

## EXCURSIONS

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Barcelona is just the beginning. Once you break through the choking ring of satellite suburbs and dormitory towns surrounding the capital, one of Spain's most diverse regions unfolds before you. Catalonia (Catalunya to the locals), a land with its own language and proud history setting it apart from the rest of Spain, offers everything from golden beaches to wicked ski runs, medieval monasteries to Roman ruins, top-quality wines to the art of Salvador Dalí. A weekender to Barcelona could easily be converted into a couple of weeks exploring the bustling city's hinterland.

The region, covering 31,932 sq km, is bounded by the mighty Pyrenees range and the French frontier to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the east and the inland region of Aragón to the west.

Barcelona is the big boy nowadays, but in the times of ancient Rome it was Tarragona that lorded it over this neck of the empire. Evidence in this sunny port town of Roman grandeur includes the forum, amphitheatre and remains of the circus (chariot race track). To the northeast of Barcelona, the intensely Catalan town of Girona (you'll be lucky to hear Spanish) flourished during the Middle Ages. Its tightly packed medieval centre remains largely intact. To the north of Girona lies Figueres, stronghold of the hallucinatory genius of Salvador Dalí.

Catalonia is not all high culture. Myriad beaches, coves and seaside locales dot the breathtakingly rugged spectacle of the Costa Brava northeast of Barcelona. Another fine strand southwest of town is Sitges, loaded with bars and an obligatory stop on the gay partygoers' European circuit. Those who take their hedonism with more restraint can trundle around the Penedès wine country west of Barcelona. And to uplift the soul, the jagged mountain range of Montserrat makes the perfect antidote to a seaside hangover.

## ANCIENT CITIES

**Tarragona** (p259) is a busy port and beachside city with an unfair amount of sunshine! Southwest of Barcelona, it is *the* place in Catalonia for those wanting to know what the Romans ever did for any of us. Apart from the well-preserved vestiges of the city's amphitheatre, circus (where chariot races were held) and forum, Tarragona has an archaeological museum replete with ancient artefacts. Inland and to the northeast of Barcelona lies another Roman settlement, **Girona** (p246). With its closely cluttered medieval buildings in the crowded

old town centre, Girona makes an enchanting counterpoint to the sprawl of the region's capital.

## DALÍ MANIA

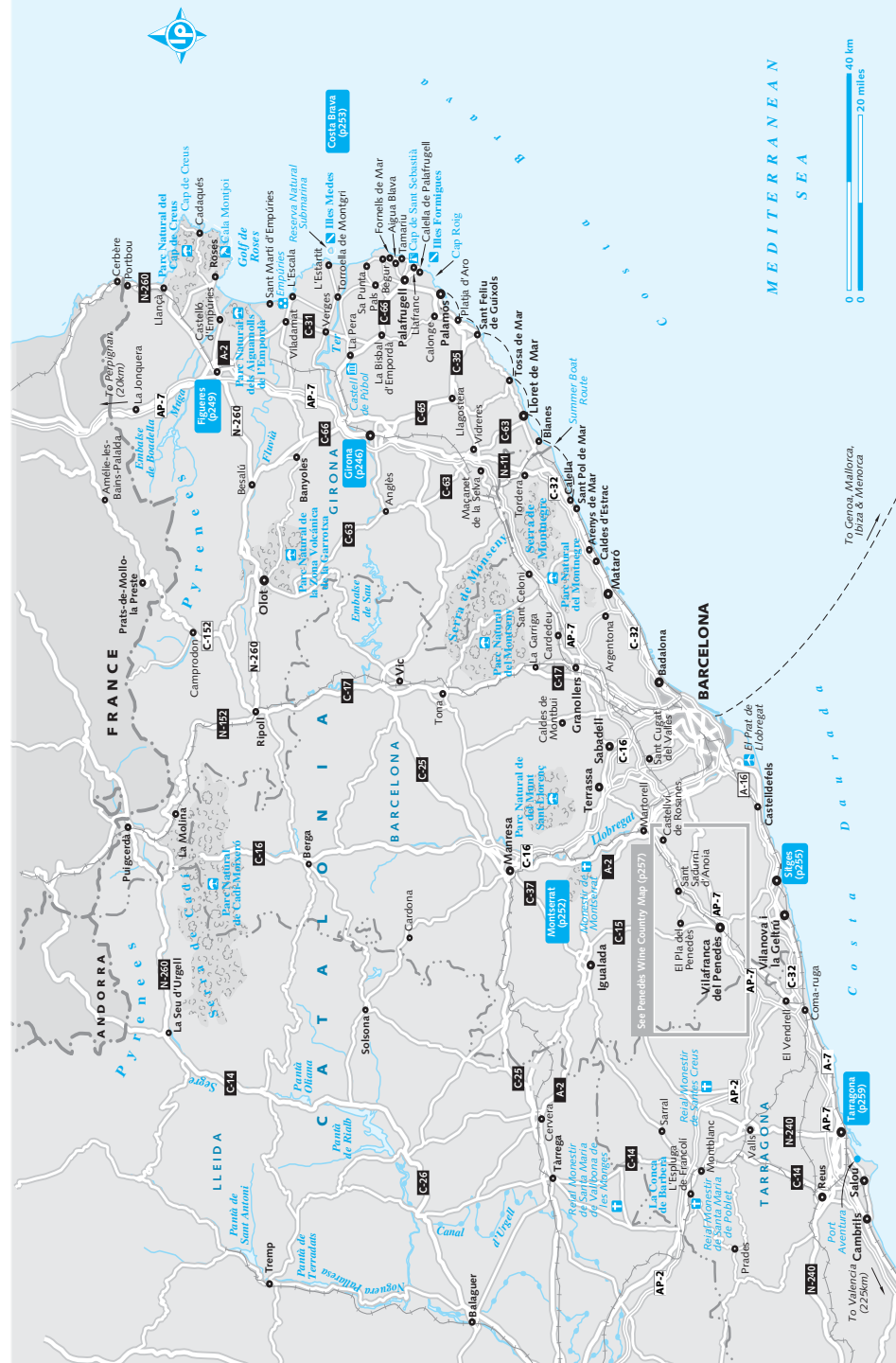
Zany Salvador Dalí, with his upturned handlebar moustache, outlandish dream paintings and outrageous lifestyle, is surely the most colourful character to emerge from 20th-century Catalonia. For all his globetrotting, he left the greater part of his artistic legacy on home turf. The core rests in his theatre-museum-mausoleum in **Figueres** (p249), a half-hour north of Girona by train. Enthusiasts can seek out more of his work in several nearby locations, including the magical coastal towns of **Cadaqués** (p254) and **Port Lligat** (p251).

