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Barcelona And Beyond: A Pre-IBTM Tour of the Evolving Mice Landscape

Ahead of IBTM World 2024, HQ joined a fam trip organised by the Barcelona Convention Bureau to explore the latest developments in the city's business events offering

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Do you think you know Barcelona? Think again. Few cities balance reinvention and tradition as seamlessly as Barcelona. Proud of its modernist architecture, which has shaped its identity, Catalonia's capital always looks for ways to innovate. As the proud host of IBTM World for the past 20 years and the stage for world-renowned events such as the Mobile World Congress, Barcelona has established itself as a global leader in the MICE industry. Ranked the world's 5th by the International Congress and Convention Association and 9th by the Union of International Association in 2023, the city's success lies in its achievements and ability to stay ahead of the curve. With revitalised urban landmarks and the quiet appeal of its metropolitan area, the province of Barcelona is a destination that always has something new to inspire meeting planners.

Ahead of **IBTM World 2024**, HQ joined a fam trip organised by the **Barcelona Convention Bureau** to explore the latest developments in the city's business events offering. Over three days, we discovered venues that set the pace for innovation, tasted Barcelona's culinary creativity and ventured into Baix Llobregat, a true getaway for meeting planners looking to broaden their horizons.

Style And Innovation Throughout Barcelona

Our journey began at the **Nobu Hotel Barcelona**, a peaceful retreat next to Sants Station, one of the busiest railway hubs connecting Barcelona to the rest of Spain and other major European cities such as Paris and Lyon. Opened in 2022, this Japanese-designed hotel combines minimalist interiors with Barcelonian touches in its decor, offering a calm escape in the city's heart.

Nobu features a 90-person auditorium with soundproofing and advanced technology, making it ideal for company events. Japanese-inspired rooms such as Sakura and other meeting rooms like Tsuki and Mizu offer versatile options for gatherings of all sizes. Their breakout rooms provide flexibility for larger events and receptions.



Barcelona is much more than tapas and patatas bravas. Here, you find global cuisines flourishing alongside local flavours. Nobu is a culinary destination in its own right. Renowned for blending precise Japanese techniques with fresh, local produce, the restaurant on the top floor of the Nobu Hotel redefines gastronomy with dishes such as the iconic black cod made famous by Robert De Niro. A real showcase of fine cuisine. The team's commitment to km 0 ingredients, including locally grown wasabi, also reinforces their dedication to sustainability, while their signature flavours remain firmly tied to their Japanese roots.

On Sunday, Barcelona's reputation as a city of transformation and innovation was on full display. The **Spotify Camp Nou**, home of FC Barcelona and the most visited museum in town, is currently undergoing a major refurbishment, due for completion in time for the 2026-2027 football season. This iconic stadium combines state-of-the-art meeting facilities with sustainable features such as rainwater recycling. The venue is positioning itself as a premier venue for corporate events. The Barça Hospitality Showroom immerses visitors in the history and future of the club, while versatile and immersive spaces can host cocktail receptions (400 pax), seated dinners (350 pax) and corporate meetings.

Our next stop was the **Hotel Torre Melina Gran Meliá**. This landmark building originally opened for the 1992 Olympics and was recently renovated and reopened in January 2024 after a four-year closure. Set in green surroundings, the hotel feels worlds away from the busy streets, offering a quiet atmosphere for events. Its meeting facilities, including plenary and breakout rooms and a ballroom, can accommodate up to 800 people. The **Palau de Congressos de Catalunya** and the adjacent botanical gardens complete the complex,

offering additional conference and exhibition space, as well as outdoor event options. The **Beso Bar**, located in the garden, is perfect for cocktail receptions or intimate gatherings, adding to the venue's versatility.

The hotel's dining options also shine, including **ERRE & Urrechú**, the signature restaurant of renowned chef Íñigo Urrechú, and **L'Amaranta**, where we enjoyed lunch. Overlooking the gardens on a sunny November day, it was a perfect display of Barcelona's mild Mediterranean climate, an undeniable asset for event planners and business travellers looking for year-round options.



Our visit to **Torre Glòries**, formerly Torre Agbar, offered a fascinating glimpse into how Barcelona blends technology and art. This iconic tower, designed by Jean Nouvel, is now home to a modern observation deck that offers breathtaking skyline views and is a hub for collecting and analysing real-time urban data. The metrics collected and visualised at Torre Glòries cover many urban phenomena. Sensors and antennas installed throughout the city monitor conditions in real-time, including air quality, sea level, wind patterns, traffic flows, light pollution and even wildlife activity, as well as pollen and spore levels in town. This data provides invaluable insights into the city's environmental and social metabolism, demonstrating Barcelona's commitment to becoming a smarter, more sustainable urban space. The Rhythm exhibition on the deck uses this data to create immersive

visual and auditory art experiences, making it a truly interactive space for visitors.

Breathtaking panoramic views crown this innovative experience. From the top, visitors can enjoy views of the Sagrada Família, the Eixample district's symmetrical grid design and the coast in all its beauty. Also visible are the Three Chimneys, a symbolic reminder of Barcelona's industrial past and often referred to as the 'Sagrada Família of the Workers'. The chimneys served as the main venue for the Manifesta 15 exhibition in Sant Adrià del Besòs, which I had the chance to visit after the fam trip. This evocative exhibition explored themes of eco-social transition, the promotion of inclusivity and environmental responsibility, values that resonate deeply with Barcelona's vision for its future, and a way for the province to repurpose its spaces.

