

July/August 2026 (Our 10th issue!)



Simply SANT CUGAT

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Including:
✓ Vall d'oreix
✓ La Floresta
✓ Les Planes

This month...

1. A Simple Guide to Public Swimming Pools
2. Pigs, Protests and Quarantine
3. Politics Goes On Holiday... Or Does It?
4. Out & About: The Gorg del Pare
5. Jokes, puzzles, reviews and much, much more

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**Simply SANT CUGAT®**

Tenth Issue: July & August 2026

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Summer Is What You Make It

For much of the year, life seems to move at full speed. School runs, meetings, activities, deadlines and commitments fill our calendars. Then July arrives and everything slows down. The streets become emptier. Some neighbours disappear to the coast, the mountains or to visit family abroad. Even local politics seems to take a well-earned holiday.

Yet summer isn't always as empty as it first appears.

This edition is full of reminders that there is still plenty happening around us. There are swimming pools to discover, hidden corners of nature to explore, languages to learn, choirs to join and community groups welcoming new faces. There are local stories worth telling, from the people protecting Collserola from wildfire to the ongoing challenges facing the park itself.

Perhaps that is one of the things we enjoy most about publishing this magazine. Every month we are reminded that behind the familiar streets, cafés and parks is a community full of interesting people doing interesting things.

Summer also gives us something increasingly needed: a little space to breathe. A chance to try something new, reconnect with friends, spend time with family, or simply sit under a tree with a good book and nowhere in particular to be.

That idea inspired our Summer Challenge on page 7. None of the suggestions are especially difficult. The goal is not achievement. The goal is simply to make the most of the weeks ahead before they slip by unnoticed.

Whether you are spending the summer in Sant Cugat, travelling further afield, or doing a little of both, we hope this edition helps you discover something new.

Thank you, as always, for reading, supporting local businesses, and helping us build connections within our community.

Have a wonderful summer.

Aston & Ian



Scan this link to join our Whatsapp announcement group and get up-to-date information about events, meet-ups, and relevant news.

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SIMPLE GUIDES

Sant Cugat's Public Swimming Pools

How to choose where to stay cool this summer

Summer in Sant Cugat is one of the joys of living here. Long evenings, terrace dinners, children playing outside until late and weekends exploring Catalonia all become part of daily life.

But by July, there is another reality too: heat.

Temperatures regularly climb into the 30s, and periods of extreme heat have become common enough that Sant Cugat now maintains a network of climate refuges. Interestingly, several public pools form part of that network, recognising that keeping cool is not only pleasant - it is increasingly important.

For international families arriving from cooler climates, one of the first summer questions often becomes: Where do we cool down?

Fortunately, Sant Cugat has several public swimming options - but they each have their own personality.

Parc Central: The Convenient Choice

Parc Central is the obvious choice for many families simply because it is central.

Located beside the park itself, it is easy to reach from much of town and works perfectly for an afternoon swim after camps, errands or shopping.

The complex includes a 25 m pool, children's leisure pool, hydromassage area, grass zones, loungers and terrace bar. Recent improvements upgraded technical systems and refreshed the surroundings. Entrance price is about 6€ to 10€.

The big advantage is convenience.

The possible downside? It feels more urban and can become busier than the other pools during peak summer days.

How to make the most of it:

- ✓ Go earlier or later in the day if possible. Mid-afternoon can be busiest.
- ✓ Great for combining with lunch in town.
- ✓ Bring extra shade for smaller children.
- ✓ During official heat alerts, municipal pools may provide free access.



La Floresta: The Hidden Gem

La Floresta feels completely different.

Hidden among trees on the edge of Collserola, this is less municipal pool and more mini summer escape.

The atmosphere is greener, quieter and slower. It offers shaded grass areas, picnic space, children's facilities and a seasonal bar/chiringuito associated with the pool. Again, entrance is about 6€ to 10€.

It has also seen substantial recent improvements. Recent works included new poolside paving and infrastructure upgrades designed to improve comfort and prevent mud and rainwater entering the pool during storms, while earlier improvements added artificial grass areas. The result is a pool that feels noticeably refreshed while keeping its relaxed woodland atmosphere.

This is probably the strongest option for younger children or families wanting shade.

How to make the most of it:

- ✓ Bring a picnic blanket and expect to stay longer than planned.
- ✓ Arrive before lunch to claim a shady spot.
- ✓ Pack books, cards or games - families tend to linger here.
- ✓ Perfect "lazy summer afternoon" energy.

Valldoreix: For Future Swimmers

Valldoreix is different again.

This is fundamentally a sports complex rather than a leisure pool.

It includes a 25 m pool with movable cover, children's area and wider sports facilities. Food and drink options associated with the complex appear stronger than at the municipal pools.

The atmosphere is more sports club than summer retreat. Less lying on the grass. More swimming, training and active families.

Valldoreix has also benefited from significant recent investment. The complex has undergone major technical works in recent years, including renovation of the covered pool systems and more recent improvement works affecting the pool facilities themselves.

The daily entrance fee is roughly 14€ for adults.

How to make the most of it:

- ✓ Bring goggles - this is the "proper swimming" option.
- ✓ Consider multi-entry passes if visiting repeatedly.
- ✓ Combine the pool with padel or sports activities.
- ✓ Check schedules during summer-school periods and organised activities.

Eurofitness: The Year-Round Option

Eurofitness is not really a summer pool.

It is the year-round solution right in the centre of town on the Rambla del Cellar.

25m indoor pool with strict 8 lane rules: Gym, spa and fitness facilities make it useful long after summer ends - or when outdoor pools are simply too crowded. Having a sauna there next to the pool is a treat. There is also a children's splash pool and swimming lessons.

Membership starts at roughly 55€/month for adults but it also has swim only day rates at 11€ and good value books of ten.

This only really becomes good value if you use the gym + pool + spa together. Otherwise, occasional swimmers will probably find the summer pools cheaper. The downside? You have to wear a swimming cap.

How to make the most of it:

- ✓ Think long term - this comes into its own after summer.
- ✓ Best value if using several facilities, not only the pool.
- ✓ Useful backup during heatwaves.
- ✓ Good option for year-round residents.

And perhaps that is the nice surprise. For a town the size of Sant Cugat, families actually have plenty of ways to survive summer - whether that means serious swimming, forest shade, or simply an ice cream beside the pool while the children disappear happily into the water.

Pool Info at a Glance

Parc Central

-  Adult entry: approximately 6 to 10€
-  Summer opening hours: unavailable
-  Terrace bar
-  Family atmosphere: ★★★★★
-  Best for: convenience and central location

La Floresta

-  Adult entry: approximately 6 to 10€
-  Summer opening hours: unavailable
-  Bar/chiringuito
-  Family atmosphere: ★★★★★
-  Best for: shade, relaxation and kids

Valldoreix

-  Adult entry: approximately 8 to 14€ depending on ticket type
-  Summer opening hours: generally 9:00–21:00 weekdays, shorter at weekends
-  Bar/restaurant facilities
-  Family atmosphere: ★★★
-  Best for: swimming and sports

Eurofitness

-  Membership from approximately 55€/month
-  Open year-round with extended daily hours
-  Café area
-  Family atmosphere: ★★
-  Best for: year-round swimming and spa facilities

An Evening of Connecting and Kombucha

We returned to Fermentaria Smakelig to launch our June edition



Our June Simply Sant Cugat Meetup saw us return to Fermentaria Smakelig for the second time, and once again it proved to be a fantastic venue for bringing together members of Sant Cugat's international community.

Around 30 people joined us for the evening. One of the things we love most about these gatherings is the mix of people they attract. Where else can newcomers to the town, long-term residents, entrepreneurs, teachers, creatives and community volunteers all find themselves sharing the same table?

This month's special feature was a tasting of fermented drinks organised by our hosts. Guests got to sample a selection including kombucha and kvass, learning about the traditions behind these unusual beverages. The tasting provided plenty of conversation and a few unexpected favourites.

The evening also gave local community members an opportunity to share their own projects. Kim introduced her upcoming Quiz Night, while Tiziana spoke about her new initiative, Shut Up and Write, a project designed to bring writers together for focussed, distraction-free writing sessions and mutual encouragement.