## WINE, PARTIES & PIETY

Barely 50km west of Barcelona stretch the vineyards of one of Spain's premier wine-making regions, the **Penedès** (p257). Most of the national production of *cava*, the local version of bubbly, pours out of this region. Alongside known names such as Freixenet and Codorníu, countless smaller wineries are in constant ferment.

## ORGANISED TOURS

The Bus Turístic that takes people around Barcelona (see p266) has been such a success that the concept has been extended in the form of **Catalunya Bus Turístic** (Map pp64–5; ☎ 93 285 38 32; Plaça de Catalunya), a series of day tours from Barcelona to various parts of the region. There are two routes: Girona and Figueres; and Vilafranca del Penedès (Torres winery visit), Montserrat and Sitges. Both run daily (except Monday) from March to October, leaving at 8.30am and returning at 8pm, and cost €66. The tours leave from Plaça de Catalunya.



## BUBBLES AND MUD

For some, a day at the beach just isn't enough (and a little impractical in winter!). Never fear, for wellness is here. Indeed, it always was. Since Roman days, thermal baths have operated in various parts of Catalonia. Now there are 20 across the region, and several of them less than 40km from Barcelona.

In **La Garriga**, a pretty town 36km north of the city, are two fine historic installations that have been modernised. **Termes La Garriga** (☎ 93 871 70 86; www.termes.com; Carrer dels Banyes 23; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm Sun) sits atop waters that bubble out at temperatures as high as 60°C. All sorts of treatments are possible, from mud baths to aroma massage. For €32 you can spend half a day (three hours) wandering between a couple of pools, sauna and various showers. You have to book ahead. The other luxury option here is the five-star **Gran Hotel Blancafort** (☎ 93 860 56 00; www.balnearioblancafort.com; Carrer de la Mina 7; s/d from €130/260), which is out of the centre. After bathing, go for a stroll around town, especially along the street hugging the railway line, and admire mansions, many of them Modernista, built by Barcelona's wealthy elite as summer retreats around the turn of the 20th century.

In the pleasant seaside town of **Caldes d'Estrac**, 36km northeast of Barcelona, the Romans loved to slop around in the thermal waters. You can emulate them in the **Balneari de Caldes d'Estrac** (☎ 93 791 26 05; Carrer de la Riera 29; admission €6.10; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun). These public baths were built in the early 19th century, although people have been bathing in the waters for at least a couple of millennia. Come up on the train for a day and split your time between the baths (you are given about 20 minutes) and other extra treatments if you wish, lunch and the beach. Or you could stay at the luxury **Hotel Colón** (☎ 93 791 04 00; www.hotel-colon.net; Plaça de les Barques s/n; d €194) and use its modern spa facilities. It offers all sorts of packages.

**Caldes de Montbui**, 28km north of Barcelona, hosts three thermal bath hotels. You can use the facilities even if you don't stay in the hotels, although the price can mount depending on what you opt for. **Broquetes Balneario** (☎ 93 865 01 00; www.grupbroquetes.com; Plaça de la Font del Lleó 1) is the town's historic spa hotel, in front of the Roman baths, and a public fountain (Font del Lleó) from which water has been spouting forth at a scorching 74°C since the 16th century. Founded in the 18th century and rebuilt several times, it is a predominantly Modernista building. Inside it boasts an original Roman *vaporarium*, a 2nd-century AD steam bath. A session in the **thermal pool and cervical showers** (☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-9.30pm Sat & Sun) costs €22 (or €28 for two people). This gives you 20 minutes, plus the use of the outdoor heated pool. Book ahead. **Hotel Termes Victoria** (☎ 93 865 01 50; www.termesvictoria.com; Carrer de Barcelona 12) is a luxury spa hotel. You can use its facilities (thermal pool session €15.40; ☎ 8am-1pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun). The town is hardly stunning but worth a wander. If you find it open, the **Museu Delger** (Carrer del Dr Delger; ☎ noon-1pm 1st & 2nd Sun of month), an 18th-century mansion stuffed with period furniture, is worth a look. Ask at the **tourist office** (☎ 93 865 41 40; www.caldesdemontbui.org; Plaça de la Font del Lleó 20; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun). Caldes d'Estrac and La Garriga are easily reached by *rodalies* trains from Barcelona. Caldes de Montbui is more easily reached by car or Sagalés bus (from Passeig de Sant Joan, 65 minutes, €2.70).

Barely 20km south of Vilafranca del Penedès, **Sitges** (p255) was a modest fishing village a century ago. It is now a party animal's haven, with a notable gay leaning, and the scene of frenzied beachside Carnival festivities in February.

On another plane altogether is Catalonia's most revered mountain and monastery, **Montserrat** (p252), northwest of Barcelona. People come here to venerate the Black Madonna, explore the monastery's art treasures and walk in the weirdly shaped mountains.

## RUGGED COAST

Too often dismissed because of its tainted package-holiday image, the bulk of the **Costa Brava** (Rugged Coast, p253) is a joyous spectacle of nature. Blessed with high blustery cliffs,

myriad inlets and minuscule coves alternating with long expanses of golden sand and thick stands of hardy pine, it begs to be explored.

## GIRONA

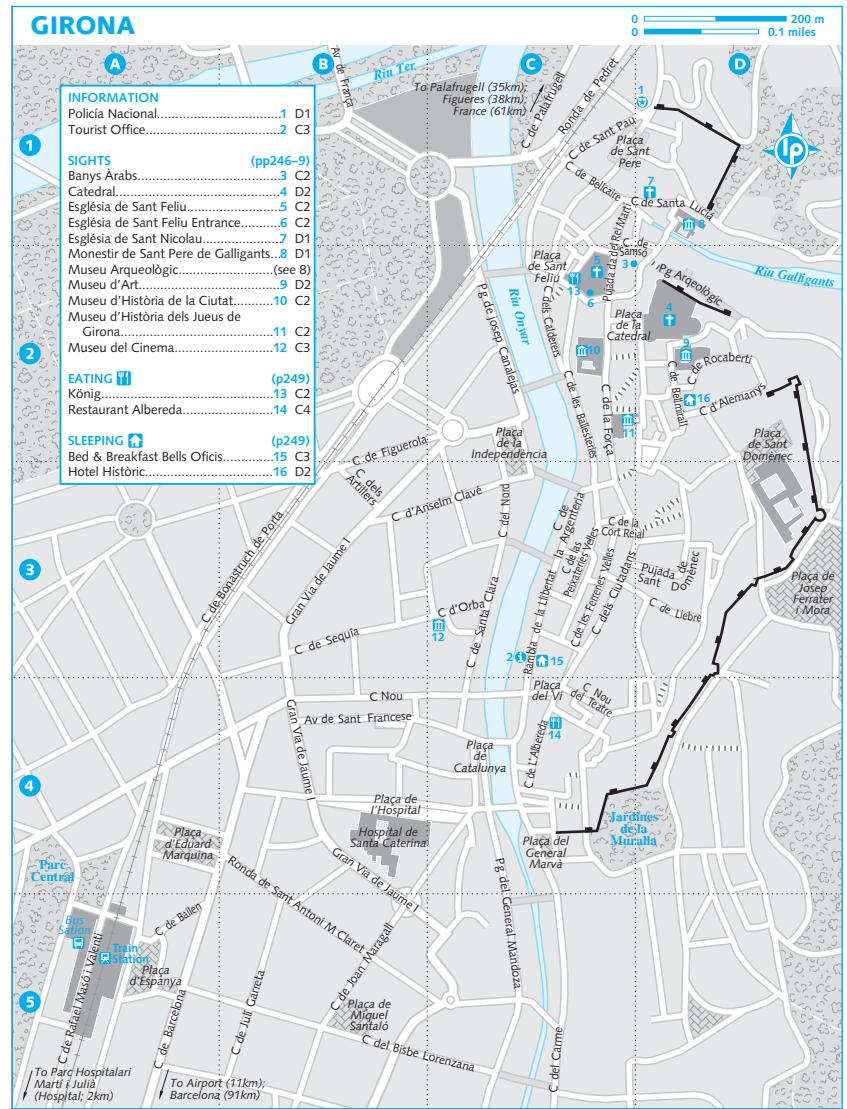
Northern Catalonia's largest city, Girona (Gerona in Spanish) is draped in a valley 36km inland from the Costa Brava and 91km northeast of Barcelona. Its medieval centre, which seems to struggle uphill above the Riu Onyar, exudes a quiet, contemplative magnetism.

