

Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site

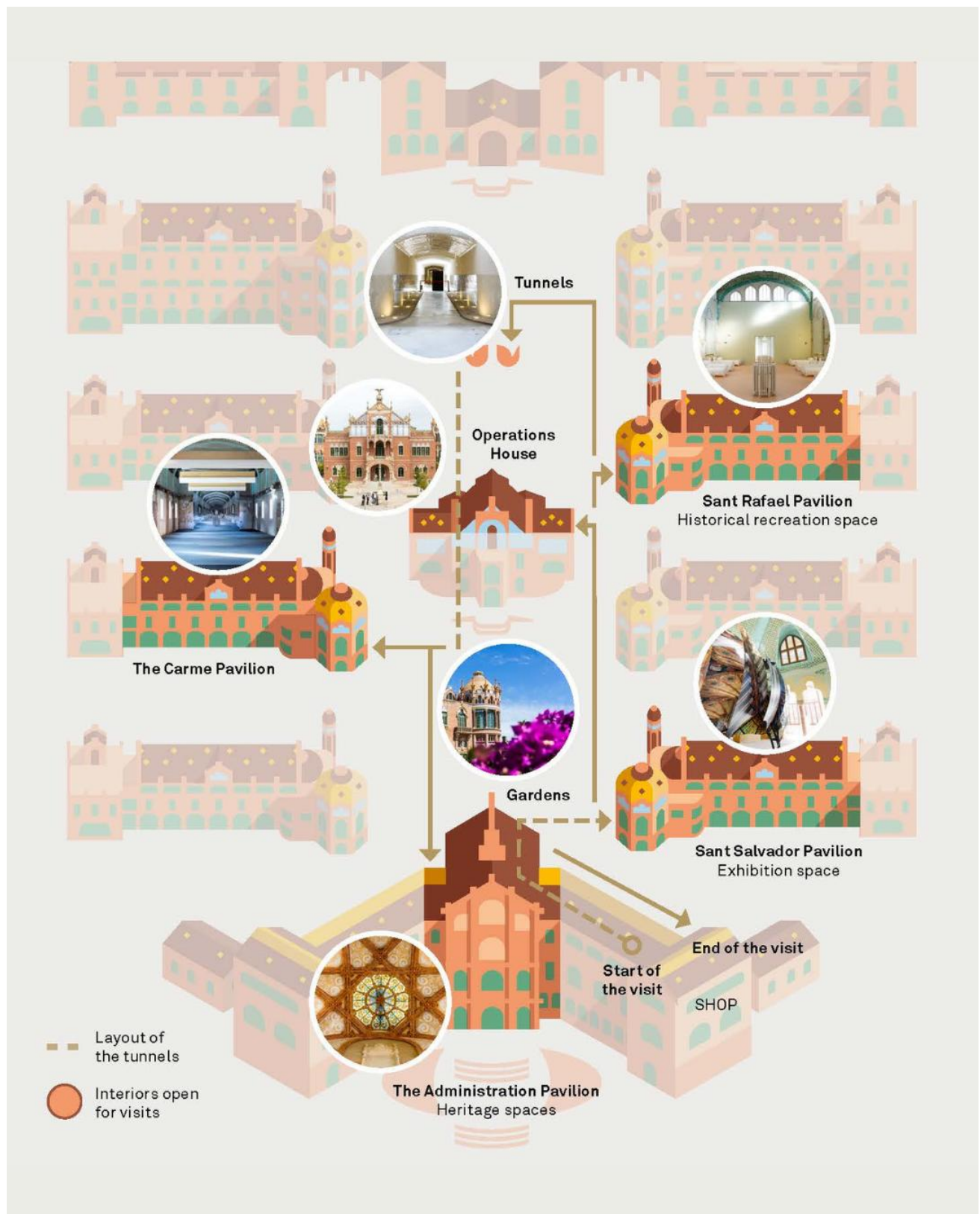
Suggested Itinerary

Educational Service



Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site is one of the most outstanding architectural jewels of Catalan Modernism and a fundamental work of the architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner. Once a hospital and now a cultural and heritage landmark, this monumental complex, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is remarkable both for its artistic beauty and for its original role in providing healthcare.

Here is a suggested route through the site, guiding you to explore its pavilions, gardens, and most iconic spaces. This itinerary is intended to immerse you in the history, architecture, and values of a place that has borne witness to major social and urban changes. Prepare for a unique experience that will inspire you to see Barcelona's modernist heritage from a fresh perspective.





Hypostyle Room

You are at Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site, which served as the headquarters of the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau from 1916 to 2009. Designed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner and built in phases between 1905 and 1930, this architectural complex is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is among the most important modernist works of its era. It is a creation of exceptional architectural and artistic value, representing a true compendium of the modernist style, where all the decorative arts are integrated into the architecture.