Following our visit to the observation deck, we headed to **Labtwentytoo**, Barcelona's only **Marriott Tribute Portfolio Hotel**, which opened its doors in 2023. Situated in Poble Nou, an industrial area now transforming into one of the trendiest districts, this hotel reflects Barcelona's spirit of innovation and cultural expression. Inspired by nature and the sea, the design of each of the 185 rooms features unique local art that reflects the coastal feel of Barcelona. The hotel's **Bar Twenty2** offers indoor and outdoor settings for casual gatherings, while the **Rooftop Za'atar** serves Mediterranean-inspired snacks with panoramic city views. For event planners, Labtwentytoo's meeting facilities include an auditorium for up to 100 people and five meeting rooms, all complemented by a foyer ideal for coffee breaks. The **Alcachofa** restaurant adds versatility, with dining areas tailored for private events or post-meeting meals. The hotel has earned three certifications recognising its eco-friendly practices, further boosting its appeal for environmentally conscious planners.

The day concluded at **Port Olímpic**, transformed for the **37th America's Cup 2024**. Now, new meeting spaces such as Espai Mestral (170 pax) and Sala Gregal (intimate boardroom), as well as new fine dining options on the waterfront, add flexible options by the beach. Dinner at **Cangrejo Loco** showcased the city's culinary traditions with seafood and paella, all served with views of the Mediterranean Sea.

Baix Llobregat: There Is More To Barcelona Than Meets The Eye

Beyond the capital's busy streets lies the Baix Llobregat region, a destination proving there is much more to Barcelona than the well-known city centre. With site visits organised by the **Baix Llobregat Convention Bureau** in partnership with the Barcelona Convention Bureau, we explored diverse locations and spaces that reimagine the possibilities for meetings and events in the region. Baix Llobregat offers meeting planners fresh perspectives from historic sites to versatile modern venues, all within easy reach of Barcelona.

At **La Centenària 1779** in Gavà, we were welcomed into the tranquil setting of a historic *masia*, a traditional Catalan country house. This venue is ideal for event organisers looking for a personal touch, with options ranging from presentations and gala dinners in the orangerie to team-building activities in the gardens. Indoors, the historic cellar provides a cosy and intimate setting for smaller gatherings. Just seven minutes from the airport, La Centenària perfectly balances accessibility and intimacy.

Our experience continued at the fascinating **Colònia Güell** in Santa Coloma de Cervelló, a 19th-century textile colony created by Eusebi Güell, Gaudí's greatest benefactor. Barcelona is famous for Gaudí's architectural icons, Casa Batlló, La Pedrera, Park Güell and Sagrada Família. But the **Cripta Güell**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, is a lesser-known architectural treasure in Baix Llobregat. Designed as a workshop for Gaudí's architectural experiments, the Cripta Güell influenced his later techniques in the Sagrada Família. The space can also be privatised for intimate events or concerts such as Candlelight, adding a unique layer of exclusivity to this masterpiece of modernism. Colònia Güell's beautiful surroundings and rich history create an inspiring setting for smaller events, offering a distinctive marriage of history, past and present.

Our fam trip ended at the **Casanova Beach Club** in Castelldefels, where the Mediterranean coastline set the scene for a luncheon with representatives from the Town Hall. The restaurant has a capacity for 400 guests and is a versatile venue, ideal for both corporate events and more relaxed gatherings. Castelldefels is a laid-back destination for business travellers and tourists alike, with meeting facilities, sporty team-building opportunities at the Olympic Canal, a growing culinary scene and accommodation for 3,000 pax, the town is becoming a destination of its own, close to Barcelona but offering a different experience for those seeking a quieter escape, still deeply connected to Barcelona's spirit of innovation.



A Province of Endless Discovery

For those who think they know Barcelona, there is always more to uncover. This city of constant change and new openings offers opportunities far beyond the familiar. From its revitalised landmarks to its hidden wonders, Barcelona is a destination that rewards curiosity.

I have been to Barcelona many times, but our brief trip reminded all of us that Barcelona's metropolitan region is so much more than an extension of the capital. It is a world of its own, rich with opportunities for event planners looking for fresh perspectives. Barcelona's evolution invites visitors to see it from new perspectives. Whether you look at its skyline from the top of Torre Glòries, discover its industrial past at Colònia Güell or the Three Chimneys, or enjoy the Mediterranean breeze along the seafront at Port Olímpic, the province continues to reveal itself in unexpected ways. It is a place where history and reinvention coexist, creating a dynamic environment that inspires those who venture beyond the expected.

As IBTM World celebrates 20 years in this remarkable city, Barcelona again proves why it remains at the forefront of the MICE industry. Read our **exclusive interview** (<https://meetingmediagroup.com/article/barcelona-20-years-of-ibtm-world-and-a-new-vision-for-the-future-of-events>) with **Christoph Tessmar, Director of the Barcelona Convention Bureau**, in HQ for more insights into its future and evolving offerings.

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