The Roman town of Gerunda lay on the Via Augusta, the highway from Rome to Cádiz (Carrer de la Força in Girona's old town follows part of its line). Wrested from the Muslims by the Franks in AD 797, Girona became capital of one of Catalonia's most important counties, only falling under the

sway of Barcelona in the late 9th century. Its medieval wealth produced a plethora of fine Romanesque and Gothic buildings that survived repeated assaults and sieges to give us pleasure today.

The narrow streets of the old town climb in a web above the east bank of the Riu Onyar. Commanding the northern half of the city with its majestic baroque façade placed high over a breezy square and stairway, the **Catedral**

(☎ 972 21 44 26; www.catedraldegirona.org; Plaça de la Catedral; museum adult/child under 7yr/child 7-16yr/senior & student €5/free/1.20/3, Sun free; ☎ 10am-8pm Apr-Oct, 10am-7pm Nov-Mar) makes an obvious starting point for exploration. Most of the edifice, which has been altered repeatedly, is a great deal older than its exterior suggests. Wander inside to appreciate this. First you find yourself in Europe's widest Gothic nave (23m), but other treasures await in and beyond the



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cathedral **museum**. Head through the door marked 'Claustre Tresor'. The collection includes the masterly Romanesque *Tapís de la Creació* (Creation Tapestry) and a priceless Mozarabic illuminated *Beatus* manuscript from AD 975. Beyond the museum you emerge in the beautiful, if somewhat wonkily shaped, 12th-century Romanesque **cloister**; the 112 stone columns display whimsical, albeit weathered, sculpture. During services (especially 10am to 2pm Sundays) you can only visit the museum and cloister.

Next door to the cathedral, in the 12th- to 16th-century Palau Episcopal, the **Museu d'Art** (☎ 972 20 38 34; www.museumart.com; Pujada de la Catedral 12; adult/child under 16yr/senior & student €2/free/1.50; ☹ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Mar-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Feb, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) boasts an extensive collection that ranges from occasionally delirious-looking Romanesque woodcarvings to rather more dour early-20th-century paintings.

Girona's second great church, the **Església de Sant Feliu** (Plaça de Sant Feliu; ☹ 11am-1pm & 4-6pm), is downhill from the cathedral. The 17th-century main façade, with its landmark single tower, is on Plaça de Sant Feliu, but the entrance is around the side. The nave has 13th-century Romanesque arches but 14th- to 16th-century Gothic upper levels. The northernmost of the chapels, at the far western end of the church, is graced by a masterly Catalan Gothic sculpture, Aloï de Montbrai's alabaster *Crist Jacent* (Recumbent Christ). It looks like it is made of perfectly moulded ice-cream.

The **Banyes Àrabs** (Arab Baths; ☎ 972 21 32 62; Carrer de Ferran Catòlic; admission €1.80; ☹ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays), although modelled on Muslim and Roman bathhouses, is actually a 12th-century Christian affair in Romanesque style. It's the only public bathhouse discovered in medieval Christian Spain. Possibly in reaction to the Muslim obsession with water and cleanliness, in Christian Europe washing came to be regarded as ungodly (and water was feared as a source of germs and illness). Europe must have been the smelliest continent on earth! The bathhouse contains an *apodyterium*

(changing room), followed by the *frigidarium* (cold water room) and *tepidarium* (hot water room), and the *caldarium*, a kind of sauna. Across the street from the Banyes Àrabs, steps lead up into lovely gardens that follow the city walls in what is called the **Passeig Arqueològic** (Archaeological Walk) up to the 18th-century Portal de Sant Cristòfol gate, from which you can walk back down to the cathedral.

About 100m north of the Banyes Àrabs across the bubbling Riu Galligants stands the 11th- and 12th-century Romanesque **Monestir de Sant Pere de Galligants** (☎ 972 20 26 32; www.mac.es/girona; Carrer de Santa Llúcia s/n; adult/senior & child €2.30/free; ☹ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Jun-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-May, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays), a modest monastery with a lovely cloister. Get up close to the pillars that line the cloister. The closer you look the weirder the medieval imagination seems – all those bizarre animals and mythical monsters! The monastery also houses the **Museu Arqueològic**, with exhibits that range from prehistoric to medieval times, and include Roman mosaics and some medieval Jewish tombstones. Just opposite the monastery is the pretty Lombard-style 12th-century Romanesque **Església de Sant Nicolau**. It is unusual for its octagonal belltower, and it also has a triple apse in a trefoil plan.

South along Carrer de la Força about 100m off the stairway leading up to Plaça de la Catedral, the **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat** (City History Museum; ☎ 972 22 22 29; www.ajuntament.gi/museuciutat; Carrer de la Força 27; adult/senior & child under 16yr/student €3/free/2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) traces Girona's history from ancient times to the present. Dioramas, explanatory boards, videos and all sorts of objects ranging from Neolithic tools to the whining musical instruments used to accompany the *sardana* (traditional Catalan folk dance) help bring the town's story to life. Learn about the 18-month siege of the town by Napoleon's troops, which cost half Girona's population their lives.