The visit begins in the hypostyle hall, or colonnaded room, located beneath the main building. Originally conceived as a space for unloading hospital supplies and as an entrance for patients unable to access through the main door, it later became the city's first Emergency Department, inaugurated in 1968.



The tunnels

The tunnels, a groundbreaking innovation at the time, connected the various pavilions and served as the main circulation route for hospital logistics as well as for patients who could not access the gardens.

Here, you can invite students to touch the walls and describe their texture. They are made of ceramic, a material chosen by Domènech i Montaner for its ease of cleaning and disinfecting.

The rounded corners also had a hygienic purpose, as this construction method prevented dirt from accumulating in the edges. At the same time, the use of curved lines is a defining feature of modernism. Later in the tour, you will return to the tunnels.



Sant Salvador Pavilion, floor 0

Upon entering the Sant Salvador pavilion — the first to open in the hospital in 1916 — you will see, on the right-hand side, the bust of the Marquis of Castellbell, one of the many patrons of the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau. This is a good moment to explain the role of a patron and to speak about the main benefactor of the old hospital: Pau Gil.

Pau Gil was a Catalan banker who lived in Paris and, in his will, left half of his fortune — around 4 million pesetas in 1891, equivalent today to about 30 million euros — for the construction of a hospital in Barcelona for the poor, dedicated to Saint Paul. For this reason, the site is filled with the letters P and G.

One of the defining aspects of the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau is that it was built almost entirely thanks to popular initiative: donations, both large and small, from people grateful for the work of the hospital and its professionals.

Model of the Raval hospital



This model represents the old Hospital de la Santa Creu, which existed before the construction of the site you are visiting today. Opened in 1401, it remained in operation until around 1920, when patients were gradually transferred to the new building — the one you are in now. In other words, it served as a hospital for five centuries before becoming obsolete.

Model of the modernist hospital



The second model represents the modernist hospital, conceived as a “city within the city” or a garden city. Each pavilion is surrounded and separated by gardens, which Domènech i Montaner considered essential to his therapeutic vision.

Before designing this complex, the architect travelled across Europe to study numerous hospitals, gathering ideas to shape his project.

The section shown in the model corresponds to what you will see once you go outside. Twelve buildings are included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, all of them — except the last one at the top right — designed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner. That last pavilion was built by his son, Pere Domènech i Roura, who was also responsible for the three largest buildings in the northern part: the former convent (centre), the pharmacy (left), and the kitchen (right).

On the screens next to the model, you can view original plans by Domènech i Montaner. His original project envisioned forty-eight buildings, though only twenty-seven were completed. Of these, he personally oversaw the construction of twelve. The ones built by his son, while following his father's structural principles, are no longer strictly modernist. They are more rational and sober, with less ornamentation and fewer decorative details.

In the display cases of this space, you can see various objects that illustrate parts of the institution's history. From here, continue by going up the staircase at the back.



Sant Salvador Pavilion, floor 1

This structure represents a dragon, a symbol that appears frequently across many cultures and was widely used in modernist architecture. This contemporary version pays tribute to Lluís Domènech i Montaner, with images on the dragon's scales depicting fragments from some of his other buildings.

On the screens located at the base of the dragon, you can explore more of Domènech i Montaner's works and projects, including the Palau de la Música Catalana, which, together with the Art Nouveau Site, is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Before heading outside, take a moment to look up at the eight-meter-high ceiling and around at the walls. You will notice abundant floral and leaf motifs, as nature was a key source of inspiration and an important decorative element in modernist architecture. For patients confined to bed, it was vital to have their surroundings evoke nature. The soft, calming colors of the ceilings and walls were intended to provide a sense of tranquility.

Next to the exit on the left is a circular room with large stained glass windows, which once served as the day room for the wards. You will see another one later in the visit. Inside, casts of angel sculptures — protectors of the patients — have been restored. These works were created by two of the main sculptors who collaborated with Domènech i Montaner on this project: Eusebi Arnau and Pau Gargallo.

Gardens



The gardens of the former hospital were designed as a place where patients could find peace and connect with nature. They helped keep the grounds clean and purified the air. There were winter gardens, planted with trees that allowed more sunlight to filter through, and summer gardens, with trees and plants that offered shade and protection from the heat. The architect planned these spaces with native trees and plants, chosen for their resistance to temperature changes and low water needs.

Today, the gardens still follow the architect's original layout, with only small modifications. They host remarkable biodiversity, including up to sixty varieties of trees — some dating back to the hospital's early years — as well as aromatic plants. Around fifty species of birds also live here or stop by during migration.

