

19 March 2017

## Mum's the word

Beautiful  
handmade gifts

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SUNDAY EXPRESS

## Alan Titchmarsh

Brings all-year  
colour to the  
garden

Earn  
your  
stripes

This spring's  
key look



# Euro stars

Our writers discover some of Europe's most colourful hotels and inspiring destinations

## Barcelona

Barcelona is never out of the top five holiday destinations for Brits, but why do we always do it on the cheap? Why do we go for a bargain hotel or an Airbnb and some *patatas bravas* on the street when we could be staying in some of Europe's loveliest hotels?

Take the Mercer. Hidden in the tight streets of the Gothic Quarter, between the Picasso Museum and the cathedral, it's a hotel built on Roman walls from the first century AD that, for all its chic, modern, five-star atmosphere, has the feel of a medieval palace, with a light-filled central courtyard of orange trees and bare stone walls, albeit with contemporary furniture and superstar chefs. It's not only a gorgeous place to stay – and less than half an hour from the beach – but slap bang in the middle of the historic centre.

And while you might have been to the Picasso Museum down in those narrow streets of the Gothic Quarter, go a few streets further down to the Old Port and you can stay in the 19th-century building where Picasso had his first studio, now The Serras, a chic five-star boutique hotel overlooking the port where you can tuck into food created by Michelin-starred chef Marc Gascons.

If you do want to take things a bit funkier – and this is very much a party town – try the Barceló Raval, a futuristic mesh-clad landmark in the middle of the historic literary district of the Raval, just a hop and a skip from the famous Las Ramblas. Here it's all quirky art, space-age rooms and a rooftop bar with perhaps the most jaw-dropping views in town, from the sea to the mountains. Go for a cocktail even if you're not staying and don't forget your camera, as it's



## Prague, Vienna and Budapest

My head is reeling from the history and my neck is aching from looking up at the stunning architecture. Fortunately all the hard work was done for me on my recent tour of Prague, Vienna and Budapest, all I had to do between sightseeing excursions was to sit back on the coach, relax and enjoy myself.

In Prague, I stayed in the Hotel International. Built when the nation was under Communist control, there's nothing basic about the hotel now, and from its luxurious interior I set off on a guided walking tour of the city. Highlights included the 15th-century astronomical clock in the Old Town Square, Prague Castle and the magnificent Gothic St Vitus Cathedral, the Charles Bridge and the eye-popping art deco architecture in the Jewish quarter. I also loved the historic Café Louvre, where Albert Einstein and Franz Kafka would visit for coffee and cake.