Carrer de la Força lies at the heart of the Call (the Jewish quarter). Until 1492, when Jews had to convert to Catholicism or leave Spain, Girona was home to Catalonia's second most important Jewish community after Barcelona. For an idea of medieval Jewish life, visit the **Museu d'Història dels Jueus de Girona** (Jewish History Museum, aka the Centre Bonastruc Ça Porta; ☎ 972 21 67 61; Carrer de la Força 8; adult/child under 16yr/senior & student €2/free/1.50; ☹ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-May, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays). Named after Jewish Girona's most illustrious figure, a

## TRANSPORT: GIRONA

Distance from Barcelona 91km

Direction Northeast

Travel time Up to 1½ hours

Car Take the AP-7 motorway via Granollers.

Train At least 20 trains daily from Barcelona Sants station (€5.90 to €6.70).

13th-century Cabbalist philosopher and mystic, the centre is rather bare but hosts limited exhibitions. It is a focal point for studies of Jewish Spain and claims to have the biggest collection of Jewish funeral stones and sarcophagi in the country.

There is not a great deal to see in the modern half of Girona, on the west bank of the Riu Onyar. One outstanding exception is the **Museu del Cinema** (☎ 972 41 27 77; www.museudelcinema.org; Carrer de Sèquia 1; adult/child under 16yr/senior & student €4/free/4; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Oct-Apr), housed in the Casa de les Aigües. Shadow puppets and magic lanterns introduce the Col·lecció Tomàs Mallol, a display that details the precursors to and story of the motion-picture business. Take a close look at some of the images for fairground magic lantern shows in the 18th century, like the devilish character working a bellows in someone's backside!

## INFORMATION

**Parc Hospitalari (Hospital) Martí i Julià** (☎ 972 18 25 00; Carrer del Doctor Castany s/n)

**Policia Nacional** (☎ 091; Carrer de Sant Pau 2)

**Tourist office** (☎ 972 22 65 75; www.ajuntament.gi/turisme; Rambla de la Llibertat 1; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun)

## EATING

**König** (☎ 972 22 57 82; Carrer dels Calderers 16; meals €8-15 ☹ daily) For a quick sandwich, *entrepà* (filled roll) or simple hot dish, 'King' boasts a broad outdoor terrace shaded by thick foliage.

**Restaurant Albereda** (☎ 972 22 60 02; www.restaurantalbereda.com, in Catalan & Spanish; Carrer de l'Albereda 9; meal €40; ☹ Tue-Sat, lunch Mon; ☹) The town's top restaurant serves Catalan cuisine with interesting twists, such as the *fidueada de ceps i calamarcets* (a noodle dish with mushrooms and tiny squids). There are also tasting menus for €53.

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Històric** (☎ 972 22 35 83; www.hotelhistoric.com; Carrer de Bellmirall 4/a; s/d €109/122; ☎ ☹) A bijou hotel in a historic building in the heart of old Girona. The eight pretty, spacious rooms are individually decorated, and there are also apartments.

**Bed & Breakfast Bells Oficis** (☎ 972 22 81 70; www.bellsificis.com; Carrer dels Germans Busquets 2; r €35-85; ☹ ☹ ☹) With just five rooms, this family-run option is perfectly placed just off Rambla de la Llibertat. The rooms are all very different. The two best ones have balconies overlooking the Rambla. The biggest (€85) has ample space for four people.

## FIGUERES

Just 12km inland from the Golf de Roses, Figueres (Figueras in Spanish) might generously be described as a humdrum town with a single serious attraction: Salvador Dalí. Born here in a two-storey 1898 Modernista house (being restored and destined to be a museum on Dalí's early days from 2010) at Carrer de Monturiol in 1904, Dalí maintained ties with his home territory in all his long years of pergrination between Barcelona, Madrid, Paris and the USA.

Towards the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, Figueres' theatre was largely destroyed by fire and subsequently left to rot. In 1961, the by-now world-renowned eccentric Dalí had the money to buy the site and work on one of his wackier projects, the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** (☎ 972 67 75 00; www.salvador-dali.org; Plaça de Gala i Salvador Dalí 5; adult/student €11/8; ☹ 9am-8pm Jul-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Mar-Jun & Oct, 10.30am-6pm Nov-Feb), which he completed in 1974. It is at once art gallery, final testament and mausoleum. It was, and remains, the greatest act of self-promotion of a man who had made a supreme art form of such activities. But make no mistake, Dalí was a unique artistic talent, as the contents of his theatre-museum amply demonstrate. It is a multidimensional trip through one of the most fertile (or febrile) imaginations of the 20th century, full of surprises, tricks and illusions, and containing much of Dalí's life's work. Admission includes entry to Dalí Joies (Dalí Jewels). The site is closed on Mondays from October to May. In August, it also opens at night (open 10pm to 1am) for a maximum of 500 people (booking essential; admission €12). You are treated to a glass of *cava*.

## FIVE IN ONE

The M5 ticket gives you half-price entry at four of Girona's five museums. You pay full price at the first museum you visit, where you pick up the ticket. It is valid for six months.



The building aims to surprise from the outset. The fuchsia wall along Pujada del Castell is topped by a row of Dalí's trademark egg shapes and what appear to be female gymnasts ready to leap. Bizarre sculptures greet visitors outside the entrance on Plaça de Gala i Salvador Dalí. One can only imagine the parish priest at the adjacent centuries-old **Església de Sant Pere** looking with disapproval (Franco was still in charge in those days) upon this loopiness as it emerged from the theatre ruins.

Inside, the ground floor (level one) includes a semicircular garden on the site of the original theatre stalls. In its centre is a classic piece of weirdness, **Taxi Plujós** (Rainy Taxi), composed of an early Cadillac – said to have belonged to Al Capone – and a pile of tractor tyres, both surmounted by statues,

with a fishing boat balanced precariously above the tyres. Put a coin in the slot and water washes all over the inside of the car. The Sala de Peixateries (Fish Shop Room) off here holds a collection of Dalí oils including his **Autoretrat tou amb tall de bacon fregit** (Soft Self-Portrait with Fried Bacon) and **Retrat de Picasso** (Portrait of Picasso). Beneath the former stage of the theatre is the crypt, with Dalí's surprisingly plain tomb.

The stage area (level two), topped by a glass geodesic dome (restored in 1998), was conceived as Dalí's Sistine Chapel. The large egg-head-breasts-rocks-trees backdrop was part of a ballet set, one of Dalí's ventures into the performing arts. If proof were needed of Dalí's acute sense of the absurd, **Gala Mirando el Mar Mediterráneo** (Gala Looking at the Mediterranean Sea) would be it. From

## DALLYING WITH DALÍ DELIRIUM

Dalí left his mark in several locations around Catalonia, particularly at his seaside residence in Port Lligat and inland 'castle', Castell de Púbol.

