

Suite Life

THE BARCELONA BIBLE

**FREE
E-BOOK**

HOW TO FIND
AN APARTMENT
IN BARCELONA
IN 30 DAYS
OR LESS . . .

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SuiteLife

HOW TO FIND AN
APARTMENT IN BARCELONA
IN 30 DAYS OF
PART-TIME SEARCHING
& HOW TO START WITH

I'm currently looking for a flat to rent in **Barcelona**. I have 30 days to hunt, find, sign and move into a new apartment.

But . . . Why am I doing this?!:

For those of you who don't know me, I am the founder and owner of **SuiteLife S.L.**, which specializes in helping foreigners and locals find the rental apartment of their dreams in **BCN**. Over the years I've become somewhat of an expert in the art of Barcelona apartment hunting (or so I'd humbly like to think).

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What are my goals?:

First, my goal is to find the best valued apartment in Barcelona that also fits as closely with my requisites as possible. Second, and equally as important, I will be documenting the whole adventure and giving you, our favourite readers and fans, golden insider tips on the best practices and strategies so you can also find the flat of your dreams in Barcelona.

What I'm looking for:

The following is a description of my perfect apartment (It's important to remember that chasing 'the perfect flat' can be difficult and being able to compromise on a couple of things will take you a long way, but we'll come to that later. For now it's good to make a list of what would be your ideal pad):

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Location:

The areas that interest me lately are Vila de Gracia, the bottom-right side of Sant Gervasi, and the upper-middle of the Eixample. Not the widest of scopes but remember, this is my ideal. Looking in other areas will certainly be on the agenda.



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CHARACTERISTICS:

Ideally 50m² +. It's somewhat a case of 'bigger = better'. At least 1 bedroom (no studios). No furniture preferred. A kitchen with appliances would be great but not necessary. Any kind of outdoor space (ie balcony or terrace) would be a big bonus. Being uber-renovated is not a big concern.

PRICE:

Here's where it starts to get tricky. I'm setting the max budget at 800 € / month. Though rental prices in BCN have dropped by about 15-20 % over the last year, I'm still going to be hard-pressed to reach my goal. We're really looking for Value (with a capital V) here kids and it's not going to be easy.

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GENERAL STRATEGY:

IN A NUTSHELL, MY STRATEGY WILL BE TO SACRIFICE FURNITURE AND STATE OF RENOVATION OF THE FLAT (OR LACK OF RENOVATION, THAT IS) IN ORDER TO GET VALUE IN OTHER AREAS SUCH AS SIZE AND LOCATION. I WILL ALSO BE SPECIFICALLY LOOKING FOR 'MOTIVATED RENTERS' AND SHOWING YOU HOW YOU CAN LOOK FOR THEM TOO. A MOTIVATED RENTER IS SOMEONE WHO, FOR WHATEVER THE REASON, NEEDS TO RENT HIS/HER APARTMENT IN A HURRY. THIS IS WHERE YOU START FINDING **GREAT BARGAINS** AND ALSO WHERE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO FLEX YOUR NEGOTIATION MUSCLES **WITH THE BEST RESULTS.**

SO, WITHOUT FURTHER ADO...LET'S FIND BENNY A FLAT!



PART 2:

EXPLORING

THE

IMPORTANCE

OF

DOCUMENTATION



GET READY, GET SET, OR GO HOME CRYING... THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTATION WHEN APARTMENT HUNTING IN BARCELONA.

Ihey don't call it apartment "hunting" for nothing people. Think of yourself as some kind of predatory animal (I like to imagine a large vicious feline, like a panther). The tip here is that you have to be prepared to pounce once you've found your perfect flat. I tell this to clients all the time; Chances are if you see a place that you love, other people are seeing it and loving it too, so you need to be able to act fast. Once you find your ideal flat you'll get excited and say "yes! I'll take it!". Unfortunately it's not that easy. Due to certain legalities, it's commonly required that you submit your 'documentation' to the owner in order to prove your solvency. Once this is done, the owner will then evaluate your documentation and either approve you or not.

AND WHAT 'DOCUMENTS' DO I NEED TO SHOW?

People who are working have the easiest time with this. They need to show:

- copy of passport or NIE
- copy of their working contract
- copy of their last 2-3 paychecks or 'nominas'

People who are studying should show:

- copy of passport or NIE
- copy of acceptance letter to their program
- whatever financial info they can provide to show they will be able to pay the rent.

