

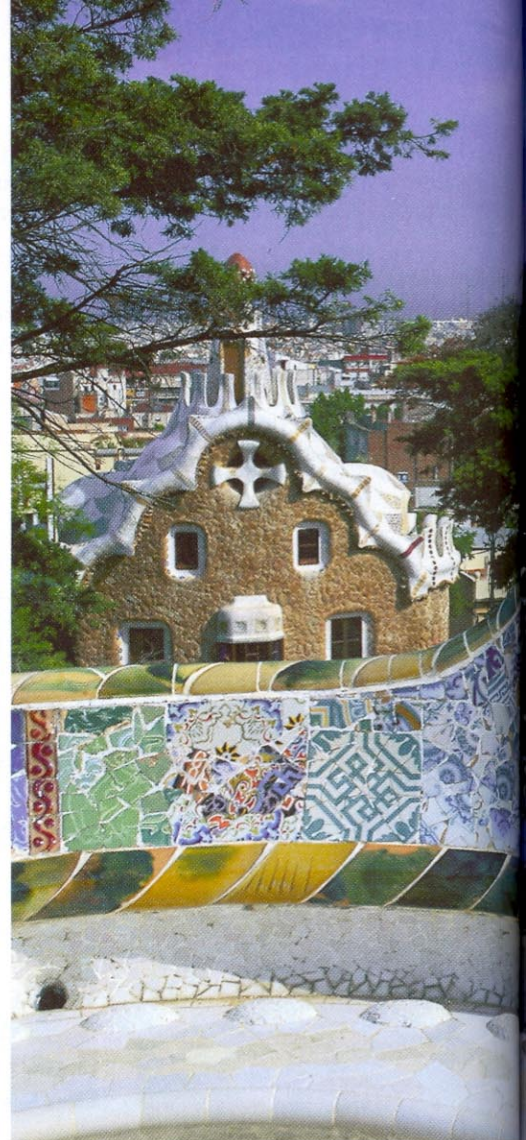
Short-haul

Self-catering holidays

If you're looking for a home-from-home experience abroad, try a self-catering city break in a top European destination

The freedom that self-catering apartments offer has led to a steady rise in demand for this type of holiday accommodation. However, it's not only secluded Spanish villas and rustic French farmhouses that are being snapped up by larger groups. Families and friends wishing to holiday together are now flocking to fabulous European cities, such as Barcelona, Berlin and Krakow, that offer culture, good cuisine and nightlife as well as being child friendly.

According to senior travel consultant Andrew Lowe, of independent travel adviser Travel Counsellors, 'City-centre, self-catering apartments offer visitors a chance to live like the locals in some of the most desirable parts of town, as well as real flexibility. Families in particular prefer to be contained in one unit rather than pay for two separate or interconnecting hotel rooms. This not only helps to bring the costs down, but also gives people the freedom to come and go as they please during their stay.'



Berlin

WHERE TO STAY?

Rubens 1 Apartment

WHERE Within the quiet, yet central, area of Friedenau-Schöneberg

BEDROOMS Two (sleeps up to four)

BATHROOMS One

COST PER WEEK £401

EXTRAS TV

CONTACT 00 39 338 170 4230, www.holiday-rentals.co.uk (ref 52890)

GETTING THERE Take Eurostar via Brussels to Berlin or fly with Easyjet from Gatwick or Luton

Situated in a refurbished apartment block, this flat is owned by Renato Conti, who bought the property in 2005. 'Friedenau remains the area of choice for locals, with



Enjoy all the kitchen comforts of home

small, quaint streets lined with old buildings, cafés and traditional restaurants leading onto tree-filled squares,' explains Renato. 'I've furnished it using an eclectic mix of modern and flea-market finds and added a few luxurious touches such as underfloor heating, a big corner bath and a fully equipped kitchen with dishwasher.'

Why go?

