yourself, can feel overwhelming! We asked several of our readers to share their personal book recommendations and perhaps their choices might spark some inspiration.

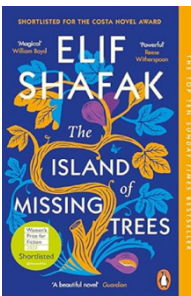


Aston: "Without a doubt '**As I walked out one Midsummer Morning**' by Laurie Lee. I loved it so much I read it twice! It is a beautifully written, slow moving portrayal of a rural, and now unrecognisable, Spain before the civil war. It follows the joys and travails of the author as he left his home in cold

England with just a few coins and a violin to sustain him. This book actually changed my attitude to life, making me feel more comfortable about taking risks."

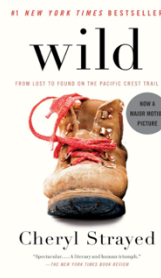


Àngels: "My choice would be '**Cathedral of the Sea**' by Barcelona author **Ildefonso Falcones**. This historical novel brings medieval Barcelona to life through the construction of Santa Maria del Mar cathedral, built stone by stone by ordinary citizens, strong port workers and sailors hauling rock from the nearby Montjuïc quarries. The cathedral became a symbol of their community and freedom. My own grandfather was a strong, hardworking stevedore and deep-sea sailor which makes the story feel especially personal and meaningful to me."



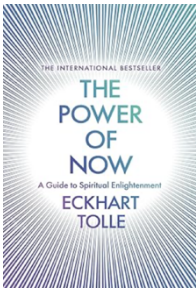
Sue: "Elif Shafak's '**The Island of Missing Trees**' is a beautifully written novel moving between 1970s Cyprus and modern-day London. It follows two communities, Turkish Muslim and Greek Christian, whose lives are torn apart by civil war. Shafak's poetic style tackles heavy themes such as conflict, migration, and

inherited trauma, while also celebrating nature, love, and resilience. One of the book's most unusual elements is that it is partly narrated by a fig-tree. This is a book to immerse yourself in and personally I learned a lot about the Cyprus conflict, something I previously knew nothing about."



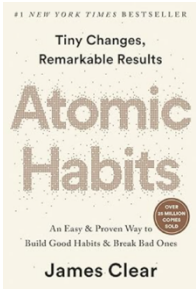
Helen: "**Wild, a journey from lost to found** by Cheryl Strayed would be my proposal. It's an autobiography of a 22 year old woman, who after suffering a series of painful life events, impulsively decides to walk the Pacific Crest Trail in the USA, alone, with no experience. Wild is a story about physical

challenges and deep personal reflection and written in a way that makes you laugh and cry. This book is special to me because it is filled with many great quotes that are inspiring, empowering and that I could relate to, especially when facing difficult times."



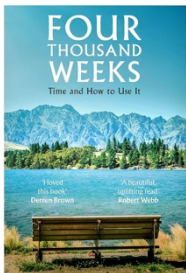
Julia: "My Sant Jordi book recommendation is '**The Power of Now**' by **Eckhart Tolle**. This non-fiction book teaches us that most human suffering comes from constantly thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Tolle emphasises that the only moment that truly exists in the present, and if you focus on that, you

experience more calm and clarity. This book changed my approach to life and help me to be more present."



Doina: "My Sant Jordi book recommendation would be **Atomic Habits** by **James Clear**. The author presents a proven system for building good habits and breaking bad ones, and that the key to building long lasting habits is to focus on creating a new identity first. It's a philosophy that can be applied to different aspects

of your life and personally I found it a book that was easy to read and helped me to find a way to make some life changes."



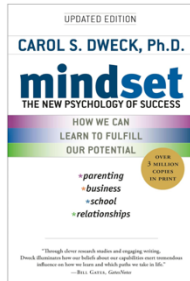
OLIVER BURKEMAN

Ian: "I strongly recommend **Four Thousand Weeks** by **Oliver Burkeman**. It's one of those rare books that feels both thought-provoking and reassuring. Rather than pushing yet another system for doing more, it challenges our modern obsession with productivity and reminds us that our time is limited, so our choices matter. It's honest,

wise and has a sense of humour, too. It helped me think less about "fitting everything in" and more about giving proper attention to the things you enjoy and to what really counts."