**Port Lligat**, a 1.25km walk north of Cadaqués, is a tiny fishing settlement on a quiet, enchanting bay. God knows what serious-minded fishermen thought of Dalí's seaside residence, antics and international jet-set pals. Dalí spent time (more than half his adult life) here, in what was originally a fisherman's hut, from 1930 until 1982. Dalí had not come by choice. His father had forbidden him to return to the family house in Cadaqués after Dalí presented what was for his father an intolerable painting in Paris. Across an image of the Sacred Heart, Dalí had written: *Parfois je crache par plaisir sur le portrait de ma mère* (Sometimes I spit for fun on my mother's picture). His father never forgave him this insult to his deceased wife. By Dalí's standards the myriad white chimney pots and two egg-shaped towers on the house he 'grew' out of the original cabin are rather understated. It is now a museum, **Casa-Museu Salvador Dalí** (☎ 972 25 10 15; www.salvador-dali.org; adult/student & senior €10/8; ☎ 10.30am–9pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10.30am–6pm Tue–Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jan & mid-Mar–mid-Jun, closed mid-Jan–mid-Mar, bookings essential).

The **Castell de Púbol** (☎ 972 48 86 55; www.salvador-dali.org; Plaça de Gala Dalí; adult/student & senior €7/5; ☎ 10am–8pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–mid-Jun & mid-Sep–Oct, 10am–5pm Tue–Sat Nov–Dec), in the village of La Pera, just south of the C-66 road between Girona and Palafrugell, forms the southernmost point of the Dalí triangle. He bought the Gothic and Renaissance mansion – which includes a 14th-century church – in 1968 for his wife, Gala, who lived here without him (apparently lusting after local young lads to the end of her days) until her death at 88 in 1982. An inconsolable Dalí then moved in himself, but abandoned the place after a fire (which nearly burnt him to a crisp) in 1984 to live out his last years in Figueres. Dalí did the castle up in his own inimitable style, with lions' heads staring from the tops of cupboards, statues of elephants with giraffes' legs in the garden and a stuffed giraffe staring at Gala's tomb in the crypt.

the other end of the room, the work appears, with the help of coin-operated viewfinders, to be a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. One floor up (level three) is the Sala de Mae West, a living room where the components, viewed from the right spot, make up a portrait of Ms West: a sofa for her luscious, wet lips, twin fireplaces for nostrils, impressionist paintings of Paris for those come-to-bed eyes.

A separate section displays **Dalí Joies** (Dalí Jewels), the magnificent Owen Cheatham collection of 37 pieces of jewellery in gold and precious stones designed by Dalí. Dalí did the designs on paper (his first commission was in 1941) and the jewellery was made by specialists in New York. Each piece, ranging from the disconcerting *Ull del Temps* (Eye of Time) through to the *Cor Reial* (Royal Heart), is unique. They changed hands several times until the foundation that runs the museum acquired them in 2001 for a cool €5.5 million.

On La Rambla, the town's main boulevard about 100m south of the dazzling display of Dalían dizziness, lie what are, by comparison, two rather staid museums. The **Museu de l'Empordà** (☎ 972 50 23 05; www.museuemporta.org; La Rambla 2; adult/senior & child/student €2/free/1; ☎ 11am–7pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun & holidays) is a worthy institution that combines Greek, Roman and medieval archaeological finds with a sizable

collection of art, mainly by Catalan artists. Admission is free with a Teatre-Museu Dalí ticket. The **Museu del Joguet** (☎ 972 50 45 85; www.mjc.cat; Carrer de Sant Pere 1; admission €5; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat, 11am–6pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–6pm Tue–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun & holidays Oct–May) has more than 3500 Catalonia- and Valencia-made toys from the pre-Barbie 19th and early 20th centuries. One wonders to what children the GroUCHO Marx doll would have appealed.

The **Museu de la Tècnica de l'Empordà** (☎ 972 50 88 20; www.mte.cat; Carrer dels Fossos 12; adult/child under 10yr/senior & student €3/free/2; ☎ 10am–7pm Tue–Fri, 10am–1pm & 4–7pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun & holidays) is a treasure chest of old mechanical masterpieces, from typewriters and watches through to sewing machines, heaters and cash registers.

The sprawling 18th-century **Castell de Sant Ferran** (☎ 972 50 60 94; www.lesfortalesescatalanes.info, in Spanish, Catalan & French; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am–8pm Easter & Jul–mid-Sep, 10.30am–3pm mid-Sep–Jun), on a low hill 1km northwest of the centre, was built to withstand the most vicious of sieges but never got the chance to show its mettle. Built in 1750, it saw almost no action. Spain's Republican government held its final meeting of the civil war in the dungeons on 1 February 1939. The Castell is still partly owned by the military, who don't at all mind divisions of tourists manoeuvring around inside.

## TRANSPORT: FIGUERES

Distance from Barcelona 129km

Direction Northeast

Travel time 1½ to 2¼ hours

**Car** Take the AP-7 motorway via Granollers and Girona. From central Girona it should not take more than 30 minutes.

**Train** At least 17 trains daily from Barcelona Sants station via Girona (€8.55 to €9.80).

## INFORMATION

**Hospital** (☎ 972 67 50 89; Ronda del Rector Aroles s/n)

**Policia Nacional** (☎ 091; Carrer de Pep Ventura 8)

**Tourist office** (☎ 972 50 31 55; www.figueresciutat.com; Plaça del Sol; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep, 8am-3pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat Easter-Jun & Oct, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) Hours can be a trifle unpredictable.

## EATING

**Mesón Castell** (☎ 972 51 01 04; Pujada del Castell 4; meals €35-40; ☎ Mon-Sat) A bustling, rustic eatery where you can sample tapas at the bar or head to the sit-down restaurant for robust local cooking (including lamb and suckling pig).

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Rambla** (☎ 972 67 60 20; www.hotelrambla.net; La Rambla 33; s/d €56/70; ☎ ☎ ☎) Right in the heart of the city with comfortable, modern rooms behind a 19th-century façade. Larger doubles cost a little more (€80).

## MONTSERRAT

Shimmering bizarrely in the distance as you drive the C-16 toll road between Terrassa and Manresa is the emblematic mountain range of Catalonia, Montserrat (Serrated Mountain). So dear is it to Catalan hearts that it has long been a popular first name for girls (generally Montse for short). Lying 50km northwest of Barcelona, the serried ranks of wind- and rain-whipped rock pillars (reaching a height of 1236m) were formed from a conglomeration of limestone, pebbles and sand that once lay beneath the sea. With the historic Benedictine monastery, one of Catalonia's most important shrines, perched at 725m on the mountain range's flank, it makes a great outing.

From the range, on a clear day, you can see as far as the Pyrenees, Barcelona's Tibidabo hill and even, if you're lucky, Mallorca.