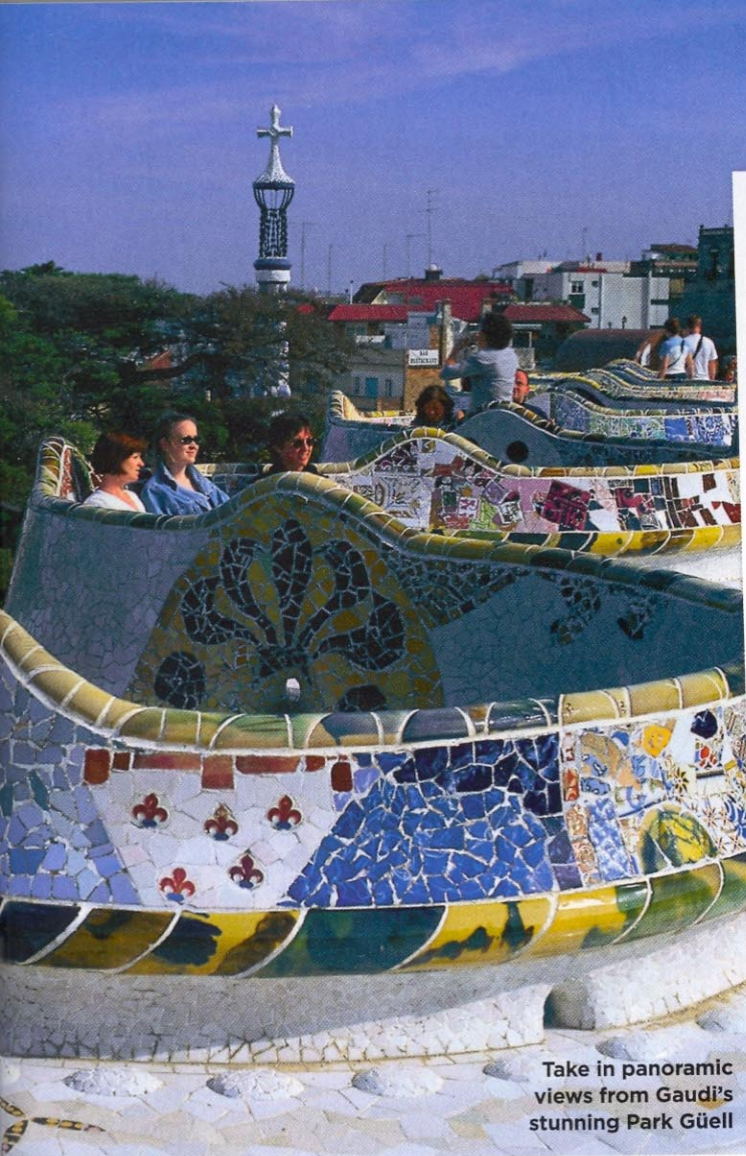
Since the Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989, the city has been reinventing itself. You can still admire remains of the graffiti-strewn wall, Hitler's bunker and Stalinist architecture, but reunification has seen Berlin enjoy cutting-edge design mixing with a lively music, film and art scene.

Highlights...

No 100 BUS ROUTE This is considered to be the best way to see all the main sights. The route takes in the Brandenburg Gate, Reichstag and State Opera. It also goes into East Berlin and offers a fascinating opportunity to glimpse what life in the communist side of the city used to be like.

The impressive Brandenburg Gate

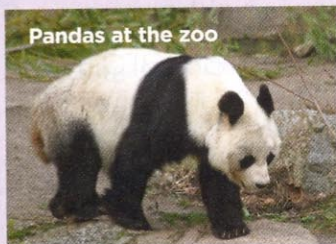




Take in panoramic views from Gaudi's stunning Park Güell

BERLIN ZOO With around 14,000 animals, this is one of the biggest and most impressive zoos in Europe. The adjacent aquarium, which features hundreds of species of fish, reptiles and insects, is also a must-see. This zoo is so huge that it'll take a full day to see everything.

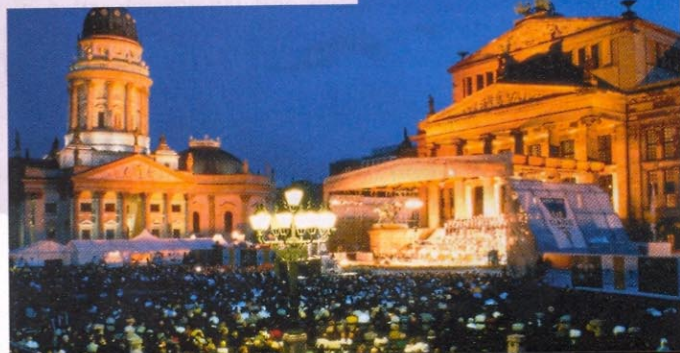
Pandas at the zoo



What's on?

The 12th Art Forum Berlin, an international fair for contemporary art, takes place at Berlin's Exhibition Grounds from 29 September to 3 October 2007. Galleries from 21 countries show work by established artists and newcomers, including paintings, sculptures and installations, video and photography. Visit www.art-forum-berlin.com.

Berlin hosts the 12th Art Forum



Barcelona

WHERE TO STAY? Art 1 Apartment, 7th Vidre St
WHERE Just off Plaça Reial and Las Ramblas
BEDROOMS Three (sleeps six)
BATHROOMS One
COST PER WEEK £647 for two people
EXTRAS Air conditioning, satellite TV, stereo system, internet access
CONTACT Olga Rodellar & David Riba, 0034 93 4194 386 or www.holiday-rentals.co.uk (ref 14382)
GETTING THERE British Airways (0870 850 9850, www.ba.com) flies to Barcelona, prices vary

Situated in the Gothic Quarter, the bedrooms are large with a spacious living area. Furnishings are contemporary and chic with laminate floors throughout and modern appliances, while original shutters retain the building's authentic charm.

A Gaudi house in nearby Las Ramblas



The large, open-plan living area

Why go?