As always, the real highlight was the conversation itself. Familiar faces such as **Steve, Gabi, Helen, Sharon, Toby** and **Ingrid** were joined by

newcomers and first-time attendees, creating exactly the kind of welcoming atmosphere that has become the hallmark of these Meetups.

What began as a simple idea - to help English-speaking residents meet one another - continues to grow month by month. Every Meetup brings new friendships, new ideas and new opportunities to discover the remarkable people living right on our doorstep.

If you've never attended before, why not join us next time? You don't need to know anyone in advance, and there's no formal agenda. Just come along, enjoy a drink, and discover how easy it is to become part of this friendly and growing community.

We look forward to seeing you at the next one*.



*To receive announcements of where & when the next one is, join our WhatsApp Group (see page 3) or check online at www.simplysantcugat.com.

CHECKLIST

The Simply Sant Cugat Summer Challenge

How many can you do?

Summer has a habit of slipping through our fingers.

One moment you're making plans for July, the next you're wondering where August went and whether you actually did any of the things you meant to do.

So, this year, we've created a simple challenge.

Here are 20 challenges. Nothing extreme. No mountain marathons or gruelling diets. Just a collection of small adventures, personal challenges and opportunities to get out of your comfort zone and try something new, learn something useful, or simply enjoy life a little more.

Some will take five minutes. Others might take a whole day. A few may even become habits you continue long after summer has ended.

The question is simple: how many can you complete before September?

Tick them off as you go. Compete with friends or family if you like. There are no prizes, except perhaps a richer summer and maybe the smug satisfaction of having completed them all.

Some of the items are about discovering new things. A few are about rediscovering yourself.

Most importantly, they're all about making the most of summer rather than letting summer simply happen to you.

Good luck. See how many you can tick off before September arrives.

1. Learn 10 new words in Catalan or Spanish ☐
2. Try a new sport (golf, petanca, pádel etc.)..... ☐
3. Read a book in a different language. ☐
4. Attend La Floresta Festa Major in July..... ☐
5. Try a new restaurant..... ☐
6. Keep a summer journal. ☐
7. Spend a day without looking at social media ☐
8. Have a picnic in a park. ☐
9. Explore a new part of Sant Cugat ☐
10. Watch the (partial) eclipse and Perseid meteor shower on the 12th August ☐
11. Declutter a cupboard or the whole room. ☐
12. Attend a language exchange group. ☐
13. Walk 10,000 steps ☐
14. Learn a new game..... ☐
15. Cook a meal you've never cooked before ☐
16. Keep a gratitude diary for a week. ☐
17. Attend a piece of live music. ☐
18. Visit a municipal swimming pool..... ☐
19. Enjoy a new flavour of ice-cream..... ☐
20. Tell someone how much you love them..... ☐
21. and why not add your own challenge here? ☐



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SWINE FEVER

Pigs, Protests and Quarantine

Why is the Collserola Park closed and when will it open again?



When my mother told me to mind my Ps and Qs, I don't think this is what she had in mind: pigs, protests and a park under quarantine. Yet that is the sorry state of the Collserola Natural Park - Barcelona's vast green lung stretching over 8,000 hectares of forest, just minutes from our doors.

Here in Sant Cugat, the Collserola is our collective backyard.

For many of us it's a place to run, cycle, walk the dog, or simply 'touch grass' (as they say on TikTok). Few towns in the metropolitan area are as bound up with their park as we are, which is why the indefinite closure has hit harder here than almost anywhere else. The lack of freedom stings - particularly so soon after the restrictions of Covid.

So what is wrong with the pigs? Will we see more protests? And how long will our beloved park remain under quarantine?

What is African Swine Fever and is it a danger to humans?

African Swine Fever (ASF) - known in Catalan and Spanish as Pesta Porcina Africana - is a viral disease that is extremely dangerous for the wild boar population. Fatality rates in infected pigs are close to 100%, and so far, there have been 332 confirmed cases. The virus is highly resilient. It can survive on

surfaces, clothing, shoes and bicycle tyres for days or even weeks.

However, African Swine Fever is not a risk to human health. Put simply, you are safe. You cannot catch the disease by walking or cycling in the forest and the disease has never crossed from animals to humans.

The real concern is the disease spreading to commercially farmed pigs. Catalonia has one of Europe's largest pig farming industries. With approximately 8 million animals, pork accounts for 19% of all Catalan food and beverage exports.

With fatality rates so high, if the disease spread to domestic pig farms, the consequences would be catastrophic for the pork industry.

Why is the park closed?

There are three main reasons why the authorities have closed the park:

- To limit the spread of the disease: with the virus so resilient, the concern is that an infected pair of shoes or bike tyres will inadvertently carry the disease into domestic farms.
- To prevent the spread of wild boars: every time a human enters the forest and startles the wild boars there is a risk of scattering animals, and the disease, into new areas.



- To protect the public and allow the Corps of Rural Agents (Agents Rurals) to go about their work capturing the animals.

Are the restrictions necessary?

Not everyone thinks so. On 6th June, around 200 people defied the closure in a protest walk, organised via a Change.org petition with 5,000+ signatures. Organisers call the restrictions 'indiscriminate and harmful', argue that they should be aimed at the entrants to commercial farms, and point to apparent double standards:

- a film set operated inside the park at Can Sant Joan while walkers were turned away
- residents' vehicles leave the zone without disinfecting their tyres, yet cyclists cannot pass.

The economic toll is real: visitor numbers are down 83%, the park has lost an estimated 100,000 euros in revenue, local bars and restaurants report a 70% income drop, and around twenty research projects have been suspended.

Timeline: how we got here

Late November 2025: First cases detected: two dead wild boars test positive for ASF in Collserola - the first confirmed cases in Spain in over 20 years.

5th December: Catalonia restricts access across 91 municipalities. A zone system is introduced: 12 high-risk towns (within 6km of the outbreak) face full closures; 79 lower-risk towns (6-20km away) face partial restrictions.

15th December: Restrictions eased in 73 lower-risk towns. Access to nature resumes for individuals and small groups; organised activities remain banned.

30th January 2026: Collserola-specific adjustments: lower-risk areas closed nightly (10pm-6am) to allow culling operations. Sant Cugat, Montcada i Reixac, and Cerdanyola confirmed as high-risk - access prohibited at all times.

11th-12th March: First case confirmed within Barcelona city limits. Total closure of Collserola takes effect - 24 hours, indefinitely. 220+ cases confirmed; 18 municipalities in the high-risk zone.

Late April: Parc de Joan Revertos (Sarria) partially reopens via one entrance - the first targeted relaxation since total closure.

26th May: Park confirmed closed through July and August. Total confirmed cases: 332. No reopening date set.

6th June: Around 200 residents march through the park in a protest walk organised via a Change.org petition with 5,000+ signatures, calling for the restrictions to be reconsidered.

When will the park reopen?

The government aims to eliminate all 500+ boars within Collserola and reduce the wider population by 80%, to one boar per square kilometre. Around 1,100 animals have been captured so far - roughly half in Collserola - using thermal cameras, drones, canine units and cage traps.

There is no fixed reopening date. The park will remain closed through July and August at minimum and will only reopen when the boar population is under control. You can stay up to date on changes to the restrictions here:

- Collserola Park: parcnaturalcollserola.cat/fauna/ppa
- Barcelona City Council: barcelona.cat/infobarcelona
- Catalan government: gencat.cat

Minding our Ps and Qs

And so, as pig numbers fall, the protests grow, and the quarantine holds, all we can do is hope this summer gives the Agents Rurals the space they need - to complete the cull and protect Catalonia's farms.

With any luck, once we're all back from the Costa Brava, we'll be running, cycling and 'touching grass' in our collective backyard once again. Fingers crossed.