Gaby: "I absolutely loved **The Correspondent** by **Virginia Evans**. The story unfolds through the daily letters and emails an elderly woman writes to the important people in her life, using them to reflect on her world and her past. It made me realise how, in our age of WhatsApps and instant replies, we've almost lost the art of thoughtful letter writing. It even inspired me to pick up a pen again and rediscover the simple joy of sending, and receiving, handwritten letters."



Jude: "**Mindset: how you can fulfil your potential** by **Dr Carol S Dweck**. This book, first published in 2012, has always been a must-read for teachers, It is still the bedrock for the "growth mindset" approach, helping pupils to become achievers by promoting a change in attitude and behaviours. This book is relevant in all life

situations, including parenting, and it's one of those books that I like to go back and read certain chapters every now and again."

SSC Readers: is there a book that is special to you and that you'd like to recommend? Drop a line to info@simplysantcugat.com and we may feature it in a future issue!

A Call for Contributions

Your stories, suggestions and local discoveries help bring our magazine to life.

Help make Simply Sant Cugat even better:

info@simplysantcugat.com



LOCAL HERO

The Heart of the Expat Community

How Doina Taylor helped hundreds feel at home in Sant Cugat – by Sonya Fay Weakley



Doina Taylor (centre) with members of her hiking group in Collserola

Maybe it is her nursing background, or maybe it's just her interest in "collecting people," but Doina Taylor, originally from England, has managed to have a profound impact on both the international and local populations in Sant Cugat since coming here in 2015.

Soon after she arrived in Sant Cugat, she met Nancy, a young mum, while walking their dogs in the park behind the cinema, who with one other lady, set up the Facebook group "English-speaking Parents in Sant Cugat" that has spawned a long list of related Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups and connected hundreds of newcomers to each other and to Sant Cugat. Doina enthusiastically became an active member of the group also organising spin-off events.

"The Facebook group really helped me settle and find other friends here," said Karen. "This led to me discovering other groups for reading, hiking and padel, which further helped me integrate into life in Sant Cugat."

Nancy and others have come and gone, but Doina has kept it going, and "English-speaking Parents of

Sant Cugat" with the baton passed now to Catriona, is still connecting international residents who come to Sant Cugat with the thriving expat community it has helped create.

A Passion for People

"My favourite activity she organises are the hikes in Parc Collserola, when it's open," said U.S. native Amy. "I love the Thursday morning walks and coffee after, and she knows endless other routes and walks."

A physiotherapist by training, Doina is particularly fond of the hiking group.

"To me, it's the best of both worlds because it's exercise, it's community, it's social. It's really important for people's mental and physical health, and we've got so many lovely places we can walk," she said. What struck her during her nursing career, was that it was the physiotherapists that got patients up and about walking, feeling better and out of the hospital. I liked that part and was a key reason I switched to physiotherapy and still enjoy seeing the benefits."



She's never too busy to share her healthcare background and knowledge with anyone.

Jitske told me when she injured her knee just before Christmas and Doina was going away with her family, she still made time to show her some exercises to strengthen the muscles around the knee.

Others have started spinoff groups, but according to Susan, "having Doina at the centre means that expat activities in Sant Cugat happen organically and coherently, with different people stepping up as needed."

"I always ask her opinion on certain matters," said Caitriona. "'Let's see what Doina says' is like checking with your mum, and I would say that's the best way to describe her – she is there for everyone."

Sue agrees, "I think of Doina as the glue who brings us all together. Through the groups she set up and the spin-offs, I now have lots of friends to go for coffee, to the cinema, for dinner, games or wine night. And also Pilates, hiking and Nordic walking. I am so grateful to her for this; she's enriched my life beyond expectation."

Many have been to her coffee mornings, currently being held at 365 Obrador by the station or they have benefited from her physical therapy expertise through one of her many Pilates classes.

Doina has been happy to see more people making connections outside of Facebook. "Some people don't want to be on FB, but one way or another, quite a lot of people still find out what we're doing," she said.

Local Connections

Doina came to Sant Cugat for Pilates training and fell in love. "It was so different to central Barcelona – lots of fresh air and groups of people meeting by the train station to go hiking or cycling and I just loved it."