A rack-and-pinion railway or your own wheels can be used to ascend the mountain as far as the monastery. From here, the main road curves (past a snack bar, cafeteria, information office and the Espai Audiovisual) round and up to the right, passing the blocks of the Cel·les Abat Marcel, to enter Plaça de Santa Maria at the centre of the monastery complex.

The **Monestir de Montserrat** (☎ 93 877 77 01; www.abadiamontserrat.net; ☎ 9am-6pm) was founded in 1025 to commemorate a vision of the Virgin on the mountain. Wrecked by Napoleon's troops in 1811, then abandoned as a result of anticlerical legislation in the 1830s, it was rebuilt from 1858. Today a community of about 80 monks lives here. Pilgrims come from far and wide to venerate **La Moreneta** (Black Madonna), a 12th-century Romanesque wooden sculpture of Mary with the infant Jesus that has been Catalonia's official patron since 1881. A bit like children refusing to believe claims that Santa Claus does not exist, Catalans chose to ignore the discovery in 2002 that their Madonna is not black at all, just deeply tanned by centuries of candle smoke.

The two-part **Museu de Montserrat** (☎ 93 877 77 77; Plaça de Santa Maria; adult/student €6.50/5.50; ☎ 10am-6pm) has a collection ranging from ancient artefacts, including an Egyptian mummy (the collection of Egyptian artefacts counts more than 1000 items), to occasional works by Caravaggio, Monet, Degas, Picasso and others (including an ample parade of Catalan painters). The **Espai Audiovisual** (adult/senior & student €2/1.50, with Museu de Montserrat free; ☎ 9am-6pm) is a walk-through multimedia space that illustrates the monks' daily life.

From Plaça de Santa Maria you enter the courtyard of the 16th-century **basilica** (admission incl La Moreneta €5; ☎ 9am-8.15pm Jul-Sep, earlier closing rest of yr). The façade, with its carvings of Christ and the 12 Apostles, dates from 1901, despite its 16th-century Plateresque style. For La Moreneta, follow the signs to the **Cambri de la Mare de Déu** (La Moreneta; ☎ 8-10.30am & 12.15-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8-10.30am, 12.15-6.30pm & 7.30-8.15pm Sun & holidays), to the right of the basilica's main entrance.

The **Escolania** (www.escolania.net; admission free; ☎ performances 1pm & 6.45pm Mon-Fri, 11am & 6.45pm Sun), reckoned to be Europe's oldest music

## TRANSPORT: MONTSERRAT

Distance from Barcelona 46km

Direction Northwest

Travel time One hour

**Bus** A daily bus (€43) from Barcelona with **Julià Tours** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 93 317 64 54; Ronda de l'Universitat 5, Barcelona) leaves for the monastery at 9.30am (returning at 3pm). The price includes travel, all entry prices, use of funiculars at Montserrat and a meal at the self-service restaurant.

**Car** Take the C-16. Shortly after Terrassa, follow the exit signs to Montserrat, which will put you on the C-58. Follow it northwest to the C-55. Head 2km south on this road to the municipality of Monistrol de Montserrat, from where a road snakes 7km up the mountain.

**Train** The R5 line trains operated by **FGC** (☎ 93 205 15 15) run from Plaça d'Espanya station in Barcelona to Monistrol de Montserrat up to 18 times daily starting at 5.24am. They connect with the rack-and-pinion train, or **cremallera** (☎ 902 31 20 20; www.cremalleraemontserrat.com), which takes 17 minutes to make the upwards journey and costs €4.10/6.50 one way/return. One way/return from Barcelona to Montserrat with the FGC train and **cremallera** costs €8.70/15.70. For various all-in ticket options, check out the above website or www.fgc.net.

school, has a boys' choir, the **Montserrat Boys' Choir**, which sings in the basilica once a day, Sunday to Friday, except in July and August. See the latest performance times (which can change) on the web page. It is a rare (if brief) treat as the choir does not often perform outside Montserrat. The choir has sung hymns since the 13th century. The 40 to 50 **escolanets**, aged between 10 and 14, go to boarding school at Montserrat and must endure a two-year selection process to join the choir.

To see where the holy image of the Virgin was discovered, take the **Funicular de Santa Cova** (one way/return €1.70/2.70; ☎ every 20min 10am-5.35pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4.25pm Nov-Mar) down from the main area. You can explore the mountain above the monastery by a network of paths leading to some of the peaks and to 13 empty and rather dilapidated little chapels. The **Funicular de Sant Joan** (one way/return €4.15/6.60; ☎ every 20min 10am-5.40pm Apr-Oct, 10am-7pm mid-Jul-Aug, 11am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) will carry you from the monastery 250m up the mountain in seven minutes. Children pay about half price on the funiculars. If you prefer to walk, the road leading past the funicular's bottom station winds 3km up the mountain and around to the top station.

From the Sant Joan top station, it's a 20-minute stroll (signposted) to the **Sant Joan chapel**. Enjoy the views as you look west from the trail. More exciting is the hour's walk northwest along a path marked with occasional blobs of yellow paint to Montserrat's highest peak, **Sant Jeroni** (1236m), from which there's an awesome sheer drop on the north-eastern side.

If you want to stay overnight, check the monastery website for the limited options. You'll also find a couple of self-service restaurants and snack bars.

## COSTA BRAVA

The rugged Costa Brava stretches from bland Blanes (about 60km northeast of Barcelona) to the French border. At its best it is magnificent. At its worst it fully lives up to its reputation as a beach-holiday inferno. Lloret de Mar and parts of the Golf de Roses are the worst offenders, where you can almost hear all that northern European flesh sizzling on the beaches in between lager top-ups. Don't run away! The bulk of the coast is one of nature's grand spectacles, with rugged cliffs plunging into crystalline water, interrupted at improbable points by ribbons of golden sand, tiny hidden coves and shady pine stands. Some towns have managed to retain great charm, and one of the most ancient sites of settlement in Spain, Empúries, is here.

Driving is the easiest way to explore the coast. What follows is a taster. To reach all these spots you need to reckon on at least one overnight stay. In July and August finding lodgings without a reservation can be problematic.

Leaving the strobe-light silliness of Lloret de Mar behind, the road slices back inland into the coastal hills before setting you down in **Tossa de Mar**. A small white town backing onto a curved bay that ends in a headland protected by medieval walls and towers, Tossa is an enticing location. Artist Marc Chagall called it his Blue Paradise. The place has sprawled

since Chagall stopped by in the 1930s, but Tossa has retained some of the integrity of a beachside village.

The walls and towers on the headland, **Mont Guardí**, at the southern end of the main beach, were built in the 12th to 14th centuries. The area they girdle is known as the **Vila Vella** (Old Town). Wandering around Mont Guardí you come across ruins of a castle and a lighthouse (with restaurant and bar attached); the sunsets here are superb. **Vila Nova** (New Town), a tangle of 18th-century lanes, stretches away from the old nucleus and makes for a pleasant stroll. The main beach, **Platja Gran**, tends to be busy. Further north along the same bay are some quieter, smaller beaches.