THE LESSON IS THIS:

Prepare your documentation **BEFORE** you start your search. Get everything ready. Bring it with you physically on each visit. Then, once you find the perfect flat you can give them your docs on the spot. Otherwise you could lose the flat to someone else while you're preparing everything. There's no feeling quite as disappointing as losing a flat you really wanted, so get prepared!

Benny Update: Seeing 3 apartments in Gracia today and very excited!

IN PART 3:

Identifying common scams so you can avoid them.

“BE CAREFUL & TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS: HOW TO AVOID SCAMS WHILE LOOKING FOR AN APARTMENT TO RENT IN BARCELONA.”

Have you come across scams while searching for an apartment in Barcelona? I have! So, today's topic is how to recognise and avoid scams while hunting for your perfect flat in Barcelona. The problem is that many of the ads online that are scams are actually the most attractive ones. What you want to always keep in mind is this time-tested adage:

“IF IT LOOKS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, IT PROBABLY IS!”

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

1. This scenario is all too common: You're looking for flats online and you come across an ad where the price is bargain basement low (let's say 300 - 500 € / Month) BUT the flat that appears in the photos is absolutely gorgeous (let's say 90m², fully renovated, beautifully furnished, terrace, etc...). This should be a big tipoff folks. Perfect example of 'too good to be true'. If you even have to wonder, please, move on.
2. You send an email to inquire about visiting a flat and the 'owner' writes back saying they are out of town and will send you the keys to the property as soon as you send them either a reserve or the full amount to enter the flat. They claim that once payment is received your keys will be couriered to you. This is a HUGE scam, and lots of people fall for it. They commonly ask for payments made through Western Union and, most recently, something called MoneyGram. This is not how the industry works here. If someone will not show you the flat or they ask for some type of fee in order to visit it, say no thanks and walk away.
3. After the initial visit the 'agent' suggests that you meet at a cafe to sign the contract, pay the total, and give you the keys. This is a BAD sign. If you are using a reputable agency, it's very common to sign the contract in their office, but most of the time contracts are signed right in the flat itself. The scam here (and I've sadly seen this happen to people) is that you sign the contract, give them thousands of euros, you get your keys and the 'agent' walks out of your life. You then go to your new flat, try opening the door, and alas, the keys do not work...
4. Be wary of people responding to you from generic hotmail and yahoo email addresses. This is not always, but many times, a bad sign.
5. Keep an eye out for any general weirdness. For example, if the person showing you the flat seems unnecessarily nervous, possibly looking around a lot as if to make sure no one sees him enter the building or flat itself. This is a telltale sign of a scammer either renting the same flat to multiple people, or someone with an illegal sublet. Another bad sign is if the ad for the apartment has absolutely no specific info (for example what neighbourhood it's located in, street, etc...).

PART 4: THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY!

Kids, today I'm going to tell you about the one that got away... She was beautiful, no, she was gorgeous. Just the right size, curves in all the right places, bright with a sunny disposition. She was one in a million. No, I'm not talking about a woman, but my dream flat that I let slip away because I didn't follow my own advice, the same advice I gave you in Part 3.

Here's how I lost my dream flat, detail by agonizing detail: I saw a beautiful 65m² 1 bedroom fully renovated flat online. For the price (800 € / Month) there was tons of value. It was perfectly located in the coolest part of Gracia. I setup an appointment to see the flat for 2 days later, which was the earliest date they could give me (often some of the smaller local agencies will spend all week taking calls for a specific flat and slot all the visits together for one time. This is a tactic to pressure people into renting the flat).

As I showed up for the visit, the agent was saying goodbye to a lady, whom I assumed was the visit scheduled just before mine. As soon as I walked in the door I fell in love with this modern spacious flat. It had a terrace that wrapped around the flat on three sides. The kitchen was brand new, modern, and just happened to be SuiteLife colours! I had that 'Je ne se quois' feeling, that gut feeling you're looking for that just screams to you, this is the place!

BUT, I hesitated. My own advice that I didn't follow was that I should have had my documentation physically on my body. At that point I should have said "I'll take it!" and handed the agent my documents. Instead, I went home, talked to all my friends and family about it, got really excited, and planned to hand in my documentation at 9am the next morning when the agency opened.

PART 4; THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY!

Later, I found out that the lady who I'd seen had visited the flat just before me actually went home after the visit and immediately mailed her documentation to the agency... meaning I was now officially second in line.

The other people ended up taking the flat and I was heartbroken.