Now fluent in both Spanish and Catalan, she has an extensive local network beyond international English speakers.

At the Christmas holidays, she offers her home to collect toys for several children's homes near Barcelona.

"I have loads of people dropping presents off, and it's a very lovely thing.

One of her coffee mornings turned into an event to raise money for an area resident. "She was needing some special cancer treatment. It was very expensive and we managed to raise some financial support."

Doina met her husband Eduard during her nursing and physiotherapy days in the UK, then they came to Barcelona, back in 2000. Not knowing any Spanish or Catalan, she can recall how isolating it was and difficult to meet English speaking people. Turning her early struggle into something positive comes naturally to her. Bringing people together, creating communities and helping out wherever she can is her gift. And I for one, am also very grateful to her for this.

"People might say that I'm caring, but it's not difficult for me. It's not like I'm making any sort of sacrifice. I just do what I do. And I think it's so beautiful that it requires very little effort."

Anyone interested in learning about international expat groups in Sant Cugat can find them on Facebook at "English Speaking Parents in Sant Cugat" or "Expats in Sant Cugat" (See the QR codes below).



English Speaking
Parents in S.C.



Expats in S.C.

Find Gimby Answer

If you haven't been able to spot Gimby, our paranoid pig, try looking on page 2 again.



SIMPLY SPORT

The Start of Triathlon Season

Why Watching Triathlon Is the Best Way to Explore Catalonia - by Adam Goldthorp



On a sunny weekend, you might head out expecting a quiet drive, only to find a road unexpectedly closed. At first it can be frustrating. But look a little closer and you may notice spectators lining the pavement, volunteers in high visibility vests, and athletes passing by on bikes or running shoes. Chances are, you have stumbled across a triathlon - and with it, an opportunity to experience the region in a different way.

Catalonia has some of the most beautiful places, interesting towns and secret sites. Over the last 20 years I have swum, cycled and run over 1000 kilometres in some of the most picturesque places.

The logical thing to do now is to try and convince you to join me, I could list many benefits, both physical and mental, of competing in a triathlon. Triathlons are associated with gruelling training schedules and highly disciplined athletes. However, I would like to entice you into the triathlon world in a different way.

Watching a triathlon offers something far more relaxed and welcoming. These events transform ordinary places - promenades, town centres,

reservoirs, and country roads - into lively community spaces. You don't need a ticket, specialist knowledge, or a personal connection to the sport. You simply stop, watch, and become part of what's happening around you.

One of the pleasures of watching triathlons is how accessible it is. Unlike stadium sports, races unfold across open environments, allowing spectators to move freely and choose their own pace. You might watch swimmers emerge exhausted from the water, wander along the course as cyclists pass, and later settle near the finish line to cheer runner's home. The experience feels informal and unstructured, encouraging curiosity rather than commitment.

Your small words of encouragement may have a profound effect on a struggling athlete.

I remember...a cold frosty morning, I was cycling up a steep hill numerous time...every time I went, I saw a relatively old man just shouting encouragement he was getting more and more frantically every time we came round.... by the third I was in real trouble I was alone...those few words was incredible helpful. "venga" "amimo" "tu pots"



Another time I was in a Calella by the sea, out of nowhere someone called my name, and started taking photos... it was hot and I was tired, this confusion took my mind off of it. It was a friend's girlfriend who happened to be a keen photographer.

In both cases my motivation skyrocketed as strangers helped me.

There is also a distinctive rhythm to these events. A triathlon doesn't rush past ninety minutes; it unfolds over several hours. This creates space for conversation, people watching, and simply enjoying being outdoors. Families picnic, locals stop by with coffee, and volunteers chat easily with spectators. Athletes, despite the effort involved, often acknowledge the crowd with a smile or a nod and are encouraged to keep going. The emphasis is less on winning and more on participation.

The Triathlon season runs from April until October and every weekend there is a race if not two events from Barcelona to Banyoles and from Amposta to Andorra. There are mass events such as the Barcelona Triathlon, but there are many smaller events. These gems take place in quieter parts of Catalonia, and it is your ticket to see beautiful parts of the region. Most events take place in the morning, and finish just in time for a walk, aperitif and then lunch. What begins as a sporting event can easily turn into a relaxed day trip.