The 21km drive from Tossa to **Sant Feliu de Guíxols** is a treat, the most breathtaking driving stretch of the coast. From here the coast road continues through the not unpleasant Spanish resort of **Platja d'Aro**, on through the more offensive **Palamós** and inland to **Palafrugell**, a local transport hub that funnels you into another prime stretch of the Costa Brava. Again, uncompromising rock walls are interspersed with coves and hideaways. Among the places you can fan out to are **Calella de Palafrugell**, **Llafranc**, **Tamaríu**, **Aigua Blava** and **Fornelles de Mar**. A coastal walking path links the first three.

Jagged cliffs and pine stands give way to a long stretch of beach beyond Sa Punta to **L'Estarit**, the diving centre of the coast fronted by the marine reserve of the **Illes Medes**. From here roads redirect you inland to **L'Escala**, a low-key resort town on the southern tip of the **Golf de Roses** bay, and the nearby ruins of **Empúries** (☎ 972 77 02 08; <http://ftp.mac.es/empuries>; adult/senior & child/student €3/free/2.50; 🕒 10am-8pm

Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-May). Founded around 600 BC, it was probably the first, and certainly one of the most important, Greek colonies in Iberia. It came to be called **Emporion** (literally 'market'). In 218 BC, Roman legions landed here to cut off Hannibal's supply lines during the Second Punic War. By the early 1st century AD, the Roman and Greek settlements had merged. **Emporiae**, as the place was then known, was abandoned in the late 3rd century after raids by Germanic tribes.

A small **museum** separates the Greek town from the larger Roman town on the upper part of the site. While the **Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya** (p146) in Barcelona has a bigger and better **Empúries** collection, highlights of the larger Roman town include the mosaic floors of a 1st century BC house, the forum and walls. Outside the walls are the remains of an oval amphitheatre.

A string of brown-sand beaches stretches north from the ruins and leads to the cheerful 15th-century hamlet of **Sant Martí d'Empúries**. On **Plaça Major** four restaurant-bars compete for your business.

Next, head for the windswept **Parc Natural del Cap de Creus**. As well as boasting Spain's most easterly point (Cap de Creus), the area bursts with hiking possibilities, coves and the eternally attractive seaside town of **Cadaqués**, a strange mix of whitewashed fishing village and minor hedonists' hang-out. The area was the stomping ground of Dalí and a host of other jet-set figures through the 1960s and 1970s. Today it is ideal for strolling, lazing around on nearby beaches and, in the evening, eating and drinking. It can get quite lively on weekends. Nearby is **Port Lligat** (see Dallying with Dalí **Delirium**, p251).

## TRANSPORT: COSTA BRAVA

**Distance from Barcelona** Tossa de Mar 77km; Palafrugell 125km; Empúries 153km; Cadaqués 164km (or 199km via Empúries)

**Direction** Northeast

**Travel time** 1½ to 2¼ hours

**Car** Take the AP-7 motorway from Barcelona and peel off at exit 9 for Tossa de Mar, exit 6 for Palafrugell and around, exit 5 for L'Escala and Empúries and exit 4 for Cadaqués (via Roses). You can also follow the coast for parts of the trip. From Barcelona take the C-32 to Blanes and then (often congested) single-carriage roads to Tossa de Mar via Lloret de Mar. The single-carriageway A-2 coast road is slower still. From Tossa it is possible to follow the coast (the initial 21km stretch to Sant Feliu de Guíxols is breathtaking) to Palafrugell and beyond.

**Bus** The company **SARFA** (☎ 902 302025; [www.sarfa.com](http://www.sarfa.com)) runs buses from Barcelona's Estació del Nord to Tossa de Mar (€9.85, 1½ hours, seven to 18 times daily) and to Palafrugell (€15.05, two hours, seven to 13 times daily). Local buses connect to Calella, Llafranc and Tamaríu. Up to four buses a day run from Barcelona to L'Escala and Empúries via Palafrugell (€17.65, 1½ hours). For Cadaqués, buses to/from Barcelona (€19.90, 2¼ hours) operate from two to five times daily.

## COOKING UP A THREE-STAR STORM

Once a simple bar and grill clutching on to a rocky perch high above the bare Mediterranean beach of **Cala Montjoi** and accessible only by dirt track from **Roses**, 6km to the west, **El Bulli** (☎ 972 15 04 57; [www.elbulli.com](http://www.elbulli.com); **Cala Montjoi**; meals €200+; 🕒 Apr-Sep; 📍) is now one of the world's most sought-after dining experiences (usually fully booked a year in advance), thanks to star chef **Ferran Adrià** (see p177). While easily Catalonia's internationally best-known dining experience, it has two stablemates as three-star Michelin eateries (in all Spain there are only six; the other three are in the Basque Country). **Can Fabes** (☎ 93 867 28 51; [www.canfabes.com](http://www.canfabes.com); **Carrer de Sant Joan 6**, **Sant Celoni**; meals €120-150; 🕒 Tue-Sat) has long attracted a steady stream of gastronomists from Barcelona (53km to the south). Chef **Santi Santamaria** (the first Catalan chef ever to be awarded three Michelin stars) is a local boy who started up here in 1981. Dishes based on local products (seafood landed at **Blanes**, for example) are at the core of his cooking, which, while loaded with creative touches, makes no attempt to reach **Adrià's** kooky levels. Some people like the food so much they stay in **Santamaria's** design digs on the same property. Barely 25km east, on the coast at **Sant Pol de Mar**, is another foodie's fave. **Sant Pau** (☎ 93 760 06 62; **Carrer Nou 10**; meals €120-150; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Wed & Fri-Sat, dinner only Thu, closed most of May & Nov) is a beautifully presented mansion whose garden overlooks the Mediterranean. Observe the cooks at work on local seafood and farm products downstairs before heading upstairs to dine. **Carme Ruscalleda** is the driving force. Some 20 other restaurants scattered around Catalonia have a Michelin star (and just one has two), in addition to 14 in Barcelona, so the French clearly find the region fruitful territory for the discerning palate!

## INFORMATION

**Cadaqués tourist office** (☎ 972 25 83 15; [www.cadaques.org](http://www.cadaques.org), in Catalan; **Carrer del Cotxe 2**; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Easter-Sep, 9.30am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-Easter) Opening hours are unpredictable.

**Tossa tourist office** (☎ 972 34 01 08; [www.infotossa.com](http://www.infotossa.com); **Avinguda del Pelegrí 25**; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr, May & Oct, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar)

## EATING

**Casa Nun** (☎ 972 25 88 56; **Plaça del Port Ditxos 6**, **Cadaqués**; meals €30; 🕒 lunch & dinner Fri-Mon, dinner only Thu) Head for the cute upstairs dining area (snag a window seat) or take one of the few tables outside overlooking the port. Catch of the day is always a good bet.