An abundance of gothic architecture, art galleries, tasty food and 4km of sandy beaches close to the city centre makes Barcelona an ideal destination.

Highlights...

PARK GÜELL Created by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi, this municipal garden was originally intended as a commercial housing project. However, only two of the planned residences were ever built. Gaudi lived in one of them, which is now a museum with examples of furniture he designed. Enjoy the multicoloured tiled mosaic seats and fantastic views over the park and city.
LAS RAMBLAS The main artery for Barcelona's visitors, Las Ramblas runs from the central square, Plaça de Catalunya, down to the waterfront. Stop at the Boqueria market for

anything from fresh fruit to local meats, or head into the Gothic Quarter to the beautiful cathedral. These intimate streets, squares and alleyways are a preserved reminder of the building boom here in the 14th and 15th centuries, when Barcelona outgrew its Roman walls.

What's on?

Held on 20-24 September, the Fiesta de La Merce is in honour of the city's patron saint. Expect to see costumed devils, sardana dance groups and DJs.



Buy fresh food at the markets

Krakow

WHERE TO STAY?

Bujwida 1 (flats 1, 2 or 3)

WHERE Five-minute walk from Market Square

BEDROOMS Three (sleeps six), all with plasma TV

BATHROOMS Two

COST PER WEEK From £405

EXTRAS Sauna, air conditioning, computer, internet access

CONTACT 0048 509 828 222, www.krakowhomes.com

GETTING THERE British Airways (0870 850 9850, www.ba.com) flies direct to Krakow from Gatwick

For self-catering in unique style, try out the Rustic Splendour apartment. With plasma screens in every room, a water feature in the living area and a Tudor-style kitchen, this apartment has an eclectic stylish interior scheme with character. For large parties, owner Pawel Potoniec also rents two neighbouring apartments – each as uniquely decorated – which, combined can house up to 22 people.



Modern, eclectic rooms

Why go?

Soak up some culture while strolling along the ancient cobbled streets filled with trendy candlelit café bars and boutiques. Krakow may not be big, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in gothic, renaissance and baroque architecture. It also happens to have Europe's finest medieval square.

Highlights...

WIELICZKA SALT MINE No longer mined commercially, this was once the source of much of Poland's wealth. Located 10 miles south east of Krakow, this Unesco world heritage site is famous for its labyrinthine passages, giant caverns and underground



St Mary's Basilica and Cloth Hall

chapels, in particular the Chapel of Saint Kinga, a subterranean church carved in rock salt and embellished with sculptures and bas-reliefs. Guided tours through some of the 200 miles of tunnels can last three hours. **MARKET SQUARE** Measuring 200 x 200m, this is one of the largest medieval squares in Europe. The original layout was drawn up in 1257 and remains intact. At the centre of the square is the great Cloth Hall, or Sukiennice, which was designed in the 14th century as a centre for



Market Square

the cloth trade. In 1555 it was destroyed by a fire and rebuilt in the renaissance style. Today the building is used to sell traditional Polish crafts and souvenirs.

What's on?

Don't miss Krakow's annual procession of dachshund dogs wearing fancy dress on 9 September.



Colourful buildings



Naschmarkt wares

Vienna

WHERE TO STAY? Central Apartments, Mühlgasse 6

WHERE Within the central arty district of Spittelberg

BEDROOMS One (sleeps up to five)

BATHROOMS One

COST PER WEEK From £192 for two people

EXTRAS Internet, cable TV

CONTACT 0043 1 877 71 91, www.central-apartments-vienna.com

GETTING THERE Fly Niki (www.flyniki.com) flies direct to Vienna from Stansted

Located within a modern, purpose-built apartment block a few minutes' walk from some of Vienna's most famous sights, including the Imperial Palace Hofburg and the Museums Quarter, these flats have Karlsplatz subway station and the Naschmarkt open-air food markets right on their doorstep. Choose from five short-stay, one-bed flats and one studio apartment, all designed along family-friendly lines, with neutral interiors, modern furnishings and plenty of storage space.

Why go?

With its wedding-cake architecture, classical concerts and stunning museums, Vienna is a cultural heavyweight, with both historical sites and a stunning contemporary arts programme on offer all year round.

Highlights...

SECESSION BUILDING If the impressive, all-white exterior and huge gilded rooftop globe, designed by Josef Olbrich, isn't enough then head to the basement of the iconic Secession Building at Freidrichstrasse 12, which houses Gustav Klimt's 30m-long Beethoven Frieze.

SCHÖNBRUNN PALACE For baroque splendour, head for the gigantic Schönbrunn Palace. Built in 1696 by Leopold I, the dramatic façade,

sumptuous state apartments, acres of landscaped gardens and a zoo make a rewarding, day-long outing.

What's on?

Gala performances at the Spanish Riding School in September. For information and tickets, visit www.srs.at.



Indulge in alfresco dining