Hot on the heels of Sant Jordi, this month’s flower-based festivities are focused on the city of Girona, where from May 10th-18th the streets will be filled with the blossoming joys of spring. By Carol Moran

Gateway to the Costa Brava and provincial capital, the city of Girona is situated at the confluence of four rivers and has served as a crossroads for many civilisations. The Iberians populated the area for several centuries, before the Romans built the fort of Gerunda along the Via Augusta from Rome in 79BC, followed by the Visigoths, Moors and Charlemagne. Numerous sieges, captures and centuries later, this ancient settlement is a thriving city of just under 100,000 citizens, where an extraordinary history and perfectly preserved old town sit alongside beautiful architecture, elegant boutiques, and a lively culinary scene. And, whilst tourists tend to bypass this historical gem en route to its more famous neighbours, there is no better time to visit than during the annual international flower festival.

FOLLOW THE SCENT
To wander through the labyrinthine medieval streets of the delightful Barri Vell (old town) is to travel through centuries of history and cultural heritage. Encompassing the most extensive and best-preserved Jewish quarter in Europe, this tightly knit urban fabric rises from the bustling Rambla Llibertat, winding its way up towards the towering cathedral. Constructed between the 11th and 18th centuries, the Cathedral of Santa Maria is a mishmash of the Romanesque, Baroque and Catalan Gothic styles and contains the widest Gothic nave (22m) in the world. During the festival, a brightly coloured, flower-filled carpet cascades down the 86 steps that lead to the imposing structure, and is a must-see.

Within the cathedral, the Romanesque cloister showcases another artistic installation, whilst just steps away, beautiful blossoms transform the 12th-century Arab Baths. As you wander the ancient surroundings, be sure to stop by the Monestir de Sant Pere de Galligants, a Benedictine abbey and home to the Museu Arqueològic, and the 17th-century convent of Sant Martí Sacosta for more sweet-scented exhibits, followed by a stroll along the Passeig de la Muralla (the old city walls) for a bird’s-eye view of the efflorescent event.

Aside from the colourful cultivations, there is a full agenda of events and entertainment running throughout the festival, from markets, workshops and music festivals, to photography competitions and guided tours. Music plays a key role, coinciding with both the third annual edition of the ‘A Cappella’ music festival (May 10th-18th) and ‘European Opera Days’ (May 10th-11th). The former brings together a host of diverse artists performing without instrumental accompaniment, from jazz and pop to barbershop and beatbox, whilst the latter will see open air renditions of opera excerpts performed in Plaça del Vi. Elsewhere, outdoor concerts, local choirs and folk dancing competitions will be filling the flower-scented air with melodies. And music is not the only kind of festival coinciding with the Temps de Flor. On Saturday May 17th, ‘Museums Night’ will be celebrated across Europe, which means free entrance and late opening (until 1am) in the museums of Girona. Get a snapshot of Girona through the ages at the engaging Museu d’Història de la Ciutat, or, after walking the streets of the Call, find out more about the community that lived there at the Museu d’Història del Jueus de Girona, proudly demonstrating the city’s Jewish heritage. If history is not your thing, the Museu del Cinema traces the history of the art form and screens floral-themed films during the festival, or the Museu d’Art houses around 8,500 artworks from across the region, from Romanesque woodcarvings to early-20th-century paintings.
GETTING THERE
99km northeast of Barcelona, Girona is easily reached by train (one hour and 15 minutes, or 37 minutes on the AVE) and bus (one hour and 35 minutes from Estació Nord with Sagalés), or by car (AP-7 paying €7.90 toll, or C-32 paying €4.85). The exhibitions are open 10am-9pm and admission is free (Wed 14th and Sat 17th, 10am-midnight).

WHERE TO STAY
Whilst a day trip there and back is easily doable, there is certainly enough to merit an overnight stay, or maybe even two...
Boutique: Hotel Llegendes de Girona Catedral Hotel Nord 1901 and Hotel Ciutat de Girona Budget: Equity Point Hostel Self-catered: Apartamentos Girorooms, airbnb Escape the city: Hotel El Racó de Madremanya (11km away) Camping Girona (7km away)

WHERE TO EAT
Girona is the beating heart of Catalan culinary innovation and during the festival the city’s chefs take creative cuisine to a new level with flower-themed menus, featuring violet petals, rosemary blossoms, and pink flower beer. If you’re feeling flush (and don’t mind waiting a few months), the world’s best restaurant awaits, Cellar Can Roca. Otherwise, there are plenty more options where you can feast on the famed local fare...
L’Alqueria (C/de la Ginesta 8): Smart arrocería known for its superb rice dishes.
Le Bistrot (Pujada de San Doménech 8): An early-20th-century style classic serving Catalan and French cuisine.
La Penyora (Nou del Teatre 3): Delectable local dishes served against a backdrop of art works.
Konig (Carrer dels Calderers 16): Ideal for a quick snack.

And for a drink in the evening, head to Plaça de la Independència and Plaça de Sant Feliu, or to the roof terrace of the Hotel Ultonia.

TOP TIPS FROM THE LOCALS
• Try to visit at the beginning of the festival when the flowers are at their freshest.
• Eat a good breakfast or take a packed lunch with you, so you can continue wandering the artistic creations when the crowds disperse for lunch (1-4pm).
• Stop by the tourist information point (Rambla Llibertat 1) to pick up a plan of the exhibitions.
• Be sure to make restaurant and hotel reservations in advance.
• A full programme and walking route can be downloaded from the official website (www.gironatempsdeflors.net) or followed on the eFlors app, available during the festival.