Quick guide to what is and isn't allowed

- ✗ Trail running, hiking, or walking on forest trails
- ✗ Mountain biking or cycling on forest tracks
- ✗ Dog walking in forest areas
- ✗ Use of picnic and barbecue areas
- ✗ Sports activities and organised events in the park
- ✗ Barbecuing or burning waste within 500m of wooded areas (until 15th October)
- ✓ Residents accessing homes within the forest zone (via paved roads only)
- ✓ Schools and businesses operating within the affected area
- ✓ Tibidabo Amusement Park - open as normal
- ✓ Parc Joan Revertos (Sarria) - via the Sol i Padris entrance
- ✓ Using paved urban roads bordering the park, including Sant Cugat



EOI Sant Cugat: From Sleeping Bags to Lotteries

How Sant Cugat's Official Language School Has Changed Over 20 Years



There was a time when learning a language as an adult required more than motivation.

Sometimes it required a sleeping bag.

"I remember people spending the night outside the EOI Drassanes to secure their place in the enrolment queue," recalls Miquel À. Gago, director of the Official Language School (EOI) of Sant Cugat. "Some people would arrive the evening before and sleep there to make sure they were first in line."

Today, nobody sleeps outside a language school.

Instead, prospective students face online forms, placement tests, lotteries for places and waiting lists. It is just one of the many changes Miquel has witnessed during more than twenty years at the head of the EOI Sant Cugat.

Unlike many school directors, Miquel did not inherit an established institution. He helped create one.

A German teacher by profession and by passion, he studied at the Goethe-Institut before graduating in Anglo-Germanic Philology from the University of Barcelona. After working at the EOIs of Lleida, Esplugues and Drassanes, he applied in 2003 to lead an exciting new educational project: a brand-new language school in Sant Cugat del Vallès.

"When I was appointed director, there wasn't even a physical school building yet," he explains. "We had to create everything."

The first EOI Sant Cugat operated from the Institut Arnau Cadell. Two prefabricated cabins served as offices while evening classes were held in classrooms made available by the institute.

More than twenty years later, the school occupies a former primary school building on Avda. Ragull that was lovingly renovated and adapted. Today it houses six classrooms, administrative offices and a substantial language library containing books, graded readers, DVDs and reference materials.

Many of these resources are used less frequently today than in the past. Streaming platforms have replaced DVDs, while online dictionaries have changed the way people learn languages. Nevertheless, students continue to make good use of the library's graded readers borrowing service.

From Paper to Screen

Technology has also transformed the way languages are taught. Teachers use educational platforms such as Moodle and Google Drive to share materials, videos and exercises. One of the tools Miquel particularly values is the digital class diary, which

allows students to consult summaries, materials and explanations whenever they are unable to attend class.

The aim is simple: help students stay on track.

Because despite all the technological advances, one challenge remains exactly the same.

Getting students through the door is one thing. Keeping them there is quite another.

Learning a language requires commitment. Students attend more than four hours of classes each week and are expected to continue studying at home. Balancing lessons with work, family life and other responsibilities is not always easy.

As a result, groups that begin the year with around thirty students can end up considerably smaller.

English students tend to persevere because they encounter the language constantly in everyday life. German, however, the school's other core language, has experienced declining demand as more students prioritise English.

Helping students stay motivated therefore remains one of the school's greatest challenges.

The Challenge of Getting In

One of the biggest challenges for many students arrives before they even attend their first class.

Most people are familiar with the private language academy model: walk in, take a quick placement test, choose a timetable, pay the fee and start learning. The EOIs work very differently.

As part of the public education system, places are limited and demand can exceed supply. Hopeful students must complete a pre-registration process and prove their level or an online placement test before entering the allocation process. For those wishing to enrol, the entire process is concentrated into a particularly short period. This year, applications for new students will take place between 31st Aug and 7th Sept. If you miss that window, you'll have to wait for any remaining vacant places after the main enrolment process has been completed.

Every year, some applicants miss deadlines, misunderstand procedures or assume that the school will contact them personally after pre-registration. In reality, applicants themselves must actively monitor the entire process.

In fact, one of the easiest ways to miss out on an EOI place is to win one... and not realise it.

That is why it is important to pay close attention to pre-registration dates, lotteries, waiting lists and vacant-place announcements.

A Little-Known Educational Resource

Many residents of Sant Cugat are not even aware that the EOI exists.

Yet it forms part of a network of more than forty Official Language Schools and delegated centres across Catalonia, offering something that is increasingly difficult to find: high-quality public language education for adults at prices that private providers struggle to match.

Many students may also benefit from reduced fees or complete fee exemptions.

The model itself is unusual. According to Miquel, there are few comparable examples in Europe of a public network dedicated almost exclusively to adult language education and the awarding of officially recognised language qualifications.

Many readers may be surprised to learn that some EOIs also teach Catalan and Spanish for foreign learners. However, the EOI Sant Cugat maintains its historic offer of English and German, while Catalan courses are also available through public organisations such as the Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística (CPNL).

Over the years, the EOI has helped thousands of people improve their professional prospects, obtain official qualifications, prepare for travel, discover new cultures or simply enjoy the challenge of learning something new.

More than twenty years after opening its doors in borrowed classrooms and prefabricated cabins, the school continues to adapt to changing times.

For Miquel À. Gago, who has led it since day one, that continuity may be its most satisfying achievement.

Buildings change. Technology changes. Admission systems change.

But the desire to learn another language and discover other cultures remains as strong as ever.



LOCAL HERO

Xavi Lago and the Guardians of Collserola

The head of the hidden team standing between Sant Cugat and a major disaster



Xavi Lago: Coordinator of the Collserola Forest Fire Surveillance System

Imagine someone pounding on your front door on a hot August afternoon.

"You need to leave. Now!"

You have five minutes. Not five minutes to do a bit of tidying up or finish your coffee, but five minutes to decide what belongings in your home matter most.

Passports? Medication? Family photographs? The laptop? Your child's favourite teddy bear?

Outside, hot ash is beginning to fall from the sky.

Looking out of your window you see the familiar green hills have disappeared behind a wall of smoke. The air smells of smoke. And somewhere in the distance you hear a disconcerting sound - not thunder, not an aeroplane, but a deep, relentless roar like a distant freight train: Fire is coming.

A major forest wildfire is one of nature's most destructive forces.

Temperatures can exceed 1,000°C. Aluminium window frames melt. Plastic pipes disappear. Steel weakens and bends. Concrete explodes. Trees spontaneously burst into flames. And we won't even start on what happens to human beings. And under the right (or should we say 'wrong') conditions, a wildfire can spread faster than you can run.

And don't think you're safe in the town.

Wind-blown embers can travel up to half a kilometre ahead of the fire. A single glowing fragment can land on a roof, enter through a vent or broken window, and start a second fire inside a house that is far from the forest.

For residents of Sant Cugat, Les Planes, La Floresta and Valldoreix, this is not a distant problem from California. We live alongside Collserola, one of Europe's largest metropolitan forests and one of Sant Cugat's greatest treasures.

Fortunately, between our homes and this worst-case scenario stands an extraordinary group of people most of us are completely unaware of.

Leading that effort is Xavi Lago, coordinator of Collserola's summer wildfire surveillance system.

Every summer, while the rest of us are thinking about holidays and swimming pools, Xavi and his team are watching the horizon.

"We are a team of 28 people," he explains. "Our job is to detect and pinpoint any column of smoke as quickly as possible."

It's a sophisticated system.



Six watchtowers are positioned within the park and two more overlook Collserola from the outside. From these towers, trained observers scan the landscape hour after hour. When they spot a column of smoke, they immediately calculate its position using specialist equipment. If three towers see it, they can triangulate it with remarkable precision.

Within less than a minute, firefighters can receive coordinates, maps and photographs showing exactly where the fire is developing.

That speed is crucial.

"The first ten minutes are the most important," says Xavi. "If the fire escapes those first ten minutes, the situation can become much more difficult. A small fire can become a large one very quickly. And a large wildfire creates its own unique problems. It no longer behaves according to normal weather patterns."

Large forest fires can create their own weather systems. Rising hot air forms enormous clouds known as pyrocumulus clouds. These can generate powerful and unpredictable winds, carrying embers far ahead of the fire front and creating new fires in unexpected locations.