It is a fantastic way to get out, but there is a more engaging way. Volunteering adds another dimension altogether. Many triathlon events rely on volunteers to help with directions, refreshments, and logistics. No previous experience is required, and organizers make it easy to get involved. In return, volunteers enjoy a front row view of the race and the satisfaction of playing a small role in someone else's achievement. It is a simple, rewarding way to give back while still enjoying the day.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect is how quietly inspiring it can be. You see first timers managing nerves at the start, experienced athletes offering encouragement, and emotional moments as

competitors cross the finish line. Many participants are not racing to win but simply to complete the course. The support from spectators makes a huge difference, and it is difficult not to be moved by the determination on display.

I have regularly volunteered over the last 5 years I have been to some incredible places and met some amazing people. I have also been privileged to part of some special moments. During the Ironman in Andorra, where I was volunteering at the finish line, handing out medals. The emotion was raw. I watched an Italian and an American cross the line together - total strangers, didn't speak the same language, but they hugged like old mates. I asked them to present each other with their medals. It was a spontaneous, beautiful moment - proof that sport breaks down barriers and brings out the best in us.

You may encounter a triathlon by accident - delayed briefly by a closed road - or attend out of curiosity or sign-up to volunteer. Either way, you may leave having discovered a new place, met new people, or volunteered your time. And who knows - you may even find yourself inspired to participate, but that I will leave for another article...

For more information, check out...

Catalan Triathlon Federation

Official site for triathlon events, clubs, and licensing across Catalonia.

 www.triatlo.org


Unió Ciclista Sant Cugat – Triatló Section

Local club with a strong triathlon team open to all levels.

 ucsantcugat.cat/triatlo

Sant Cugat Triatló Club

A newer club focused on promoting triathlon, athletics, and swimming in the area.

 santcugattriatlo.com

YOUNG VOICES

New Kids On The Block

A new country, a new language, a new life

For this article, we interviewed three students at Agora Sant Cugat International School each who arrived here from a different country and had to fit in fast. They came from different backgrounds, with different personalities and different stories, but all three faced the same challenge: settling into a new school, a new social world, and, in some cases, new languages almost overnight. What does that really feel like as a teenager? And what helps most?



Santiago

- Paris, France
- 15 years old
- Arrived September, 2025
- Humorous, practical, routine and language adjustment, fresh start.



Rafaella

- Lima, Peru
- 15 years old
- Arrived August, 2025
- Emotional, honest, friendship-focussed, learning confidence.



Ansor

- Azerbaijan
- 15 years old
- Arrived October, 2022
- Thoughtful, resilient, language-driven, highly positive integration.

Moving to a new country as a teenager sounds exciting (and it can be) but the reality is much more complex than just changing schools or learning the way to your next class. It means finding your place socially, adjusting to a different way of life, understanding unfamiliar rules and, little by little, beginning to feel at home.

For Rafaella, Santiago and Ansor, that process has meant different things. Rafaella arrived from Lima in

August 2025. Santiago moved from Paris a month later. Ansor came from Azerbaijan in October 2022. Their stories are different in tone and detail, but together they paint a clear picture of what it really means to be “the new kid” in Sant Cugat.

Before arriving, Rafaella felt “a lot of nostalgia”. She knew she was leaving behind family, friends and the life she had built over 14 years in Peru, and she feared “starting from zero”. On the other hand, Santiago felt excited by the idea of a fresh start in a new country and was curious to see whether speaking Spanish would help him adapt more quickly. And Ansor’s first reaction was somewhere in between: nervous about leaving his comfort zone at 14, but also attracted by Europe’s culture, history and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Their first impressions of Sant Cugat are wonderfully varied. Rafaella remembers being amazed by the number of babies she saw and jokingly concluding that the town must have an unusually high birth rate. Santiago’s unforgettable early memory was less peaceful: still getting used to the difference between the S1 and S2 trains, he fell asleep, got on the wrong one and ended up at a completely different station. Ansor remembers something simpler but just as poignant: a local pizzeria giving his family an extra pizza on the house as a welcome gesture for newcomers.

These moments are funny and memorable, but they also hint at an important truth. Settling in is often shaped not by dramatic events but by small daily experiences: a train line, a kind waiter, a first impression of the streets, the atmosphere of a town.

