



LA FRANÇA

Barcelona's La França, is a love hotel par excellence, where discretion is the byword and escape from the shackles of everyday life lies waiting for you within the cloistered realms of a luxury suite.

◊ A black BMW with tinted windows snakes past Barcelona's beautiful Mercat de les Flors and, barely braking, disappears into a dark tunnel at one side of a large four-storey building, causing a passer-by to wonder what lies inside this virtually unmarked establishment with so many blinded windows. Maybe something he will never know.

Once inside, the car is ushered into a large parking space behind a three-metre-high black curtain by a man dressed in black holding a two-way radio. After radioing ahead to check that the coast is clear, the man in black opens the car door, and a woman in an expensive coat and heels and a well-groomed man in a tailored suit step out of the car and are escorted through the basement car park, her heels sending sharp heartbeats around the tunnel as they hit the asphalt. Without encounter-

ing any of the hotel's other clients, who would possibly recognise them from their daily lives, the couple make it to the Gran Suite where, at last, they kiss incautiously as the Jacuzzi fills up behind the glass doors and the champagne cools on ice. And why this should be kept a secret, is entirely their business.

Sound like a scene from Eyes Wide Shut? Well, this is a mere slice of Barcelona's secret nocturnal life, and it's not the exclusive realm of politicians and the ruling class. In the case of La França, it's an affordable, but still luxurious, take on the love hotel steering clear of the seedier side of the market involving call girls, creepy desk clerks and cockroach rooms with paper-thin walls.

The term "love hotel" originated in Japan and refers to a special type of hotel that offers privacy for a couple to have sex. Love hotels in Japan



are often used by young couples, since many young Japanese people live with their parents, a characteristic they share with young adults in Barcelona, who often find it difficult to afford their own place, and prefer to save while living at home.

The function of the love hotel in Spain, known as *meublè* or *hotel de parejas*, has traditionally been to provide a private setting for extramarital affairs, although in recent years, according to the owner of La França, clients of the hotel include young couples (that can't afford their own flat) and, people who, for innocent reasons, prefer not to use their own place, say, a divorced mother who doesn't want to bring a man home in front of her kids.

La França is also an excellent antidote to those lulls in the sex lives of live-together couples, who become stuck in a routine, forgetting

the love story they lived when they first got together. You see, secrecy can feel sexy. And on your journey into the tunnels and through the corridors of La França, you somehow shake off the trappings of ordinary life, allowing you to rediscover the romance.

Room prices start reasonably at €38 a night for the standard room, you can keep the room for 24 hours, providing one of you stays there at all times. On a Friday and Saturday night, due to the increased demand, you get the room for a four hour slot for €38, with a full-stay becoming available after 2.30am and costing €48. All rooms follow this basic price structure. There are several different types to choose from, among them you have the stylish Suite Superior, €46, the dreamy Suite Fantasia, €76, and the top of the range Gran Suite, €86, fitted with Jacuzzi, circular bed

with a remote-controlled tilting mirror on the wall. They offer a range of wines starting at around €10.

You can enter the hotel either on foot or by car (with parking inside). On doing so, you'll soon be met by one of 'the men in black', who will take great care of you from the moment you get there till the moment you leave. For whatever reason you end up in La França, you and your lover will experience the art of discretion played at the highest level, allowing you to enjoy each other's company in complete privacy, which nowadays, perhaps, is something worth paying for.

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