The threat is particularly significant because of Collserola's location. Around three million people live in the metropolitan area surrounding the park. A major wildfire would not only threaten vegetation. Smoke, ash and airborne particles could affect communities far beyond the immediate fire zone. Large areas could even require mass evacuation or temporary confinement.

Yet despite the seriousness of the risk, many residents don't notice the work taking place above their heads.

"The towers are not very visible," says Xavi. "People see patrol vehicles and police officers, but they don't usually see the people spending ten hours at a time in a tower watching."

Most residents would probably be shocked to learn how often fires start around Collserola. In 2024 alone, around 40 fires were recorded across the metropolitan surveillance area. The year before there were 71. During the drought years of 2021 and 2022, the figure exceeded 100 each.

The important point is that most of them never became headlines.

Many were detected quickly, accurately located and tackled before they became serious problems.

That, says Xavi Lago, is the real measure of success.

People remember the dramatic images of forests in flames, helicopters overhead and homes under threat. What they rarely see are the dozens of small incidents that are spotted early, reported within minutes and put out before they became dangerous.

The greatest achievement of Collserola's fire surveillance system is not the fires we remember - it's the fires we never hear about.

Perhaps the most sobering part of our conversation concerns the causes of fires.

According to Xavi, around 98% of incidents in Collserola are linked in some way to human activity.

A cigarette thrown from a car window. A barbecue. A spark from a power tool. A moment of carelessness.

"Any small mistake can become a huge forest fire," he warns.

The message is especially relevant during the summer months, when hot temperatures, low humidity and dry vegetation combine to create dangerous conditions.

As our interview draws to a close, Xavi returns repeatedly to one theme: teamwork.

The surveillance system only works because dozens of people arrive on time, remain alert and perform their roles day after day throughout the summer.

"We are a team," he says. "If one person is missing, the system no longer works in the same way."

If all goes well this summer, most of us will never think about Xavi Lago or his people in the watchtowers.

We will walk our dogs, enjoy long evenings on the terrace and take Collserola's green landscape for granted.

And that is exactly how they would like it.

Because success, in their world, is a thin column of smoke spotted in time, a rapid response and another summer in which Sant Cugat, Les Planes, La Floresta, and Valldoreix all remain safe.

Unseen in their towers, the guardians of Collserola will be watching.



NEW RESTAURANT REVIEW

Santa Quitèria: Who is Sam de Pop?

by Sharon Biggar

Editor's note: Our restaurant reviews are genuine, independent and undercover. We pay for our meals, accept no freebies, and do not tell the staff we are reviewers. That way, we experience each restaurant just like any other customer.

A year or so ago my Sunday morning ritual was a hard climb up Tibidabo, coast back down, before settling into the Brevet café on the corner of Carrer de Girona and Rambla Can Móra, for a well-earned cuppa. The gentle clack of the cycling shoes on the tiled floor, the snap of the helmet clasp, followed by the barista's "the usual?", which served as a combined greeting and order, was the prelude to sighs of satisfaction over the first sip. The coffee didn't disappoint.

Unfortunately, Santa Quitèria did.

Brevet's old corner has been reborn as a full restaurant serving Catalan Cuisine – grander, cooler, and yet somehow less "easy like a Sunday morning".

To be fair, the decor is impressive, the kitchen larger than the average Barcelonian apartment. The **bravas** were genuinely excellent: exceptionally crisp, with a pleasurable crunch of potato against the smoothness of the sauce. The **padrón peppers** were tasty, and the **sobrasada** was a welcome addition to the **tortilla**. All topped off with an excellent white wine. On the plate and in the glass, no real complaints at all.

The menu, though, was another matter. It defeated me. And Google.

My Catalan is embarrassingly poor – I know, I know, I need to fix that – but I had a feeling that even if this menu was in English, I would still have struggled. Anyone know what "**Sam de Pop**" is? Google (somewhat unhelpfully) informed me I was welcome to eat "the father of Sam" but no thank you! When half the menu is a mystery, you default to the familiar – which explains our very sensible order of *macarones*, *padrón* peppers and *tortilla*.



Sam de Pop remains a mystery, and I can't help feeling that might be our loss.

A restaurant is more than the food. Great food is table stakes (excuse the pun) and to earn a place in your regular rotation, a restaurant needs more: a menu that excites, an environment that inspires, a welcome that makes you feel at home. And here is where I had hoped Santa Quitèria would raise the bar.

Dare I say that the overall vibe leans towards pretentious? It's the kind of place that's trying so hard to be "cool" it makes you wonder if you are.

Brevet knew its regulars, its coffee, and what Sunday mornings were for. Santa Quitèria has set its sights higher. The food is fancier, the decor more impressive, the space more open – and yet?

Santa Quitèria

Rambla Can Móra, 5

Open from 8:30 to 00:00, 7 days a week

santaquiteria.cat

CULTURE CORNER

Summer Nights in the Cloister

Nits de Música al Claustre



From 4th to 17th July, the cloister garden of the Monastery hosts three live concerts in its annual series of Nits de Música al Claustre.

This year's programme offers three very different musical experiences. The acclaimed **Quartet Gerhard** opens the festival on the 4th July with works by Beethoven and Ravel. Perfect relaxation after the excitement of watching the Tour de France set off from Barcelona.

This is followed by **the Coblà Jovenívola de Sabadell** on the 10th celebrating their 50th anniversary with a concert of traditional Catalan sardanas (or if you are a footie fan, then stay home and watch the World Cup).

The series concludes on the 17th (no clashes!) with the lively and regionally famous Menorcan singer-songwriter **Cris Juanico**, who wakes up the town with his melodic folk-rock sung in Catalan.

Whether you are into the music on offer or not, these are memorable evenings in the open air and in the beautiful surroundings beneath the ancient arches of the monastery.

Concerts begin at 21:30 and tickets are 12€ and can be bought from the tourist office next door or else online <https://santcugat.cat/programa/nits-musica-al-claustre>

99% Solar Eclipse 2026

A dramatic celestial event for everyone

Our other major summer highlight is a deep partial solar eclipse visible from Sant Cugat on 12 August at 20:29. From here, the moon will cover approximately 99% of the sun at its peak, creating a dramatic celestial event.

Although it never quite reaches total eclipse here, the event unfolds over two hours, as the moon gradually moves across the sun before and away again. The changing light and shifting shadows make it a fascinating experience and being on your own rooftop or Plaza Octavia will be captivating. If 99% is not enough, travel up north Catalonia or go online to find the best nearby viewing spot.

To mark the occasion, Sant Cugat is going to host workshops, talks and family activities focused on astronomy and safe observation.

As always with solar viewing, eye protection is essential. Even during a deep partial eclipse, looking directly at the sun without filters can cause permanent eye damage.



99% SOLAR ECLIPSE
12 AUGUST 2026
A RARE OPPORTUNITY
YOU MAY NEVER SEE AGAIN

SAFETY WARNING
Looking at the Sun without proper protection can cause serious and irreversible eye damage.

THIS RISK EXISTS THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE ECLIPSE.

SAFETY ADVICE

- Use only eclipse glasses certified to ISO 12312-2 standards and in good condition.
- Use approved solar filters for telescopes and cameras.
- Observe the eclipse using indirect projection methods.
- Always supervise children during the eclipse.

DO NOT

- Look directly at the Sun without protection.
- Use ordinary sunglasses.
- Use X-ray films, CDs, smoked glass, or homemade filters.
- Look at the Sun through binoculars, telescopes, cameras, or other optical devices without a proper solar filter.

 AJUNTAMENT DE SantCugat  + SANT CUGAT

SIMPLY FOR KIDS

FIND GIMBY!

Hello again!

This month, little Gimby is struggling with the heat. So, he's decided to find a nice cool and shady part of the magazine to rest, possibly with something nice to drink?

Can you find him?

(answer on page 29)



Gimby

SIMPLY COLOUR

Pau, Anna and Maria are celebrating because they've created something amazing on the beach.

Can you fill in the picture and make it even more amazing by adding some colour?



SUMMER WORD SEARCH

Welcome to our Summer Trilingual Word Search! Hidden in the grid are four things many of us associate with **a holiday by the sea**. Each one appears **3** times: once in English, once in Catalan and once in Spanish.