And it is those everyday things that can be surprisingly difficult. For Rafaella, one of the biggest hidden challenges has been social rather than academic. What outsiders may not think about, she says, is what it feels like to enter a classroom where everyone else already seems to know one another.



Alongside that comes the ache of missing the close friendships she left behind in Peru. Santiago points to something equally ordinary: routine. In France, he was used to a certain pattern of life, from waking later to walking home, and adapting to a new daily structure in Spain has taken time. Anzor highlights another detail many adults might overlook - simply understanding how a place is organised. Back home, he was used to locating places through numbered “micro districts”, so even getting used to local city planning took getting used to.

Language, unsurprisingly, sits at the heart of all three stories. But even here, their experiences are not the same. Rafaella and Santiago both use Spanish naturally, with English as a useful bridge in some situations, and Catalan as the language that can still create awkwardness. Rafaella says one phrase has genuinely helped her in daily life: “*Jo no parlo català*”. Santiago admits that if someone approaches him in Catalan unexpectedly, he may simply go quiet because the situation feels uncomfortable. Both make the same basic point: when someone new is struggling, replying in the same language - or switching to one they understand - can make a huge difference.

Anzor’s experience adds an interesting twist. When he first arrived, English was his main language and some teachers even translated Catalan exams into English for him. Grateful but determined not to remain dependent, he pushed himself to learn Catalan and Spanish quickly and says he managed it within three months. Now he uses English and Spanish in academic contexts and Catalan in formal or administrative ones. More impressively, he argues that locals should speak Catalan to newcomers more often, not less, because that is part of true integration.

If language is one side of adapting, friendship is the other. Rafaella remembers three girls approaching her and starting a conversation. Their kindness, she says, helped her control her nerves and stay in the moment. Santiago made a conscious decision to socialise more and found it especially helpful to approach students who were in a similar situation to

himself. Those early connections ended up shaping his whole experience here. Anzor also remembers classmates being unexpectedly friendly from the first day, teaching him not only language but local jokes and games, while a shared taste in music helped one friendship deepen further.

There is a lesson here for both newcomers and locals. For new students, confidence matters. Rafaella believes being a little more extroverted can make it easier for others to approach you. Santiago recommends finding others who are or were in the same position, because it helps you feel less alone. Anzor’s advice is simple and practical: start learning the language as soon as possible.

For classmates, teachers and local families, the message is equally clear. Curiosity helps. Patience helps. Small gestures help. Being genuinely interested in where someone is from can relax them immediately, as Anzor found. So can a first conversation, a language switch, or simply making room for somebody who is still finding their feet.

Of course, all three students still miss things from home. Rafaella misses her family and friends in Peru and keeps in touch across a six-hour time difference. Santiago misses many things about France, but especially “the baguette”. Anzor misses Azerbaijani food, black tea and traditional sweets. Yet all three also describe growth: more freedom, more confidence, more social ease, more optimism. Rafaella says she has developed her ability to adapt and socialise. Santiago says the move helped him grow personally. Anzor puts it most strongly of all: if he could go back in time and change one thing, he would change absolutely nothing.

Starting over, then, is not the same as starting from nothing. New students arrive with nerves, memories, and questions, but also with resilience, humour, and the capacity to build a new life. And if Sant Cugat sometimes feels welcoming, that may be because of something very simple: a conversation, a smile, a switched language - or even a free pizza.

Starting over is not the same as starting from nothing.

BILINGUAL SHORT STORY

The Thirteenth Floor / El Tretzè Pis

by Richard Wilkinson

At exactly 19:14 every evening, the old lift in Clara's apartment building opened **on the thirteenth floor**, even though there was no thirteenth floor. Everyone in the building knew it. Everyone avoided it.

But Clara, who had just moved in, **was tired of** whispered warnings and nervous smiles. So one rainy Tuesday, when the lift stopped and the doors slowly slid open onto a dim corridor lined with old yellow lamps, she stepped inside.

The **hallway** smelled of lavender and dust. Framed photographs covered the walls: birthdays, weddings, babies, old Christmas dinners. Clara moved closer and **squinted**.

Every picture was of her. There she was at six, holding a red balloon. At twelve, grinning with **braces**. At twenty, in her university gown. But the dates were wrong. Some were years ahead. In one, she stood beside a silver-haired man and two children she didn't recognise. In another, she lay in a hospital bed, smiling weakly.