Moral of the story: If I had taken my own advice and had my documents physically with me, I would have gotten them submitted before the other lady and I would have gotten my flat! So now you don't even need to learn this mistake the hard way. You can just learn from my experience. I can't really explain how disappointing the whole ordeal was, so please, take my advice and bring your documentation with you on every visit. You never know when you might fall in love!

A small consolation is that, as my parents like to say, there is a streetcar every 5 minutes. I was completely depressed the entire day after realizing I lost 'my' flat, but the next morning I saw another flat, which I fell in love with also! So, you never know!

PART 5: HOW TO NEGOTIATE THE RENTAL PRICE

The apartment rentals market in Barcelona is like any other market in the world; something is only worth what someone else is willing to pay for it. Negotiation of the rental prices is very common and is something we highly suggest. It never hurts to try and negotiate the price. The worst that can happen is that they'll say no.

HOW NOT TO NEGOTIATE:

The strategy you use when negotiating is paramount. The most ineffective, yet most popular strategy, is to come up with a list of un-ideal characteristics of the flat and use those as the arguments as to why the price should be lowered.

Why this is not effective: You have to keep in mind that buying an apartment is the biggest investment most people will make in their lives. Hence, landlords are often very proud of their flats and they often have a close and sentimental connection with them. Keeping this in mind, harping on the flat's imperfections as the focal point of negotiation can seriously backfire. You can offend the owner and end up getting nowhere.

HOW MUCH CAN YOU EXPECT TO NEGOTIATE THE PRICE?

Very generally, you can usually expect to negotiate a monthly rental price down by about 50 - 100 € / month MAX. Any more than this and you can expect a big NO and probably a good laugh from the owner. This is important to keep in mind as a good strategy to getting the best value possible is to look at flats that are about 50 - 100 € above your budget and then get them negotiated down.

Remember: Your ability to negotiate a price will also be based on how much demand there is for the specific property. Basically, the more interest there is in a flat, the less chance there will be that the owner will accept an offer. The best way to negotiate is through an agency. We've found that when tenants negotiate directly with owners, there's always the chance that things will be mis-communicated, feelings will be bruised, and in general that things will not work out. It's always best to have an agent who can broker the deal for you.

PART 6: HIT THE STREETS!

Today's tip is to get a lil' guerilla. I'll explain...

SuiteLifers, have you ever walked through the streets of Barcelona, looked up, and noticed 'for rent' signs posted in the balconies of flats? Today we'll explain how you can hit the streets as an alternative, and sometimes very fruitful method of flat hunting.

WHY CAN THIS BE A GREAT STRATEGY?:

Street hunting, as I like to call it, is great for a couple of reasons:

1. If you have a very specific location you'd like to live in, you can literally comb the streets of that area, writing down phone numbers of the places you see offered for rent. This is a good way of making sure you don't miss any opportunities in the area in which you'd like to live.
2. There are many owners who aren't too savvy when it comes to promoting their flats for rent in Barcelona. Sometimes the only ad is the little sign the owner has hung on the balcony and they haven't put it anywhere on the Internet at all. So this strategy allows you to possibly find great deals that aren't exposed to a lot of people.

WHY CAN THIS BE A TOUGH STRATEGY?:

1. The reason this is a tough strategy is that the only info you get is the phone number. You have no idea if the flat fits your requirements or budget. It's a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack. So, the percentage of what will turn out to be a good option is lower than normal.
2. Also, you're going to need to have some Spanish skills in order to call the numbers (or a friend who can help you).

HOW TO DO IT: THIS IS THE EASY PART:

1. Take a map with you and mark off the area of interest.
2. Then methodically walk up and down every street looking up. You're looking for signs that say "en alquiler" (Spanish) or "en Lloguer" (Catalan). What you're not looking for is signs that say "en venta" or "en venda" (these are flats that are for sale). Sometimes there will only be a number and it won't be clear whether the flat is for sale or rent. Take down those numbers anyways. You're not making any calls yet. This exercise is to create a list of numbers to call later. Also, make a note of the street and building number for each of the numbers.
3. The next step is to run down the list and call each number. When you call you can say you saw their "cartel" (this means sign in Spanish). Now you can ask about the flat, if it's for rent, what the characteristics are, etc... and then setup a visit if it fits with what you're looking for.

We hope this helps! It's an out of the box strategy for those who are concerned with living in a very specific area of town.

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PART 7: DECLARE YOURSELF!