Can you find all 12 words?

No word list. No extra clues. Just your powers of language and observation. Happy hunting!

P	A	S	O	R	R	A	S
A	L	S	V	E	S	P	A
B	E	A	C	H	V	S	N
P	L	N	T	A	E	U	E
L	A	D	A	J	R	M	S
A	V	I	S	P	A	M	T
Y	W	A	S	P	N	E	I
A	R	E	N	A	O	R	U

	ENG	CAT	ESP
Word 1	beach		
Word 2		sorra	
Word 3			verano
Word 4	wasp		

SIMPLY JOKE

Can you match the questions with the answers?

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. What do you call a fish wearing a bow tie? | A. A nervous wreck! |
| 2. Why did the baby crab never share his food? | B. Because they always wear their trunks. |
| 3. What did the baguette do on holiday? | C. Antibiotics! |
| 4. What lies on the ocean floor and wobbles? | D. It gets wet. |
| 5. Why are elephants always ready to swim? | E. A deep thinker! |
| 6. What do ants take when they're ill? | F. Sofisticated |
| 7. Why do birds fly north in the summer? | G. It's too far to walk. |
| 8. What do you call a philosopher at the bottom of the sea? | H. Nothing. It just loafed around. |
| 9. Where do zombies go on holiday? | I. The Dead Sea |
| 10. What happens when you drop a red hat into a blue sea? | J. Because he was a little shellfish! |

1 = F, 2 = J, 3 = H, 4 = A, 5 = B, 6 = C, 7 = G, 8 = E, 9 = I, 10 = D



Want to Sing? Join a Choir!

By Helen Jackson



Helen Jackson (fifth from top left) is a proud member of the Cordedama Choir

Twelve years ago I came across a women's choir, "Cordedama", which practises in the heart of Sant Cugat. Joining the choir has given me so many opportunities to meet new people, make new friends, learn songs from many different countries and traditions, and perform in Sant Cugat and in other towns and villages around Catalunya. It has been nothing but a positive experience for me, and I am so glad that I took the plunge to join.

The benefits of singing in a choir, such as improved mental and physical health, reduced stress and greater social connection, are well recognised and when moving to a new community, it is a way to build links with your new home.

Many people moving to Sant Cugat have previously been a member of a choir, or have wanted to join

one, and moving to a new country, they may be unsure how to go about it. If this is the case for you, then you are in luck, because Sant Cugat has a rich musical life with many different choirs and many different types of choirs. From Gospel to classical, rock to traditional songs, there is a choir for you.

Being a member of the international community here, you might feel concerned about the language, and the chances are, in Sant Cugat, that the choir will have Spanish or Catalan as its principal language of direction. Whilst this might be a concern, you could see this as an opportunity to develop your language skills in a relaxed environment, using the music and the repetitive nature of refining your singing to help you learn. Of course, joining a choir also gives you a chance to meet more people, broaden social contacts and



enhance your sense of community and connection to your new home.

Several of the local music schools, such as *Aula de So* or the local municipal music school “*Escola Municipal Victòria dels Àngels*”, have active and established choirs, as does the Club Muntanyenc de Sant Cugat, whilst other choirs such as Cor de Gospel Sant Cugat can easily be found with a quick online search.

In Barcelona, there are a few international choirs such as the 250-member Barcelona English Choir or the Barcelona International Choir.

There are also large choral choirs, such as El Cor Canta or “*Canta amb OBC*”, which perform in impressive venues such as the Auditori de Barcelona. At times they may offer opportunities to take part in major works, such as Handel’s Messiah. These are worth looking into as they offer special and memorable experiences.

So if you want to join a choir, go for it. There are plenty of different opportunities out there. Take that first step by deciding what type of choir you would like to join, then contact them. Who knows where it will lead?

Thinking of Joining a Choir?

Cordedama is a women’s choir based in the centre of Sant Cugat. For more information, search for cor.dedama on Instagram or contact Aula de So.

- You don’t need to be able to read music.
- Many choirs welcome complete beginners.
- Most offer a trial rehearsal.
- Language ability is usually less important than enthusiasm.
- Remember... different choirs have different levels of commitment, from casual to performance focused.

Language Exchange Evenings

Looking for a relaxed way to practise languages and meet new people? Join our friendly Language Exchange Group.

every Tuesday evening

6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

outside Abat, Plaça Octavià 8.

Whether you’re learning English, Spanish, Catalan or another language, you’ll find a welcoming atmosphere, interesting conversations and people from a variety of backgrounds. No classes, no pressure– just real conversation practice and new connections.

Info: Whatsapp 664 788 806

Aula de So Summer Showcases

Enjoy an afternoon of music, theatre and young talent with Aula de So - one of Sant Cugat’s leading music and performing arts schools.

Students from the Musical Theatre Summer Camp will take to the stage to present the songs and scenes they have been working on during the summer programme.

— Showcase 1 —

Friday 17th July, 16:00

Casa de Cultura

Carrer de Castelltvi, 8

— Showcase 2 —

Friday 31st July, 16:00

Sala Clavé (Unió Santcugatenca)

Avda Josep Anselm Clavé, 13-17

Admission is free and everyone is welcome!



Other parties have yet to make a formal announcement. PP has not confirmed a candidate, but Álvaro Benejam - who has led the party in Sant Cugat for three consecutive elections - is the most likely choice. A lawyer by profession, he also serves as a partner and managing director of a Barcelona law firm. En Comú Podem's Ramon Gutiérrez, a former graphic designer and current city councillor, has publicly stated his willingness to lead the party again. It would be his second time at the top of the list - he previously served as a councillor between 2015 and 2019 under the leadership of Roser

Casamitjana, before the party lost its representation in city hall at the following election. VOX has not made any public statement regarding its candidate, though the two current councillors are considered the most probable options: Jordi Guirado, a teacher, and Marcos Rodríguez, a jeweller.

Local parties have been a recurring feature of Sant Cugat's political landscape, but none has secured representation in city hall since 1982. As of yet, no local party has come forward for the 2027 election and there are no candidates to speak of. That long absence from the council chamber does not necessarily make them irrelevant - in a closely contested election, the votes they attract could yet influence the final outcome.

Municipal elections rarely dominate television debates or front pages. Yet they are often the elections that most directly shape a city's daily life - and their consequences can reach far beyond the local level. In Spain, the 2023 local election results pushed Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to call a snap general election. The local is never just local.

Sant Cugat is no longer a small town where politics runs on personal familiarity, neighbourhood gossip

or informal networks. It is a significant municipality with complex public debates, increasingly demanding voters and an active civil society. Parties have had to adapt. Elections here are now prepared with a level of sophistication that would have seemed excessive not long ago.

This is why the months before the campaign matter more than they appear to. Parties decide which messages to push, which audiences they need to reach and which version of the city they want to project. The groundwork for the next political season is laid precisely when residents are paying the least attention.

By the time summer ends, Sant Cugat will already be in election mode. Catalonia's National Day on September 11 will likely mark the symbolic close of the political pause and the starter pistol for the long campaign season. From that point, the tone will sharpen, messages will become more defined and the candidates now being chosen will step into the spotlight.

For now, Sant Cugat feels calm. But in political terms, the storm is already forming.

Sant Cugat Toastmasters Club

Mondays: 6th & 20th July
7:15 - 9:00 pm · Casa de Cultura

Thinking about improving your public speaking, leadership, or networking skills?

Join us for two free guest sessions this July and discover our friendly international community before the new season starts in September.

Practise speaking, build confidence, and meet interesting people in a welcoming bilingual (English/Spanish) environment.

Optional social meetup afterwards.

Non-members are very welcome.

Info: toastmasterssantcugat@gmail.com

A Wise People Workshop

LinkedIn: A Key Tool for Your Job Search

Are you aged 45+ and looking for new career opportunities? LinkedIn is one of the most effective platforms for job searching, professional networking, and connecting with potential employers.

Join WPSC for a practical workshop on how to improve your LinkedIn profile, expand your network, and use LinkedIn more strategically in your job search.

