

A first-class transversal and innovative tourist product

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What can visitors to Món Sant Benet do?

Apart from activities geared to corporate groups holding meetings, conventions or events as well as from groups interested in gastronomy or science applied to nutrition, private visitors will meet new experiences at Món Sant Benet.

The tourist proposal is based on three differentiated spaces: the medieval monastery, the Art Nouveau space and the Alícia Foundation. Món Sant Benet offers the possibility of combining two or all three spaces according to the visitor's time availability.

The medieval space allows to experience a 12th century atmosphere based on its heritage, but especially thanks to the sensorial recreation of stimuli that carry us virtually a thousand years back in time. This journey is reduced to a hundred years in the Art Nouveau space, in which multimedia technology and the room decoration at the holiday home of the wealthy family of the painter Ramon Casas place us in a creative and colourful setting.

A leap forward brings us to present times, to the Alícia (Nutrition and Science) Foundation, where great Catalan chefs such as Ferran Adrià, advised by scientists like Dr Valentí Fuster, run a research centre devoted to technological research and cui-

sine creativity, but also to teaching nutrition basics to the youth. Visitors can go there, know the goals of the project and look at how work is done in the lab kitchens. Afterwards, a chef will offer a small degustation combining senses with flavours and explain how both affect our nutrition.

To complete the setting of these three spaces, the hotel, restaurants and the beautiful landscape require a whole day for a complete visit to Món Sant Benet. Visiting two spaces only can be done in two or two hours and a half.

What is so innovative about Món Sant Benet?

In the first place, its multiproduct conception is not frequent. It does not happen very often that a tourist and cultural resource is conceived to serve different interests and needs of different visitors. When this occurs, it is often a consequence of the maturation process of the tourist product and of the need to attract increasingly specific market segments. However, it is definitely not usual that projects start from zero with this idea in mind.

The museum offer is as such innovative, with state-of-the-art museological techniques turning the visit to the monastery into a true tourist experience. Also, the restoration process intends to respect the chronological footprint of the different

building stages of the site. This respect for its heritage allows paradoxically to give the main role to people. It allows to explain the thousand years of history that separate us from Romanesque (with Baroque and Art Nouveau in between) focusing on the residents and their experience – from austere and laborious Benedictine life to the relaxed and pleasant bourgeois summers of the Casas family.

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The other clearly innovative proposal is that of gastronomy. The Alicia Foundation is above all a unique scientific and gastronomic research centre. However, it is conceived in an open way to welcome visitors of different ages to try and learn in a distinctive setting, thanks to its creative avant-garde atmosphere but also to the possibility of being together with some of the most relevant players in world cuisine. Our cuisine has already been taking a leading role in our main tourist markets for some years, basically driven by the quality of our chefs, the recognition they have earned at the most renowned gastronomic forums, in the most reputed guides and by cuisine critics from all over who have spread the word of our cuisine's excellence.

However, all this would be in risk of passing by as a one-off fashion trend if it was not underpinned by a true movement giving value to the singularity of our gastronomic culture and doing research to create proposals allowing to maintain our privileged current position in the future. Alicia will work along this second goal, without setting aside the first one, to recover some food products that used to be part of our traditional cuisine but had gone lost with time. All these are concepts that are met with increasing receptivity in target markets and will clearly help us to consolidate the arguments by which our gastronomy



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is already an important part of tourist promotion by both public administration and the private sector.

Also, the view of Món Sant Benet as a congress centre for corporate meetings and business seminars has been focused from a modern creative perspective. Everything has been laid out for creating an unforgettable experience with visitors. These singular experiences are the result of crossing gastronomy at Alicia with history and art of the medieval monastery and the Art Nouveau space. All this stays open to interaction with the visitor, typical of a tourist product conceived and developed for the 21st century and especially geared to congress tourism, one of the most sophisticated and demanding markets.