"**Declaring yourself**" is very easy and it can help you in many areas of life though it is particularly useful for our purpose of finding an apartment in Barcelona. Simply put, declaring yourself means expressing to as many people as possible what your objectives are. In this case we are looking for a flat to rent in **Barcelona**. So, we're going to try and let as many people as possible know this.

Why: They always say that the best way to get a job is through your personal network, either through a friend or a friend of a friend. **Flat hunting** is the same. The more people you tell that you are looking for a flat to rent in Barcelona, the more chance that one of your friends will know of someone who happens to be looking to rent or could help you out with a contact. Spreading the word is easy to do and makes sure you leave no base uncovered.

Who: Tell your friends, co-workers, family, strangers (yes strangers too!), post ads, etc... Basically, try and mention to anyone who will listen what your objective is. You never know when someone will have a great contact for you!

How: Word of mouth is great. Start by telling literally anyone who will listen that you are looking to rent a flat in Barcelona. Next, harness the power of social media. Change your Facebook status, send Twitter updates, start a blog, whatever it takes. They don't call it six degrees of separation for nothing. Once you realize that your own network of people has access to an infinitely larger group of people you'll appreciate this method for how potentially powerful it can be.

IN PART 8

SET UP ALERTS

Quick tip for today: Any online portal for finding an apartment to rent in Barcelona that is worth its weight has a system for setting up alerts.

Searching online for an apartment in Barcelona can be frustrating. You've narrowed down the sites you'll be checking constantly, and then you're stuck returning to them once or twice a day to see if anything new has been added. Once in a while you see a new one, but more often than not you simply run into the same stale ads as the day before.

Setup Alerts!: Most people choose to set an alarm clock so they can wake up in the morning. It would be silly to keep waking up every so often to look at your clock and see if it was actually time to wake up no? That's why we set an alarm, or alert. Flat hunting is the same. If you need an example check out one of our favourite flat hunting portals called [Enalquiler](#) (you can find it at [enalquiler DOT com](#)). With this site you can choose quite a lot of criteria to explain what you are looking for. Then, whenever something is uploaded to the site that fits with the criteria you've set out, they will send you an email notifying you of the new property. Not only does this save you not having to check back day in and day out, but when a hot property gets uploaded you'll be one of the first to know and can act accordingly! **A small tip but a goodie! Hope it helps!**

IN PART 9:

WHY AND HOW YOU SHOULD USE AGENCIES.

Private owners, referred to in Spanish as 'particulares', are property owners who are promoting their flats for rent in Barcelona without the help of an estate agency.

Advantages of going directly through the owner:

The biggest advantage is that they do not charge an 'agency fee', so you will save some money there for sure.

Often (but not always) with private owners, there will be slightly less bureaucracy and the process can sometimes culminate more quickly as there is no middle man to go through.

Disadvantages of going directly through the owner:

Most of the flat rentals market in Barcelona is controlled by the agencies, so finding listings directly through the owners can be a laborious task to say the least. If you don't know where to look you might be out of luck.

You will need to have a very decent handle on the Spanish language because many of the owners do not speak English.

Negotiations can be far more difficult to manage when you don't have an experienced third party helping to facilitate them.

Agencies: In Barcelona the majority of the apartment rentals market is controlled by agencies. Why? It's actually very simple. You see, in many countries it's the owner of the property that pays a real estate agency to promote it to its clients. In Spain the system is exactly the opposite. The tenant, not the owner, pays the agency fee. This means that owners have nothing to lose in letting as many agencies as possible promote their flats. The agency only gets paid if one of their clients decides to take it. This should help you understand why agencies control most of the rental properties in Barcelona.

IN PART 9:

WHY AND HOW YOU SHOULD USE AGENCIES.

Advantages of using an agency:


You can get the agencies working for you! Since you only have to pay an agency once you decide to take a place, we suggest finding a handful of agencies to have them show you the flats in their inventory that best fit your requirements. Since they will set everything up for you, you can get them to do a lot of your leg work for you.

If you're not that familiar with Barcelona or how things work here, the agencies will help you with info and hold your hand through every step of the process. Many of the international agencies speak multiple languages and this can also help you leap over the language barrier. Price and contractual negotiations are always better done through a third party. Agencies are well trained in how to gently massage negotiations on both sides so you get the best chance of getting a deal.

Disadvantages of using an agency:

There are literally thousands of agencies in Barcelona. You'll quickly see that some of them are either very hard to get in touch with or aren't so quick to call you back. Without passing too much judgement, we suggest you do a little research, send off a mail with your requirements to a dozen agencies, and work with the ones that get back to you promptly and value your business.

