

EVA SANTANA • CLAIRE SMEDLEY

CATALONiA in A NUTSHELL

DONKEYS, DANCING EGGS AND LOGS THAT POOP SWEETS



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□■ Cossetània

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On more than one occasion, Claire and I found ourselves discussing the subtle and not so subtle differences between our countries and cultures.

Why are Catalans so obsessed with poop? Don't you think that you all get a bit over excited with fireworks? Isn't it strange to call a cheese and ham toastie a bikini?

As a Catalan, many of these things are just second nature to me, so it's not until someone else points them out, you realise that yes, perhaps it could seem strange that we include pooping ceramic figures in our nativity scenes, or that one of our national symbols is a donkey!

Then it hit me. Why not write our own book about Catalonia –definitely not an encyclopedia or a tourist guide, just two friends sharing their lighthearted vision of what Catalonia and its people are really all about.

Oh, and as the book's illustrator as well, I'd just like to point out that it is by chance and for no other reason, that I drew Claire's bottom much larger than mine on page 95, honestly...



I was delighted when Eva suggested co-writing this book with her.

It's been a super fun project, though we work very differently!

Eva is very, let's say "artistic/chaotic" and I am rather "British/methodical" —you get the drift... We've shared the writing, translating and adapting the other's texts, and I shared lots of illustration ideas, most of which Eva ignored completely... I'll stick to writing then... The good news is that we remain friends, and for the most part, "sane"... just...

I've learnt a lot about Catalonia during the process —now I finally know why there's generally rice on the menu on Thursdays! By the way, you've got to love a language that manages to find so many ways to use the word "collons" balls - and we're talking testicles here!

P.S. As the one with the large bottom on page 95, I think the illustrator is just getting her own back after I pointed out Catalans are forever whingeing about the "humidity" —I mean, isn't it enough that it's not raining? Back in Scotland we call that a win!



WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Catalonia has a rich history.

Various civilizations, from the Greeks, Romans and Visigoths, to Arabs have come and gone, each leaving their mark.

There have been invasions, rebellions, revolutions, unifications and wars, as well as divisions and expansions of territory. For its people, the road has been long and bumpy, and the quest to secure its identity a never-ending battle.

OK, we know that this is an overly simplified summary, but this is obviously not a history book. However, here's a snapshot of just some of the key moments in history that played a big part in shaping Catalonia.

Also, you may want to know a bit more about Catalonia and the people who live there, what languages they speak, how they spend their free time, or even just what's the weather like...

FOR ANY HISTORIANS OUT THERE, PLEASE FORGIVE OUR
AUDACITY AT THIS ATTEMPT AT A TIMELINE...!

2.000 BC

NEOLITHIC

THE BRONZE AGE

Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians come to the Mediterranean coast to trade, contributing greatly to the Iberian culture. The Greeks founded two very prosperous colonies on the now called Costa Brava.



In 218 BC, the Romans arrived in Emporion, one of the Greek colonies. Two hundred years later, they had conquered the entire Catalan territory, leaving Catalonia with lots of architecture, laws and taxes, as well as their language.



The seeds of future Catalonia are sown in the northern strip of the territory, in the Pyrenean foothills. Catalanian counties are formed, which compared to Al-Andalus are pretty medieval, dark and dirty! It's a pre-feudal peasant society under the rule of the Kingdom of the Franks and heavily armed due to great unrest.

There, in 840AD, Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy) was born. He would be the first Count to establish an independent lineage to Frankish rule. It is said that he had hair in places no other men had, yep, enough said... Legend has it that the Catalan flag was created from the blood of his wounds.

The church is growing, playing an important role in conserving culture in what were barbaric times.

The Romanesque art style arrives! Catalan institutions are formed. The Catalan Parliament is actually one of the oldest in the world, dating back to the XI century.



IV BC - I AD

IBERIANS



The Iberians make their homes high in the hills where they feel safe. The first to make tools from iron for agricultural jobs, they're also the first to develop a writing system. After coming into contact with the Greeks and Phoenicians, they eventually integrate into their culture.

In 476AD, it was the Visigoths' turn to do some conquering, marking the end of the Roman Empire. Another tribe, the Franks would also settle next door in present-day France.



It's 711AD and the Muslims' turn and they conquer Visigothic Hispania, as well as 2/3 of the Catalan territory, which becomes part of Al-Andalus. They not only make great strides in science, medicine and agriculture, but also great desserts –yum! They create an open society where all religions co-exist.