At the end of the corridor stood a single door. On it was a **brass plaque** that said: Clara Williams, 2002–2098. Heart pounding, she pushed it open. Inside sat an old woman in a chair facing the window, **knitting** calmly. Without moving, she stopped knitting and said, "Hello, my dear. You came."

Clara stared. The woman turned to show her **wrinkled face**. It was Clara's. Then the old woman put down her knitting, took a deep breath and said, "Whatever you do, don't marry Daniel."

Exactament a les 19:14 de cada vespre, l'ascensor vell de l'edifici on vivia la Clara s'obria **al tretzè pis**, tot i que no hi havia cap tretzè pis. Tothom a l'edifici ho sabia. Tothom l'evitava.

Però la Clara, que acabava d'instal·lar-s'hi, **estava tipa** de les advertències xiuxiuejades i dels somriures inquietos. Així que, un dimarts plujós, quan l'ascensor es va aturar i les portes es van obrir lentament cap a un passadís fosc, il·luminat per vells fanals groguencs, hi va entrar.



El **passadís** feia olor de lavanda i pols. Les parets estaven cobertes de fotografies emmarcades: aniversaris, casaments, nadons, antics sopars de Nadal. La Clara es va acostar i **va aclucar els ulls**.

Totes les fotos eren d'ella. Allà hi era als sis anys, agafant un globus vermell. Als dotze, somrient amb **aparells a les dents**. Als vint, amb la toga de la universitat. Però les dates estaven malament. Algunes eren d'anys futurs. En una, estava

dreta al costat d'un home de cabells platejats i de dos nens que no reconeixia. En una altra, jeia en un llit d'hospital, amb un somriure dèbil.

Al final del passadís hi havia una sola porta. A la porta hi havia una **placa de llautó** que deia: Clara Williams, 2002–2098. Amb el cor bategant amb força, la va empènyer i la va obrir. A dins, una dona gran estava asseguda en una cadira de cara a la finestra, **fent mitja** amb tota tranquil·litat. Sense moure's, va deixar de fer mitja i va dir:

— Hola, estimada. Has vingut.

La Clara se la va quedar mirant. La dona es va girar i li va mostrar la **cara arrugada**. Era la seva. Llavors la dona gran va deixar la labor, va respirar fondo i va dir:

— Facis el que facis, no et casis amb el Daniel.

HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) HOROSCOPE

100% April... 100% accurate... 100% Hairy Henry

Aries

April finds you full of energy, confidence, and opinions nobody asked for. Ideal for bold moves and glorious overreaction. Count to three before speaking, especially if you're "just being honest."

Taurus

You want peace, snacks, and absolutely no nonsense. A sensible goal. April brings small pleasures, minor annoyances, and one moment where your legendary stubbornness is either deeply impressive or slightly concerning. Probably both.

Gemini

Your mouth may move faster than your brain, but at least it will be entertaining. Expect chatter, flirtation, and several avoidable arguments. Read the message twice. Then maybe don't send it.

Cancer

You'll feel everything, even things that haven't happened yet. Seek comfort, honesty, and quality time near a window. A month for sincerity and resisting the urge to solve everyone's problems.

Leo

April puts you centre stage, which is fortunate because you were already mentally there. Expect attention, admiration, and one chance to make a grand entrance for no particularly good reason. Triangles are more important.

Virgo

You are, as usual, correct about several things. Sadly, April does not require you to point this out constantly. Progress comes when you relax your standards, extend your siestas by 10% and let humanity be disappointing in peace.

Libra

You want harmony, beauty, and everyone to behave themselves. April may test this fantasy. A decision you've been avoiding now requires an answer. Enjoy yourself more - spend less.

Scorpio

You can smell nonsense before the sentence has finished. April sharpens your instincts. Good month for strategy, mystery, and finding things out accidentally on purpose. Use your powers responsibly. Try making waffles.

Sagittarius

April brings ideas, temptations, and a very weak reason to stay put. Excellent month for fun and mild chaos. Remember: spontaneity is charming until someone has to organise it. Drink more water.