Business tourism is probably one of the domains best suited for developing so-called creative tourism. It is the main R&D focus within the industry, an area of innovation and experimentation in which talent serves capturing new talent. After

all, conventions, congresses and incentive trips are acts of communication and even seduction. All the creativity and resources are needed to draw the attention of professionals attending there, who are often saturated with flat, undifferentiated proposals. So there is a need to surprise, to create, to be different. Corporations choosing Catalonia as the venue of their conventions or incentive trips will definitely not be indifferent with such a unique proposal that will allow them to surprise their guests thanks to its conceptual solidity and brilliant resolution. The modularity of the product further allows easy adaptation to the programmes for visitors to Món Sant Benet, a convenient advantage increasingly demanded by convention organisers.

For all these reasons, we consider Món Sant Benet to be an innovative initiative, exploring new ways on which the first steps have been made, such as the communication campaign that, with the «timeless phenomena in Central Catalonia» message, presents the special feelings experienced by visitors to the site as just another bit of news in both the press and the internet.

Future tourist model

The promotion of our attractions is aimed at keeping Catalonia's leading position as an overall tourist destination, geared to ensuring the development of a renewed tourist model that allows to place our emphasis on quality, thus avoiding any future price debate. This is what the Strategic Tourism Plan for Catalonia sets out, while it also pleads for enlarging the territorial scope for tourism.

However, such promotion requires a product meeting these expectations. The Strategic Plan also refers to the need of placing more products rooted in their location to foster territorial balance. Besides, it clearly shows the need for development in Central Catalonia, an area that has largely been left aside by tourism for decades.

Private initiative started here a proposal that fully fits into the strategic goal. The Nutrition and Science Foundation (Alícia), partnered by the Caixa Manresa savings bank and the Catalan government, is a clear example of how public-private cooperation can create big research and dissemination projects, but also first-class tourist products. Public and private support of the tourism industry is thus not to be underestimated as it helps setting out the tourist model the industry itself set out when it defined the strategic tourism goals for Catalonia in 2005.

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It is definitely pleasing to see that there are tourist destinations, the leadership of which is acknowledged everywhere, sharing this view of the tourist model with Catalonia. Within the European Union, role models such as Tuscany and Provence-Alps-Côte d'Azur created together with Catalonia the Taskforce for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism. They meet at least twice a year to discuss precisely different aspects related to the tourist model. Their diagnose is the same: environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability of destinations requires their singularisation in order to give value to their identity. Our mature destinations will increasingly depend on their differentiating elements to be competitive. In Catalonia, as in Provence and Tuscany, the paths leading most effectively to this singularisation are culture, gastronomy, history, traditions, legends etc.

Món Sant Benet is an outstanding crossroads of all these paths. And it is so without over-sophistication, without inventing anything from scratch, but simply by taking advantage of our reality and explaining it well. This model is very different from others pushing for mass, created spontaneously and for quick consumption, without any relation to the territory nor any singularising factor. The model targeted by Catalonia intends to

get away from *fast* to *slow* tourism, with a distinctive own flavour and taste, appreciating details, to be enjoyed for all it has to offer, which makes it a unique experience.

Món Sant Benet is a model intending to get away from fast to slow tourism.

For all these reasons, the development of the Món Sant Benet project can be considered a true gift for our tourist model, for all it represents and for its location. There was a clear need for such a successful proposal and courage to come together in Central Catalonia. With Món Sant Benet, this area has now a new resource that is to be-

come a must for tourists and visitors and thus a valuable new reason for attracting people from all over. As the project becomes mature and takes its position on the market, there will for sure not only be corporate and academic groups coming but also an increasing flow of individual visitors interested in culture and gastronomy for which the discovery of this world of feelings will become ineluctable.

So let us welcome and wish a long successful life to Món Sant Benet. At Turisme de Catalunya, we already have included it in the list of our prime cultural, gastronomic and meeting tourist offer and we will feel especially proud to introduce it to media, operators and consumers from all over the world, convinced as we are of its singularity.

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