Wednesday 8th July, 10:00 - 12:00

For professionals aged 45+

Registration: wp@wisepeoplesantcugat.cat

(Workshop in Spanish)

NEW INITIATIVE

Shut Up & Write

Ever wanted to write... but somehow ended up reorganising your kitchen instead? by Tiziana Bellicci

Let me guess: You sit down with every intention of writing that story, journal entry, article, business idea, or perhaps that email you've been avoiding since February.

You make tea.

You check your phone.

You suddenly remember an urgent need to reorganise a drawer.

Three hours later... absolutely no writing has happened.

If this sounds familiar, I have good news. Sant Cugat is getting a writing group.

Not a scary writing group.

Not a "please read your work aloud while strangers stare at you" writing group.

Not a group where someone dramatically says, *"Have you considered changing your protagonist's motivation?"*

No.

This is **Shut Up & Write**.

This is part of a global, nonprofit writing community built around one very simple idea: writing doesn't have to be lonely. And despite the slightly alarming name, nobody is rude to you.

I first discovered Shut Up & Write while searching online for a writing group for myself. I wanted something closer to home, somewhere I could meet people locally and feel part of a community.

When I couldn't find anything nearby and then discovered Shut Up & Write, I had a simple thought: Why not bring one to Sant Cugat?

Although I hadn't attended a session personally, I joined an orientation call with one of the organisers. The more we talked, the more I liked the idea.



Tiziana Bellicci is the founder of SU&W Sant Cugat

Because what many people need isn't necessarily more motivation. Sometimes they simply need other people.

The concept itself is wonderfully simple: we meet, say hello, briefly share what we're working on (if we want to), then... we write.

That's it. No workshops, no lectures, no forced sharing. Just people quietly writing alongside one another. For many people, writing isn't difficult because they lack ideas or talent. It's difficult because life gets in the way - work, family, endless to-do lists.

Many aspiring writers spend years saying: "I really should write more".

Shut Up & Write helps solve this problem by creating something many people struggle to create alone: Time.

Instead of waiting for inspiration to magically appear, you simply show up, sit down, and begin.

And you do not need to be a professional writer. You don't even need to call yourself a writer.

You can come if you write:

- Fiction
- Poetry
- Academic papers
- Journals
- Work projects
- Business ideas
- The novel that has been living in your head since 2014
- Or even if you simply want an hour where you finally sit down and write something.

No one critiques your work. No one edits your sentences. No one asks you to explain your metaphors. Your writing stays yours.

There are also optional writing challenges and global events for those who enjoy a little extra motivation, or who occasionally require external pressure to defeat their inner procrastinator.

What attracted me most to the idea was its focus on community. I genuinely believe people are more likely to continue writing when they feel supported. Building habits alone can feel difficult. Building habits alongside others often feels easier.

And this is exactly why I think a group like this can be valuable for Sant Cugat.

We live in a community full of professionals, entrepreneurs, remote workers, parents, students, creatives, commuters, and people carrying around ideas they keep promising themselves they will return to "one day".

Many people here are busy. Many people are creative. Many people are trying to find more balance.

This group creates space for those people.

Simply through showing up and creating together. What makes communities like this special isn't only the writing itself. It is the quiet sense of belonging that forms around it. There is something comforting about sitting with people who understand the strange combination of excitement, procrastination, overthinking, and occasional panic that writing can create.

Mostly though, this is about making space.

So if you have been waiting for a sign... this is probably it. Bring a laptop. Bring a notebook. Bring unfinished ideas. Bring terrible first drafts. Bring yourself.

This writing community officially begins in September, so if you are feeling even slightly curious (or if you have already started mentally choosing your favourite notebook), keep an eye on future editions of *Simply Sant Cugat*.

That is where you will find details, updates, locations, and dates for our first session.

Maybe what many of us need is not more discipline.

Maybe we simply need somewhere to sit down and write.

See you in September.

(Editor's note: We will post Information about the first SU&W meeting on our Whatsapp announcement group and in September's edition)



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DAVID COOK
ACCA



SIMPLY SPORT

Patí de Vela: The Catalan Boat With No Rudder

by Aston Swift

Imagine learning to sail a boat with no rudder, no steering wheel and no centreboard. It sounds impossible. Yet thousands of Catalans do exactly that every year aboard one of the most unique sailing boats in the world: the Patí de Vela, also known as the Patí Català.

If you have walked along Catalonia's beaches, you can't have failed to notice these long, slender wooden catamarans scattered across the sand. At some sailing clubs, dozens sit side by side awaiting their crews.

Born on the beaches of Badalona, the Patí has become a familiar sight along the Barcelona coastline, the Maresme and the Costa Daurada. Yet despite its unique design and appeal, it remains largely unknown outside Catalonia. I find that surprising because this is an exciting sport that is accessible, relatively easy to learn and by sailing standards, remarkably affordable.

The Patí is designed to be sailed by one person, but two fit quite easily while you are learning. It consists of a basic twin-hulled catamaran (these are the "Patí's") with a simple sail. The boat is controlled through a combination of sail and body position. Sailing close to the wind, you move forward on the deck. With the wind behind you, you move aft. To tack, you head the boat as close to the wind as possible, walk forward towards the mast, step around it, and allow the boat to swing onto the new course as the sail fills on the opposite side.

Getting this right for the first time is enormously satisfying and I remember my feeling of exhilaration when even in a gentle breeze I managed to change direction with remarkable ease. I was worried I wouldn't be able to steer the boat back to the beach near the clubhouse, but with the wind behind us I just sat and steered a precise course using my position and the sail, managing to avoid the oblivious tourists bobbing in the water on their lilos. It was an incredible feeling! . With only a single



Patí de Vela: not as hard as it looks!

sheet to control, most of the learning involves understanding how your movements affect the boat. Gybing is equally straightforward and as there is no boom flying overhead, the manoeuvre is less intimidating for beginners. The worst that happened to me in my learning was I fell in a few times, but in the warm sea water and lifejacket it was always a pleasure.

The absence of a rudder and centreboard brings another advantage: launching and beaching the boat is incredibly easy. The Patí can be dragged directly onto the beach and despite its size, is just about light enough for one person to move.

I took a four-session course with the Club Patí Vela Barcelona (CPVB), right in the heart of Barcelona. Lessons were spread over several weeks and scheduled flexibly. The instruction was excellent, with coaches keeping a close eye on everyone from support boats while encouraging us to swap positions, practise manoeuvres and learn how to recover from a capsiz.



The Patí is a tradition that stretches back more than a century, yet it has changed remarkably little during that time. While modern boats seem to evolve every year, the Patí remains wonderfully simple. Traditional boat builders are still producing new boats today down on the beaches, and there is also a healthy second-hand market, with fully kitted out ready to sail boats available from around 2,000€.

I thoroughly enjoyed my lessons. The only challenge I encountered afterwards was finding boats available to rent, as demand is high during summer. If you discover that you enjoy the sport, it may make sense to buy a Patí of your own or share one with friends and join a local club where you can sail recreationally or compete in races.

If you already sail, give it a try. It is unlike anything else on the water and an experience you won't forget. If you have never sailed before, the Patí is a wonderful introduction because it teaches the

fundamentals of wind, sail trim and balance more directly than almost any other boat.

In a world of carbon-fibre foiling yachts and computer-assisted navigation, the Patí de Vela remains a beautiful throwback. A boat with one sail, no rudder and over a century of Catalan heritage beneath its hulls. It has barely changed in a hundred years and perhaps it never will.

Information on CPVB: <https://pativela.cat/>

4 Classes of 3 hours per class is 400€.

Contact Joan on 670 089 879 or
info@pativelabarcelona.com



COMMUNITY NEWS

A Winning Night for Quiz Fans



The proud winning team celebrate their spoils

On Thursday, 11th June, 30+ people gathered at Tragaldabas restaurant for Mike and Kim's final English-language quiz night before the summer break.

The rounds covered an entertaining mix of film, current affairs, animals, music and science with frequent "Aha! I knew that!" moments.

The quiz will return on Thurs. 24th Sept., at a venue still to be announced on our SSC Whatsapp group. Entry fee is 5€ per person (which covers prizes).