Until the XIII century, the territory is a tug-of-war between the Christians and the Muslims. The Christians win, thus beginning an era of military and trade expansion across the Mediterranean. Cities are growing and trade is consolidating. During the XIII century, Wilfred the Hairy's lineage plants the seed of what is the largest Mediterranean empire of the time, called the Crown of Aragon and Catalonia.



Unfortunately, the good times don't last, and the Plague and social inequality sends Catalonia into crisis and its population halves.

In 1479, the ascent to the throne of Ferdinand II, married to Isabella I of Castile, means the dynastic union of the crowns of Catalonia and Aragon, with the Crown of Castile.

Dark times begin, with peasant revolts, internal and external battles for power, the expulsion of Muslim descendants, and finally the Reapers' War (Catalan Revolt), which the Catalans lose, leaving Catalonia under Hispanic rule.



Just when the Catalans are rebuilding the economy, with trade and exports and creating the foundations of industrialisation, another scare... In 1808, Napoleon's troops invade the territory and until 1812 they are French! Yikes, bonjour!



Franco remains in power for 40 long years, repressing any manifestation of Catalan culture. All Catalan institutions are abolished, again. In 1940, things take a turn for the worse, as the President of Catalonia, Lluís Companys, is executed.

Following the dictator's death, a new democratic constitution (1978) and a new autonomous state (1979) mark the beginning of the return of democracy and freedom and rights.



More doom and gloom. Now there's a battle for the succession of the Hispanic crown and the Catalans face the Bourbons. The fact the Bourbons are still there, is a clear indicator of who won that battle! On 11th September 1714, Barcelona is defeated and falls, leading to the abolition of Catalan institutions and the start of an extremely hard repression. Being perhaps somewhat masochistic, the Catalans actually celebrate this day "la Diada" every year as the national day of Catalonia.



It's 1814 and not wanting to go against tradition, the Catalans are under Spanish rule again. There's another war, a revolution and finally, in 1873, the First Spanish Republic is proclaimed. It's a very industrial society, where workers are increasingly organized and claim their rights.



In 1931, the Second Spanish Republic is proclaimed and the President of the Catalan Government makes a pact for Catalonia to be an autonomous state and the old institutions are restored. Unfortunately, the honeymoon doesn't last long and in 1936, General Francisco Franco takes up arms and begins a Civil War that will last 3 years and leave hundreds of thousands dead and exiled.



From here, it all gets a bit complicated... We'd need at least a degree in politics/history, as well as another few books, in order to describe everything that's happened in Catalonia during the last 40 years –and we don't have either. Catalonia's quest to secure its identity is ongoing and the journey will no doubt be bumpy. Whatever the outcome may be, it's likely that not everyone in Catalonia will get the result they were hoping for.



WHO LIVES THERE?

Catalonia is home to over 7.6 million inhabitants and it's obviously the place where people want to be, as over 1.2 million of its inhabitants are foreigners. Though they come from all over the world, Morocco tops the list, with Romania, Italy, China and France also in the top 5.



YOU DEFINITELY CAN'T SAY THAT THE CATALANS
ARE NOT WELCOMING!

CATALAN, SPANISH AND 298 MORE LANGUAGES

Naturally, Catalan is spoken in Catalonia, but it's not the only language spoken there. Catalonia's three official languages are:

CATALAN. Which, by the way, is also spoken in Valencia, the Balearic Islands and in parts of Aragon and Murcia (all regions in Spain). It doesn't stop there, you can also hear people speak it in France and Italy (in Alghero on the Italian island of Sardinia) and it's also an official language in the small country of Andorra.

SPANISH. That everyone knows and speaks. It wasn't spoken in Catalonia until it was introduced between the XV and XIX century.

ARANESE. This Occitan language is spoken in the Aran Valley in the western Catalan Pyrenees.

LENGUA DE SIGNOS CATALANA (LSC). Catalan Sign Language is also an official language by law.

Catalan is used in institutions and schools, and mandatory for anyone hoping for a job in the public sector. By the way, a 2019 report by Linguapax found that in Barcelona, Catalonia's capital and largest city, there are over 300 languages spoken.



Catalonia in a nutshell

With an area of 32,108 km², Catalonia has a whopping 947 municipalities spread across 42 counties. At school, primary children learn the names of all 42 counties, their capitals and where they are on the map –no mean feat!

When many people think of Catalonia, Barcelona immediately springs to mind, however, there are actually 4 provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona. Oh, and just to confuse you, the province, and its capital both have the same name! So, Barcelona is the province and also its capital...

