



Cultural crossroads: clockwise from main, Passeig de Gràcia; a bedroom at Praktik Vinoteca; its modern exterior; the lounge; food at Flax & Kale, inset below

A vine time to visit Barcelona

HOTEL REVIEW

PRAKTIK VINOTECA

Barcelona

KAREN DACRE

BARCELONA is a city under siege. And not just from the platoons of British stag and hen parties that descend on the Catalan metropolis weekend after weekend armed with glitter and “Big Dave’s last Weekender” T-shirts, but by Airbnb. The recent success of the apartment subletting site has Catalonians up in arms – not least because they’re fed up of being woken at 3am by Jim from Croydon who’s just vomited on their stairs, but because they’re being forced to watch as their buoyant hospitality industry begins to collapse into the Mediterranean.

Contemporary hotel brand Praktik is among the first to offer a solution. A Spanish equivalent to the French Philippe Starck-designed Mama Shelter chain, Praktik consists of five themed boutique properties that come with room rates to rival even the most astonishingly priced Airbnb flats, and the brand is indicative of a growing middle market for accommodation that offers style as well as substance.

Having spent three nights on the floor of a friend’s Barceloneta apartment and four long days at the city’s Primav-

era music festival, my husband and I arrived at Praktik Vinoteca in desperate need of a little luxury. Or at least, a bed that doesn’t require another pump of air mid-sleep.

Praktik Vinoteca, dedicated to fully indoctrinating guests into the produce of Catalan vineyards, is a wine bar that doubles as a hotel. The concept, while gimmicky in suggestion, won me over immediately. We were greeted by a receptionist-cum-sommelier who offered us a drink of our choice as she checked us in. We opted for an ice cold glass of cava but there is plenty of choice for those who want to get straight into viticulture – 900 options are on display behind the bar.

The communal space, which includes the bar and reception area as well as a canteen-style dining room that spills out on to a sun-drenched patio, is lined with vintage wine posters and dark mahogany furniture. The vibe is relaxed – Soho House meets local Spanish hang out.

Upstairs the wine theme gives way to simple streamlined bedrooms. Entirely whitewashed, except for the occasional poster, the rooms are compact but

comfortable and feature a separate shower room as well as a TV and sprightly Wi-Fi connection. Ask for an exterior room for a view of the city’s prestigious Carrer de Balmes if gazing down at the patio doesn’t inspire you. And try to travel light – wardrobe space is a little limited.

In keeping with the budget boutique aesthetic, there is no kettle or room service but guests can enjoy a glass of wine in their bedroom provided they opt for white or cava. “Red is not allowed – we’ve had a few accidents,” the receptionist told me.

Breakfast, served in the dining room, is the usual continental fare and includes a selection of pastries and a help-yourself toaster. Coffee comes via a hard-working Nespresso machine. The staff, hardly present other than to clear the occasional plate, encourage guests to live like they’re at home.

So is this the place to come if you’re used to five-star service? Definitely not. The Praktik ethos hinges on efficiency and great design at remarkably low cost. And to me, the odd neglected empty wine glass and abandoned dirty ash tray seems like a small price

to pay for a beautifully designed £80-per-night hotel smack bang in the middle of the ultra-cool Eixample district.

Sandwiched in between quiet Les Corts and bustling Gràcia, Eixample offers a chic alternative to the party strip of Las Ramblas and is the place to stay if you want to indulge in the city’s growing café culture. A sort of Catalan Islington, the area is lined with popular brunch spots – notably Brunch & Cake, which had a queue of dinners spiralling up the street when we turned up – and Flax & Kale, a healthy “flexitarian” restaurant that claims to offer an 80 per cent plant-based menu.

The hotel is just a six-minute walk from the boutique-lined Passeig de Gràcia and a 20-minute walk from Las Ramblas’s celebrated Boqueria food market, so is perfectly located for those who want to escape the hotel bar, even for just an hour so.

On our final day we ambled through the narrow streets to the Picasso Museum and on to the Parc de la Ciutadella before retreating to the Praktik Vinoteca patio, where we enjoyed one more for the road before heading to the airport. It would have been rude not to.

■ Praktik Vinoteca, Carrer Balmes 51, Barcelona, Spain (00 34 93 454 50 28; hotelpraktikvinoteca.com). Doubles from €94 including breakfast.

Insurance firms won’t cover a change of heart

Simon **says**



SIMON CALDER

I am booked to travel to Turkey in September next year, flying into Dalaman and staying in the Dalyan area. I have been trying unsuccessfully to find some clarity from my travel insurance provider – both by phone and email – about cover. Does my travel insurance cover me if I decide to cancel the holiday due to escalation of violence that has resulted from the Syrian conflict and now Russian involvement?
Barbara Cove, Surrey

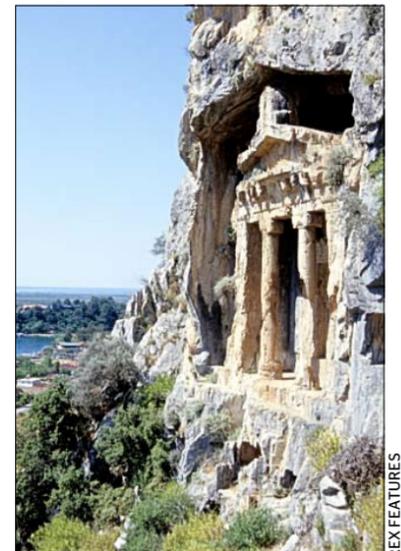
I am surprised the travel insurance provider has been unable to help, because it is a straightforward matter. If you decide not to take the holiday you booked because of your personal concerns about safety, you will not be able to make a claim against your insurer – it’s known as “disinclination to travel” and is an uninsurable risk.

The only uncertainty that I can see would be the extremely unlikely case that the FCO advised British citizens not to travel to the resort areas of Turkey. If you are booked on a package holiday, then insurance is not relevant. If the advice was issued when you were already in Turkey, the tour operator would bring you home swiftly and at no extra charge to you.

If you had yet to travel, the holiday firm is obliged to give you a full refund or a different holiday. But anyone who has booked flights and accommodation separately does not get such certainty, and if you are in this position then it depends on the policy wording.

My general advice for anyone who is concerned about political instability is to hold off booking until shortly before departure. In the case of Turkey in September next year, it would be perfectly feasible to book in August 2016. You might pay a bit more, or a bit less, but any difference is likely to be minimal, and there should not be any problem with availability outside school-holiday time.

■ Email your queries to s@hols.tv



Rock on: a visit to Dalyan, with its Lycian tombs, can be booked at short notice