Booking: WhatsApp Kim on 680 85 26 57

Instagram: @comm_unityconnect

CASA PARRA

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Sant Cugat.

Book Your Table
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See you soon at Casa Parra!



Simple Bilingual Crossword

Time to test your vocabulary!

One of the joys of living in Sant Cugat is hearing different languages every day. This crossword celebrates two of them.

Across (Horizontals): Catalan clues, English answers.

Down (Verticals): English clues, Catalan answers.

Whether you're a native speaker, a newcomer, or somewhere in between, it's a chance to learn, revise and discover a few useful words in a fun way.

Happy puzzling!

Horizontals (Across):

1: Un àpat en el parc

6: Clavilla

8: Castell

9: Molts riures?

10: L'adreça d'una
pàgina web

12: Un més un

13: Llar per a avions

17: Déu del sol

19: Companyia aèria
britànica

21: Planta marina

23: Intel·ligència artificial

24: Calamar

27: Nou menys vuit

29: Brúixola

31: Sogra

33: Una tassa a les
cinc?

34: Pasqua

35: Plou

36: D'edat.

Down (Verticals):

1: Beaches

2: Heat

3: Island

4: Field

5: Unemployment

6: Three make a yard

7: Ice

11: He steals
clothes?

14: Anger

15: A wave

16: Railway
vehicle

18: Friend

20: Water

22: Acorn

25: Who

26: Women

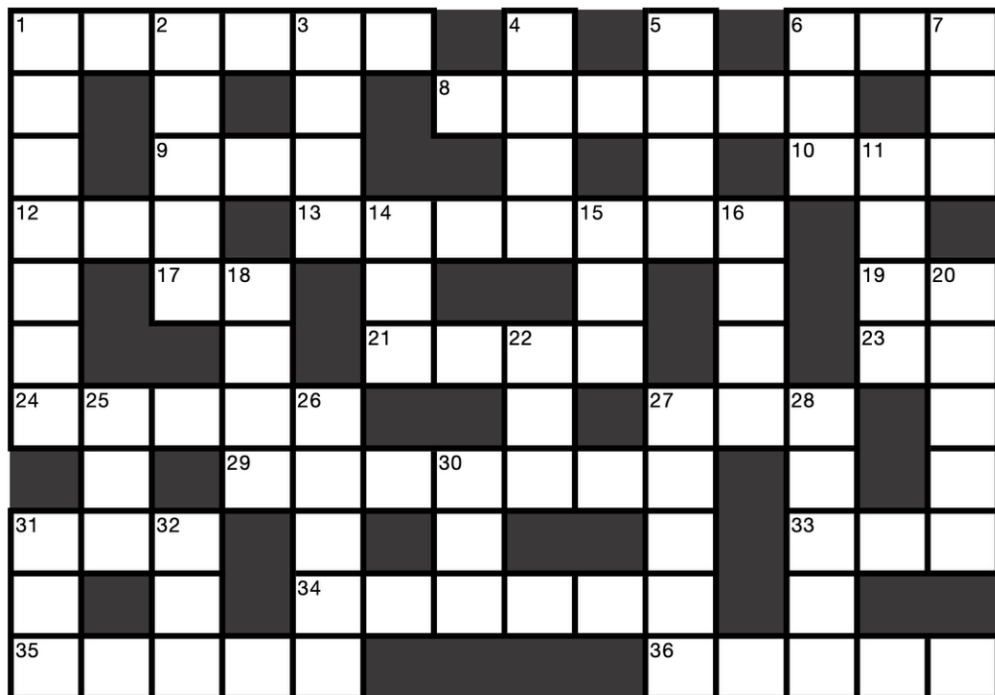
27: Oyster

28: Summer

30: Floor

31: Sea

32: Linen.





HAIRY HENRY'S (TOTALLY RELIABLE) HOROSCOPE

100% Summer... 100% accurate... 100% Hairy Henry

♈ Aries (21st Mar – 19th Apr)

Your energy is a heatwave with opinions. You'll start three "quick projects" and finish none...heroically. Pick one goal and do the first step today. Be wary of pigeons – they are watching. 23.11 is important.

♉ Taurus (20th April – 20th May)

You'll become strangely loyal to a chair, a terrace, or a particular shady tree. Pleasure is your plan, and honestly, it's a good one. Just beware over-committing to naps. Try one new place this week and order the weirdest thing.

♊ Gemini (21st May – 21st Jun)

Your social calendar will multiply like rabbits. You'll agree to things you don't remember. Keep your sparkle. Protect your peace. Text someone "coffee?" right now. Block out one evening for yourself.

♋ Cancer (22nd Jun – 22nd Jul)

You'll feel everyone's moods, plus that of the plant in your kitchen. Retreat when needed - return glowing. Plan one gentle ritual (sunset walk, swim, journaling) and do it twice a week.

♌ Leo (23rd Jul – 22nd Aug)

You're the main character of summer and the universe is your slightly chaotic film crew. Attention follows you - use it to uplift, not just dazzle. Host something simple (picnic, terrace drink) and crown someone else the star.

♍ Virgo (23rd Aug – 22nd Sep)

You'll attempt to "optimise summer." Cute. The world refuses spreadsheets in flip-flops. Relax your standards. Sand is not a personal attack. Declare one "messy day" and do something fun without fixing it. Ceramic and felt will surprise you.

♎ Libra (23rd Sep – 23rd Oct)

You'll flirt with harmony and then immediately RSVP to chaos. Romance is in the air. Say "yes" to one invite and "no" to another. Practise both in the mirror. Avoid nuts, limes and amphibians.

♏ Scorpio (24th Oct – 21st Nov)

You're a mystery novel in sunglasses. People will be drawn to you, then feel intimidated, then drawn again. Use your intensity for reform, not revenge. This summer, embrace gold, maroon and cobalt. It's time to confess one secret desire.

♐ Sagittarius (22nd Nov – 21st Dec)

You'll try to be "productive", but your soul wants a slow playlist and zero emails. Grow more. Explore new ice-cream flavours. Allow yourself to be human. Put one work habit on pause.

♑ Capricorn (22nd Dec – 19th Jan)

You'll crave adventure, even if it's just getting lost on purpose. Spend five minutes a day being a different person. Fix what you can and leave well alone. Take a spontaneous day trip... barefoot.

♒ Aquarius (20th Jan – 18th Feb)

Your brain will hatch wild ideas: a trip, a hobby, a new identity. Not all will be sensible, but all will be entertaining. Underwear will become a problem. Hot will take on a new meaning. You deserve a prize. Make it happen.

♓ Pisces (19th Feb – 20th Mar)

Your dreams will be wild, vivid, and slightly confusing. Resist the urge to attack. Listen closely: your intuition is giving hints. Create something this summer (an album, a collage, a playlist) and share it with one person. Cocktails could be the answer.



El Gorg del Pare

The hidden land of giant stone hippos



Gorg del Pare: Given the tiny stream, the valley floor is surprisingly flat and wide.

Having battled against the crowd last month to get to Sant Miquel del Fai (see June edition) we thought it might be a good idea to find something at the other end of the spectrum: a place so unknown, hardly anyone went there. We googled “Hidden gems near Sant Cugat” and the first on the list was El Gorg del Pare (Father’s Gorge). We stared at the screen. “I’ve definitely never heard of that” said my wife. “Perfect!” I replied.

Thus, one sunny Sunday morning saw us in the car looking forwards to discovering a small waterfall with natural pools near the medieval village of Mura. As it turned out, the drive itself was part of the experience.

After following the motorway north as far as Matadepera, we left the familiar roads behind and joined the winding BV-1221 as it climbs through the Natural Park of *Sant Llorenç del Munt i l’Obac*. The scenery quickly becomes spectacular. Around every bend are dramatic views and some of the most astounding rock formations you are likely to find anywhere near Sant Cugat.

These enormous and rounded massifs dominate the landscape. They seem almost sculpted, rising

above the trees in strange shapes and formations like offcuts from Montserrat. Long after we had returned home, these rocks remained one of our strongest memories of the day. Unlike anything found locally, they alone make the journey worthwhile.