Among the trees, you will spot orange trees which, depending on the season, may be in bloom with their fragrant flowers, bearing small green fruit, or heavy with ripe oranges. There are fourteen in total, all bitter orange trees, a variety valued for its resilience and strong aroma. You can also find lavender and rosemary, which you are encouraged to smell and enjoy.

At the center of the garden stands a replica of the cross from the Raval building, the old Hospital de la Santa Creu.



Operations House and old operating room

This semi-circular room, known as the amphitheater, served as the hospital's main operating room. Students can be invited to stand behind the railing, just as medical students or other doctors once did to observe the lead surgeon at work and learn from his techniques.

The room is flooded with natural light, a crucial feature in the early twentieth century, when electricity was unreliable and operations could not risk being interrupted by darkness. The glazed outer section was covered with alabaster — a translucent type of marble — which allowed light to pass through while preventing anyone from seeing inside.



Exterior of the Sant Rafael Pavilion

In Sant Rafael Pavilion, you will find a historical recreation of a patient ward from a hundred years ago, dating back to when the hospital first opened.

Before entering, take a moment to look at the stone sculptures on the façade. Above the entrance to each pavilion is a depiction of the Saint or Virgin to whom it is dedicated — in this case, the archangel Raphael.

Around the dome of the day room, you will notice a series of animals and fantastical creatures. These gargoyles, which appear on every pavilion, are part of the rich symbolism found throughout the site. The animals represent life (such as animals with their young), while the monstrous figures symbolise death or disease.



Interior of the Sant Rafael Pavilion

Inside you will discover what Barcelona was like in the 1920s, the characteristics of the pavilion, and the type of medicine practiced when the building first came into service. In the background, there is a small recreation showing the layout of the patients' beds. Every pavilion had an altar, as the hospital was run by a religious order and jointly owned by the City Council and the Church.

Each main ward accommodated twenty-eight patients, and this was the standard capacity across all wards. As Barcelona's population grew and medical practices advanced, the pavilions were adapted to meet new needs. Space became scarce, leading to the interiors being divided into additional floors or supplemented with adjoining buildings. Over time, Domènech i Montaner's original design was altered and obscured. The recent restoration has brought back the original volumes, spaces, and decorative elements.

The pavilions are named after saints, often in memory of relatives of Pau Gil or other benefactors. Those named after male saints — located on the west side — were initially intended for male patients, and those named after female saints — on the east side — for female patients. In practice, this division was never strictly applied. In fact, the first patients to arrive from the old Santa Creu hospital were women, who were placed in the Sant Salvador Pavilion.

This was a hospital for the poor, as wealthier families rarely went to hospitals at the time. Doctors would visit them in their homes. Even

so, each pavilion included some private rooms, located behind the main ward, reserved for patients with greater financial means.



Exterior of Mercè Pavilion

The pavilion directly opposite Sant Rafael Pavilion is Mercè Pavilion. Although it has been restored, it is not open to visitors, as it now houses offices for international organizations — as do several other pavilions — working in the fields of health, education, sustainability, and innovation. In this particular case, it is home to the World Health Organization's office in Barcelona.

When the hospital was still in operation, Mercè Pavilion served as the maternity ward, and many boys and girls from Barcelona and the surrounding area were born here.



North entrance to the tunnels

The visit continues through the tunnels, accessed via the stairs located in the middle of the garden, between Sant Rafael and Mercè pavilions. Inside, you will find a series of panels displaying historical photographs. From there, the route leads back out to the garden through the south entrance, directly opposite the Operations House.



Carme Pavilion

This ward is included in the visit to illustrate the ongoing rehabilitation efforts. From the first pavilion to be fully restored — Sant Salvador — the tour moves to another, Sant Rafael, which is not yet rehabilitated but, after removing the elements added in later periods, was found to be in relatively good condition.

By contrast, in Carme Pavilion, where only the added floors have been removed, the damage is still very evident. Its walls remain bare, the roof needs protection to prevent the green and white leaf-patterned tiles from falling, and on the side walls you can still see the remains of the beams that once supported the added floor.



Administration Pavilion

You are now in the lobby of the Administration Pavilion. This building never accommodated patients; instead, it housed the hospital's administrative offices, the library, the archive, residences for medical staff, a dormitory for medical students, and, most prominently, the hospital's main entrance.

In the four corners of the pink vaulted ceiling, you can see various symbols: the coats of arms of Barcelona, Catalonia, the old hospital of Santa Creu i Sant Pau, the name of benefactor Pau Gil, the emblem of the bank he directed, and that of Paris. The flowers decorating the column capitals are almost all medicinal plants. This is also the most ornate building in the entire complex, reflecting another hallmark of modernism: an abundance of decoration.