Capricorn

You are productive, composed, and one step away from becoming a bore. April rewards discipline, but also suggests a little joy wouldn't kill you. Loosen the belt. Buy the pastry. Feel something.

Aquarius

You remain gloriously unpredictable, which is inspiring for some and confusing for many. April brings odd brilliance, strong opinions, and at least one idea that sounds ridiculous until it starts working surprisingly well. If in doubt, choose red.

Pisces

April has you hovering somewhere between intuition and delusion. Creativity is high, boundaries are low. Lovely month for numbers and art. Less lovely for pretending deadlines are spiritual suggestions. Be nicer to dogs.



OUT & ABOUT

Món Sant Benet: More than just a Monastery**A journey through the history and power of Catalonia**

For this month's article, we went to Món Sant Benet with fairly modest expectations.

That may sound a little uncharitable, but it was coloured by our previous visit to the Mines of Gavà, which had promised much and delivered less. So this time I was prepared for another worthy but underwhelming heritage trip: a few old stones, some dates, perhaps a guide reciting a few facts, and a polite sense that one had "done" another one.

Happily, Món Sant Benet was something quite different.

At one level, of course, it is exactly what it appears to be: an extraordinary monastery, full of striking architecture and layers of history. But what makes the Medieval Experience so memorable is that it does not present the past as something remote. It draws you in. It makes history feel immediate. And, perhaps most interestingly of all, it sombrely reveals just how little our human nature has changed.

The site itself is a tad confusing at first. There are several buildings and projects sharing the same space (the Fàbrica, the shop, the Alcía Project and more) so it takes a moment to orient yourself. But once you start exploring, the monastery quickly

makes itself known. It has that unmistakable appearance of a place that has stood and endured for centuries.

And what a place it is.

In some parts, it reminded me of one of those Escher drawings: higgledy-piggledy walls, arches, windows and stairways seemingly built one on top of one another, each from a different moment in its drawn-out past, yet somehow forming a coherent whole. Some of the stonework dates back over a thousand years. You do not have to be a historian to feel the weight of that. The building itself is fascinating before the tour begins.

This is not a simple monastery visit in which you wander from room to room while reading a few labels and surreptitiously looking at your watch. The audio-visual technology is subtly built into the experience. You wear headphones which in some spaces, start automatically as you enter. In others, you activate it yourself by pointing your control at a marked sensor and pressing a button. There are projections, reconstructed scenes, soundscapes and voices, but they are used with creativity and



restraint. The tech does not scream for attention. It supports the building rather than competing with it.

That is an important distinction. It would have been very easy to overdo it. In a place of such architectural beauty and historical weight, too much technology would feel intrusive or gimmicky. Here, it felt discreet. It kept the visit engaging without drowning the site in effects. I chose the English version, one of several languages available, and found it very easy to handle.

Some rooms are staged to show how they once looked and functioned. The kitchen and a monk's quarters were especially effective in this respect, giving a clear sense of lived reality rather than abstract history. You can read about how monks prayed, worked and followed routines, but it is another thing entirely to stand in their spaces and imagine the rhythms of daily life. At one point I found myself wondering not about theology or politics, but about basic human needs. How did they keep warm? Without central heating or glazing, the place must have been like living in a fridge or much of the year. That small observation somehow made the past feel more real.

The bell tower, meanwhile, gave us one of the visit's more unforgettable moments. Climbing it was easy enough, and the views were certainly beautiful. But unfortunately, we reached the top at 30 seconds before midday, at which time the massive bell began to toll with brain-numbing enthusiasm. "Deafening" would not be an understatement and I'm genuinely surprised there are no warning signs. It was one of those travel moments that becomes instantly memorable, even if not exactly enjoyable at the time.

But for me, the most lasting impression of Sant Benet was not tied to a particular room or story. It was the broader pattern that emerged over the course of the visit: the endless cycles of the fight for power.

Across more than a thousand years of history, the specific names and institutions may change - churchmen, nobles, military leaders, wealthy patrons, royalty - but the song remains the same. Again and again, powerful individuals sought more power. Again and again, those with influence tried

to consolidate it, expand it and defend it. Again and again, the accumulated injustice pushed ordinary people to rise and resist until someone else filled the power gap.

This was the real lesson of the visit.