Arriving in Mura, we discovered another unexpected surprise. A large automatic bollard blocks access to the village, allowing entry only to authorised vehicles. We assumed we weren’t. Fortunately, a modest parking area on the edge of the village was far from full, and finding a space was easy.

We had been to Mura before. It’s a charming place. Its narrow streets, stone houses and traditional atmosphere make it one of Catalonia’s most attractive villages. It’s excess in charm is counterbalanced by its lack of bars and restaurants. This is worth bearing in mind if you are planning lunch. On our return from the walk, we found ourselves waiting (somewhat impatiently) in the June sunshine before finally securing what felt like two life-sustaining beers and a large fresh baguette sandwich each.

But let’s get back to the beginning. Before getting



But let's get back to the beginning. Before setting off on foot, one thing immediately struck us. Sant Miquel del Fai has everything clearly signposted, here there were no signs to Gorg del Pare at all. Had it not been for Google Maps, we might have wondered whether we were in the right place.

The route itself is straightforward. We walked about four kilometres in total, taking approximately two hours because we stopped constantly to admire the scenery. The path is mostly flat and follows a

stream through the beautiful wooded gorge. There are a few places where you need to step across small rivulets, but anyone reasonably mobile should have no difficulty. Families with children would be perfectly comfortable here.

The real pleasure lies not in reaching a destination but in enjoying the journey.

The stream winds its way over smooth, rounded rock formations that create a fascinating landscape. The best way I can describe them is as if a collection of giant pinky-grey hippos were lying side by side like sardines. Between them, crystal-clear pools form naturally, creating miniature habitats for frogs, insects and other wildlife.

Given the tiny stream, the valley floor is surprisingly flat and wide, suggesting that during periods of heavy rain enormous volumes of water must rush through here. On the hot, cloudless day of our visit, however, the atmosphere was serene and gentle. It was difficult to imagine the torrent that occasionally transforms this tranquil setting.

Wildlife was everywhere. We spotted frogs, lizards, dragonflies the size of small helicopters, and butterflies of every colour imaginable, including tiny blue varieties neither of us remembered seeing before. There were even hoofprints from wild boar impressed into the earth beside the path.

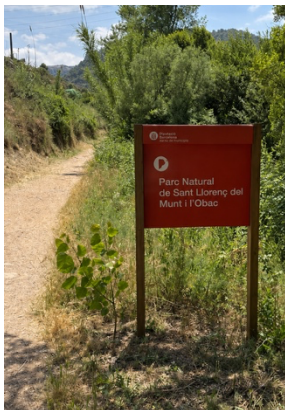
As for the aforementioned waterfall, expectations should be managed.

Despite a relatively wet year, there was far less water than we anticipated. One disappointed couple even

stopped us to ask where the waterfall was. We were not entirely sure what to tell them. There was certainly water, and there were attractive pools, but anyone expecting a dramatic cascade worthy of a postcard may leave underwhelmed.

This is not a destination for swimming. Unless you happen to be a frog, there is unlikely to be enough water to justify bringing a swimsuit.

Yet somehow that hardly matters.



The words 'Gorg del Pare' were suspiciously absent from the local signage

The true reward of the Gorg del Pare is the sense of discovery, the absence of crowds, the remarkable geology and the opportunity to sit quietly on ancient rocks while listening to croaking wildlife and flowing water.

During the entire walk we encountered only four other couples. In a region where many beauty spots struggle with overcrowding, that level of tranquillity is thoroughly refreshing.

Would we recommend it?

Absolutely.

If you enjoy nature, gentle walking and escaping the crowds, the Gorg

del Pare is well worth a visit. Bring a picnic (or book a table at a local restaurant), sturdy footwear with good grip and perhaps a pair of binoculars.

But leave the swimsuit at home.

The Gorg del Pare, Mura

What to bring:

- ✓ Sun hat
- ✓ Picnic
- ✓ Binoculars for wildlife spotting
- ✓ Waterproof shoes with good grip
- ✓ Drinking water
- ✓ Camera

Best time to visit: Spring, early summer and autumn. Water flow may vary depending on recent rainfall, best to check beforehand.

If you haven't been able to find Gimby, our paranoid pig, try looking on page 6 again.

LANGUAGE LEARNING TIPS

One Little Verb, a World of Meanings: LLEVAR / PORTAR

by Cristina de Muller & Nuria Coderch, teachers at Spanish Fast & Fun

If you've ever tried to speak Spanish and felt like the language was playing tricks on you, you're not alone. Today, we're putting one of the trickiest under the microscope: LLEVAR. And before we dive in - don't confuse it with LLEGAR (to arrive)! They may look like twins, but they really couldn't be more different.

Picture this: you're at a restaurant and the waiter asks, "¿Para aquí o para llevar?" / "Per a aquí o per emportar?" - and you confidently answer, "Para llevar, por favor!" / "Per emportar, si us plau!" You've just nailed meaning number one: to take something from A to B. "Llevo los niños al cole" / "Porto els nens a l'escola." But when you add a reflexive pronoun, the meaning shifts: "Me llevo el coche, mamá" / "M'emporto el cotxe, mama" - now you're taking it with you. LLEVAR / PORTAR to take, LLEVARSE / EMPORTAR-SE to take away with you. And LLEVAR is always the opposite of TRAER (to bring). "¿Me traes un café? ¿Me traes el menú?" Good news for Catalan speakers: PORTAR does both jobs - "Em portes un café, si us plau?" - no separate verb needed. One less thing to worry about!

But LLEVAR doesn't always involve moving anywhere! "¿Llevas dinero? ¿Llevas las entradas del concierto?" - they just want to know if you have it on you. In Catalan: "Portes diners? Portes les entrades del concert?" No movement, just possession. And then there's the fashionista version: "Llevas un vestido precioso" - "Portes un vestit preciós" - you're wearing something beautiful. Next time someone compliments your outfit, you'll know exactly what's happening grammatically - in two languages!

Now here's where it gets really interesting. LLEVAR also works with time: "¿Cuánto tiempo llevas en Sant Cugat? Llevo dos años." Catalan does the same with PORTAR: "Quant de temps portes a Sant Cugat? Porto dos anys." And if you need a verb after it? Gerundio in Spanish, gerundi in Catalan!



"¿Cuánto tiempo llevas estudiando español? Sólo llevo dos meses." - "Quant de temps portes estudiant català? Només porto dos mesos." "Doncs parles molt bé, et felicito!"

And finally, one very satisfying moment in any shop. When the assistant asks "¿Se lo lleva?", the answer is "Sí, me lo llevo" - I'll take it. In Catalan: "M'agrada, me l'emporto." You're taking it away with you - LLEVÁRSELO / EMPORTAR-SE'L, of course.

Oh, and did we mention 'llevarse bien', 'Qué lleva la ensalada?', llevo 5 años...? We did say one verb, infinite possibilities - we just didn't say we'd cover them all today!

At Spanish Fast & Fun, we teach the language people actually use - in shops, at dinner tables, and yes, in fitting rooms. Come learn real-life Spanish and Catalan with us!

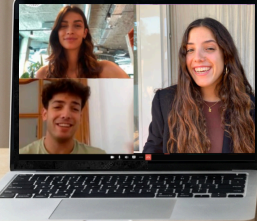

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Crossword answers (from page 26)

Across/Horizontal: 1: Picnic, 6: Peg,

8: Castle, 9: Lol, 10: URL, 12: Two, 13: Airport, 17: Ra, 19: B.A., 21: Alga, 23: A.I., 24: Squid, 27: One, 29: Compass, 31: MIL, 33: Tea, 34: Easter, 35: Rains, 36: Adult.

Down/Verticals: 1: Platjas, 2: Calor, 3: Illa,

4: Camp, 5: Atur, 6: Peu, 7: Gel, 11: Roba, 14: Ira, 15: Ona, 16: Tren, 18: Amic, 20: Aigua, 22: Gla, 25: Qui, 26: Dones, 27: Ostra, 28: Estiu, 30: Pis, 31: Mar, 32: Lli.



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