From the lobby, you can also explore one of the two richly decorated side galleries and visit one of the two auditoriums. These rooms have ceilings 11 meters high. The east wing, known as Pau Gil Room, was used for the archive, while the west wing, Cambó Room, served as the library.



Domènech i Montaner Room

This impressive space is Domènech i Montaner Room, which served as the hospital's auditorium. It rises to a height of 18 meters and is richly decorated throughout. Here you can see a wide variety of construction materials, including wood, mosaic, wrought iron, stained glass, and marble.

The sculptures adorning the door's frieze (depicting Saint George) and the front above the mosaic (showing the coat of arms of the unified hospitals) are the work of Pau Gargallo. The large painting is by Aleix Clapés and depicts the transfer of the remains of Saint Eulalia from Santa Maria del Mar to the Cathedral, painted in 1920.

A border of Gothic lettering runs around the room, forming a kind of prayer — you can try to read it in place or consult the panel in the lobby for the full text.

To conclude your visit, return to the entrance hall by descending the main staircase.

The route may be modified by the occupation of the spaces.

Resident Organizations

The old modernist buildings are now modern workspaces for organizations that promote projects with a high social impact in the fields of innovation, sustainability, health, education and culture. These institutions develop their programs and establish collaboration agreements to carry out projects and activities that provide answers to some of society's challenges.

Pharmaceutical Bank

Banco Farmacéutico is a non-governmental organization founded in 2005 that works to promote the social inclusion of people through health and to address pharmaceutical poverty. Its work is structured around three main pillars: assessing the economic and social impact of pharmaceutical poverty, raising awareness of this issue, and assisting people who cannot access medicines due to financial hardship.



Barcelona Health Hub

Barcelona Health Hub (BHH) is a non-profit association that promotes innovation in digital health and its transfer to the health sector. BHH fosters interactions between *start-ups*, healthcare organizations, corporations, and investors to accelerate digital transformation in the healthcare industry. The Hub is one of the international reference centers in digital health, attracting innovation and talent.

EMEA

The **Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA)** is an independent forum for research and prospecting. It develops projects for the integrated analysis of political, social and economic factors in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It works in collaboration with the European Union, the Union for the Mediterranean, universities, *think tanks* and financial institutions.



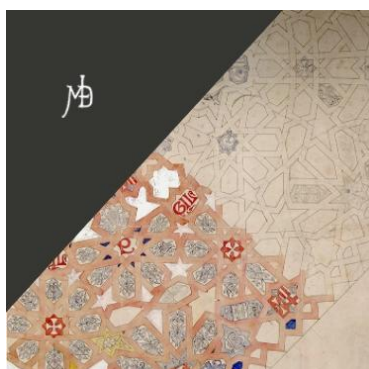
EFI



The **European Forest Institute (EFI)** conducts research and provides expert advice to develop forest-related policies. The Barcelona Office hosts three programs: the **Mediterranean Facility (EFIMED)**, which focuses on forests and forestry in the Mediterranean region, with an emphasis on scientific research, capacity building, networking, and policy advice; the **Genetic Resources Facility (EFIGEN)**, which hosts the long-term EUFORGEN program to promote the conservation and sustainable use of forest genetic resources in Europe; And the **International Partnerships Facility (IPF)**, a global hub of knowledge and expertise that supports policy and governance reforms to combat illegal logging and deforestation around the world.

EURORDIS

EURORDIS – Rare Diseases Europe is a non-governmental alliance that brings together over 800 rare disease patient organizations from 70 countries. Its mission is to work across borders to improve the lives of people living with a rare disease.



Lluís Domènech i Montaner Foundation

A foundation established in 2006 with the purpose of preserving, researching, and promoting the legacy and work of Lluís Domènech i Montaner — one of the most influential and emblematic Catalan figures of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the architect of the Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site.

WHO

The WHO Barcelona Office is a centre of excellence in health financing for universal health coverage. It collaborates with Member States across the WHO European Region to promote evidence-based policy-making. The Office supports countries in developing policies, monitoring progress, and designing reforms through health system diagnostics, analysis of country-specific policy options, high-level policy dialogue, and the exchange of international experience. It also hosts WHO training courses on health financing and on strengthening health systems to achieve better health outcomes.



City Resilience Global Programme.



UN-HABITAT

UN-Habitat's Global City Resilience Programme (GCRP) works with cities and territories to support their journey towards resilience, aiming to ensure a sustainable urban future for all. The program focuses on technical cooperation, advocacy, and knowledge creation to strengthen local resilience capacities. It fosters an environment that enables cities and territories to become more resilient. Over the past decade, places such as Asunción in Paraguay, Barcelona in Spain, Dakar in Senegal, Tunis in Tunisia, and Teresina in Brazil have collaborated with UN-Habitat's GCRP.

Information and bookings

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