You will have to pay an agency fee. The typical agency fee in Barcelona is usually either the equivalent of one month's rent plus tax OR 10% of the annual contract plus tax. So you have to be ready to part with this money, and that certainly is somewhat of a disadvantage, but if you look at what you are getting in return it definitely seems to be the best way for most people to go.



IN PART 9:

WHY AND HOW YOU SHOULD USE AGENCIES.

SuiteLife Barcelona is one of Barcelona's top real estate agencies. We take it a step further than most agencies and instead of just renting apartments in Barcelona, we also strive to provide people with excellent insider information about living in the city, through our blog, SuiteLife TV videos, and our free eBooks called the Barcelona Bible Series. We pride ourselves on our excellent service and hope you will get in touch if you or someone you know is looking for a flat to rent in Barcelona.

Personally, I hope that you were able to pickup at least one tidbit of info from my series that will help you on your flat hunt and help you secure the apartment of your dreams, just like I did.



PART 10:

FINAL

Thoughts

AND

Progress

REPORT



I FOUND A FLAT IN BARCELONA IN 28 DAYS

*It was stressful, thrilling, disappointing, up, down,
and all over the place....*

PART 10:

In general, I clustered up my visits of flats in Barcelona seeing up to almost 20 flats/week within a span of 3-4 days. At the end of both week 1 & 2, I thought I had found the 'flat of my dreams', but in the end lost out as I didn't follow my own advice on the importance of documentation. Each time I thought 'great, how will I ever find a flat that I like as much as the one I just lost!' And in the end I in fact did, and more, and I'm exactly where I should be.

The biggest lesson from my search was to be prepared. If you think a flat is really special, chances are everyone else who's seeing it thinks exactly the same. Being prepared with your documentation ready and actually on your physical person is paramount. Not being prepared enough was the reason for me losing two amazing flats, but it was also the reason why I snagged my dream flat in the end.

What I got:

As you might remember from my first post ("How to Find an Apartment in Barcelona in 30 Days or Less... Part 1: Introduction & Important Info) my main goal was finding the most value possible. I was ready to sacrifice certain things (state of renovation & furniture) in order to gain other things (central location & outside space). Here's the breakdown of what I got:

Neighbourhood: I had my sites almost exclusively set on Villa de Gracia. In the end my dream flat is located in the bottom right hand corner of Sant Gervasi (only about 4-5 streets walking to the heart of Gracia & only 7 blocks from the SuiteLife office. Nice!).

Flat Characteristics: The flat is an attic (big bonus), with a 20m² south-facing terrace (even bigger bonus!). The actual flat is 45m² and very well distributed. The kitchen, living room & bedroom are all independent and perfect size. If I wasn't so interested in a terrace I probably could have gotten a 2 bedroom, but that's not the case. After all, I'm only one person and I'll have more than enough room for visitors on my living room's pull-out couch. Another big bonus was that the building has an elevator! The flat is 2 blocks from my gym, 1 block from my favourite supermarket, and half a block from Starbucks! I was very lucky with this flat. The previous tenant was an IESE student who only stayed for one year. He had bought all the electrodomeastics new and then left them in the flat when he moved out. There were two couches and his bed, which I tossed out and replaced with my own. The terrace furniture was already there, and that was it! Not much to furnish in a 45m² flat anyways. So I'm all setup just a couple days after moving, and now it's time to start thinking of decorating!

PART 10:

Price: I did VERY well on the price. The flat was originally listed at 790 € / month, which just fit in under my original 800 € maximum budget. If you've read my entry on how to negotiate the rental price than you'll know that it never hurts to try and negotiate the rent. I made an offer of 725 € / month, handed in all my documentation right there at the end of the visit, and a day later received a call saying the owner had excepted my offer!!

Basically the better prepared I was, and the more ready I was to act quickly, the luckier I got. There was a great feeling the day I moved all my stuff in and started unpacking. Almost immediately after entering the flat... I felt as if I was 'home'. More than anything I think that's the feeling you're looking to accomplish, and how you'll know that you've done a great job.

Thanks so much to everyone who read this ebook and followed our original blog series. I hope we'll be able to help as many people as possible with their hunt for an apartment for rent in Barcelona. If you have any feedback or topics that you think we should cover here in The Barcelona Bible Series, please don't hesitate to shoot us a mail at anytime. Info@SuiteLife.es. Happy flat hunting SuiteLifers! Remember, home is where the heart is!





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Thanks to the
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and fans!