We often think of history as a catalogue of dates, buildings and rulers. But Sant Benet makes its point. It shows that history is also a pattern of behaviour. Bishops, generals and kings may wear different clothes from today's rich and powerful, but their actions are recognisable: greed, manipulation, control, conquest. The names change. The mechanisms evolve. But the drama remains.

That is one reason the visit feels so relevant. It is not simply about looking back at a bygone world. It is about recognising ourselves in it.

At the same time, the experience also gives visitors a vivid sense of Catalonia's historical development. This is not only a monastery tour; it is a window into the "birth" of Catalonia and into a period when it was a major Mediterranean power. For anyone interested in understanding this part of the world more deeply, that alone makes the visit worthwhile. History here is not presented as an isolated local curiosity, but as part of a much bigger story of identity, influence and change.

What also impressed me was how well the experience seemed to work across ages. In our small group there were adults, a teenage boy and a seven-year-old girl, and everyone appeared engaged. That is no small achievement. Holding the attention of such a mixed group without oversimplifying or overloading the material is difficult, yet Sant Benet managed it.

In the end, what stays with me is not just that I enjoyed the visit, though I certainly did. Nor is it only that it was informative and well presented. It is that Mòn Sant Benet turns a historical site into something more reflective: a place where the stones speak not only of the past, but of recurring histories of people, ambitions and society.

A thousand years have passed, but the behaviour is still recognisable.

And that may be the most captivating thing of all.

LANGUAGE LEARNING HACKS

The Power of Chunking

The smarter way to learn vocabulary - by Ian Gibbs

When English speakers start learning Catalan or Spanish, it is very tempting to focus on individual words. You learn that *comer* means to eat, *casa* means house, *avui* means today, and little by little you build up your vocabulary.

That helps - but it is often not enough.

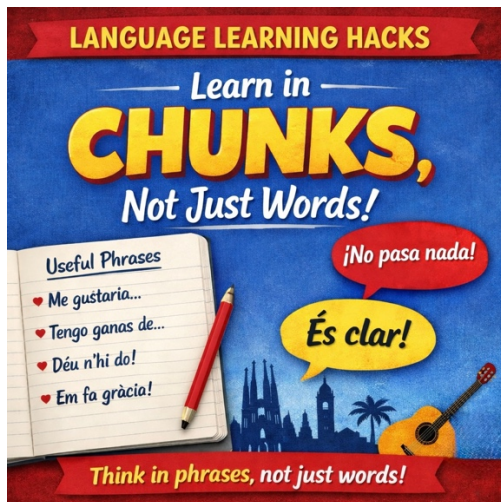
If you want to sound more natural and speak more fluently, one of the smartest things you can do is learn chunks: groups of words that commonly go together. Instead of learning language one word at a time, you learn useful ready-made pieces such as *déu n'hi do*, *és clar* or *a veure* (or in Spanish, *me gustaría*, *no pasa nada*, *tengo ganas de*, etc.)

Why is this so important? Because real conversation is full of these mini building blocks. Native speakers do not usually create every sentence from zero. They rely on familiar patterns and expressions they have heard and used hundreds of times. Successful learners do the same.

Take a simple example. You could learn that *gustaria* means something like would like. But it is much more useful to learn *me gustaria...* as a whole chunk, because that is how you will actually use it: *me gustaria un café*, *me gustaria apuntarme*, *me gustaria saber más*. In Catalan, the same applies to chunks like *m'agradaria*, *tinc ganes de*, or *em sembla que*.

Chunking helps in three important ways. First, it makes speaking faster, because you are pulling out whole phrases instead of building every sentence word by word. Second, it improves listening, because you start recognising common patterns in real speech. Third, it helps you avoid awkward direct translations from English.

This matters a lot. English speakers often try to translate their thoughts literally, but Spanish and Catalan do not always organise ideas in the same



way. Learning chunks helps you absorb the natural rhythm of the language.

So what should you do? When you read or listen, do not just note down new words. Write down the whole phrase. Keep a notebook of expressions, not just vocabulary. And practise them in different situations. For example: *tengo ganas de descansar*, *tengo ganas de viajar*; or *em fa gràcia*, *em fa mandra*, *em fa falta*.

The goal is not just to know what words mean. The goal is to be able to use the language naturally. And very often, that starts not with single words, but with chunks.

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