

WEEKEND PLANS? / GIRONA, SPAIN

## Life in the slow lane

The lifestyle in Girona is decidedly relaxed. When Monocle visits on a weekday morning, three women are chatting over coffee in the Old Town, while others flick through newspapers at a kiosk. Near the cathedral, passers-by pause to watch a team of archaeologists digging for Roman ruins. Colombia-born café owner Andrea Gaitan lived here with her parents when she was younger but spent many years in Buenos Aires. It was the Catalan city's slower pace of life that brought her back. "Everything I hated about Girona when I was a teenager is what I like about it now," she says. "It's peaceful, it's clean, it feels safe and you never spend hours commuting." She isn't the only one to have made such a move.



Image: David Powell



For those seeking to put down roots in a sunny European city, Girona is an increasingly enticing alternative to Barcelona. Known for its cycling routes through the Pyrenees and proximity to Costa Brava, the city of about 100,000 has long been attractive to visitors. But recently more people have chosen to stay. In the past three years the proportion of migrants here has grown from 12 per cent to 16 per cent. The city is experiencing an influx of foreign entrepreneurs and hospitality operations, such as the Estudio Alémdesigned Hotel in Girona, are launching to meet the demand.

Meanwhile, the city's textile, paper and food industries continue to thrive and storied businesses such as restaurant El Cellar de Can Roca are building on their legacies. Menswear shop Pujadas has been selling high-quality Italian brands since the 19th century. "I'm the fifth generation of my family to run it," says owner Xavier Pujadas. While he believes that respecting tradition is crucial, he also embraces change, recently overseeing a refit of his shop. Girona as a whole isn't afraid of progress: city hall is sponsoring new cycling schemes and freshly opened sourdough bakeries and wine bars are becoming a common sight. It strikes the ideal balance between the old and new. When friends Júlia Bamala and Marta Pujol decided to set up ceramics shop Cucut Oliva, they knew that Girona would be the right place to start. "It's a city," says Bamala. "But it has the heart of a small town."