**Casamar** (☎ 972 30 01 04; **Carrer de Nero 3**, **Llafranc**; meals €30; 🕒 Wed-Mon mid-Mar-mid-Jan) All sorts of marvels pour out of the hotel's restaurant kitchen, from peach ravioli to succulent lamb ribs.

**La Cuina de Can Simon** (☎ 972 34 12 69; **Carrer del Portal 24**, **Tossa de Mar**; meals €45-50; 🕒 Wed-Sat, lunch Sun; 📍) Tossa's culinary (Michelin) star is housed in the former stone dwelling of a fisherman. This place serves up an imaginative array of creative local and Mediterranean cuisine, such as black rice with artichokes and shrimp dumplings.

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Diana** (☎ 972 34 18 86; [www.diana-hotel.com](http://www.diana-hotel.com); **Plaça d'Espanya 6**, **Tossa de Mar**; s/d €66/102, d with sea view €126; 📍) A small-scale, older hotel fronting **Platja Gran** with 21 simple but light rooms, a Gaudi-built fireplace in the lounge, Modernist décor and stained glass in the central covered courtyard. Prices shoot higher still in August.

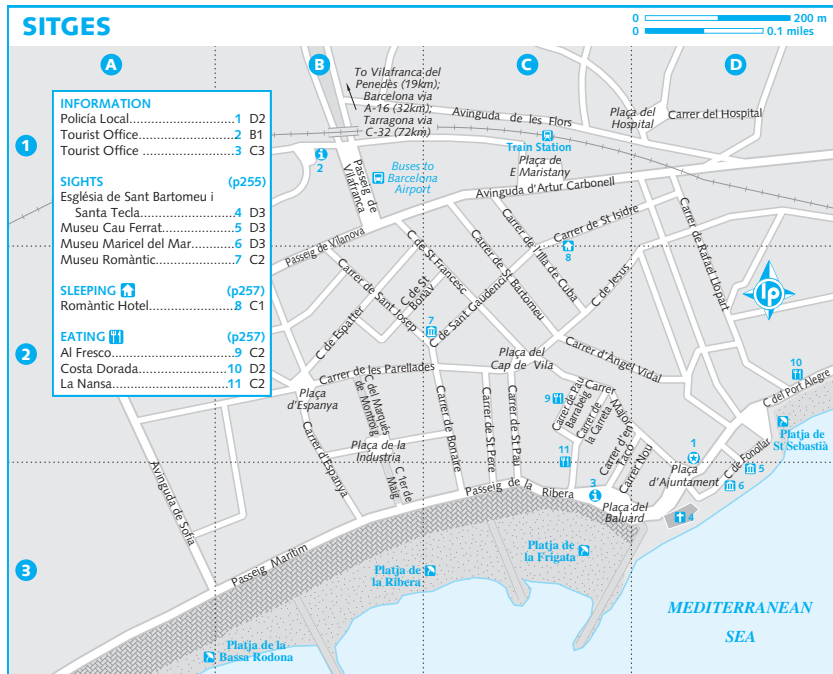
**Hotel La Residència** (☎ 972 25 83 12; [www.laresidencia.net](http://www.laresidencia.net); **Avinguda de la Caritat Serinyana 1**, **Cadaqués**; s/d €70/95; 📍) Right in the heart of the town, with a dozen rooms ranging from simple doubles to extravagantly decorated suites.

## SITGES

Jet-setters, honeymooners and international gay partygoers descend on this once-quiet fishing village from spring to autumn. Just 32km (a half-hour by train) southwest of Barcelona, **Sitges** boasts a long sandy beach, groovy boutiques for fashionistas, a handful of interesting sights and nightlife that thumps from dusk 'til dawn. In winter, **Sitges** can be dreary, but it wakes up with a vengeance for **Carnaval** (see p17) in February, when the gay crowd puts on an outrageous show.

**Sitges** has been fashionable in one way or another since the 1890s, when it became an avant-garde art-world hang-out. It has been one of Spain's most unconventional, anything-goes resorts since the 1960s.

The main landmark is the **Església de Sant Bartomeu i Santa Tecla** parish church, atop a rocky



## TRANSPORT: SITGES

**Distance from Barcelona** 32km

**Direction** Southwest

**Travel time** 30 minutes

**Car** The best road from Barcelona is the C-32 toll road. More scenic is the C-31, which hooks up with the C-32 after Castelldefels, but it is often busy and slow.

**Train** Four *rodalies* trains an hour, from about 6am to 10pm, run from Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia and Estació Sants to Sitges (€2.60, 38 to 46 minutes from Passeig de Gràcia depending on intermediate stops).

elevation that separates the 2km-long main beach to the southwest from the smaller, quieter Platja de Sant Sebastià to the northeast.

Three **museums** (adult/child/student €3.50/free/1.50; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Oct-Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep), which offer a combined ticket (adult/child/student €6.40/free/3.50), serve as a timid counterweight to the hedonism. The **Museu Cau Ferrat** (☎ 93 894 03 64; Carrer de Fonollar s/n) was built in the 1890s as a house-cum-studio by artist Santiago Rusiñol. The house is full of his own art and that of his contemporaries. The interior, with its exquisitely tiled walls

and lofty arches, is enchanting. Next door is the **Museu Maricel del Mar** (☎ 93 894 03 64; Carrer de Fonollar s/n), with art and handicrafts from the Middle Ages to the 20th century.

The **Museu Romàntic** (☎ 93 894 29 69; Carrer de Sant Gaudenci 1), housed in a late-18th-century mansion, re-creates with its furnishings and dioramas the lifestyle of a 19th-century Catalan landowning family. It also has a collection of several hundred antique dolls – and some of them are mighty ugly! Many of Sitges' grand old residences were built in the 19th century by locals who had made good (often in dubious businesses such as cotton-raising using slave labour) in South America and were commonly dubbed *Americanos* or *Indians*.

At night, head down to the 'Calle del Pecado' (Sin St), actually Carrer de Marqués de Montroig, and its extension, Carrer del 1er de Maig for wall-to-wall bars that will kick your Sitges nocturnal life off with decibels.

## INFORMATION

**Policia Local** (☎ 704 101092; Plaça d'Ajuntament)

**Tourist office** (☎ 93 810 93 40; www.sitgestur.com; Carrer de Sinya Morera 1; ☎ 9am-8pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Jun)

**Tourist office** (☎ 93 811 06 11; Passeig de la Ribera s/n; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm daily mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm Sun-Thu mid-Sep–mid-Jun) A branch office.

## EATING

**Al Fresco** (☎ 93 894 06 00; Carrer de Pau Barrabeig 4; meals €25-30; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun mid-Jan–mid-Dec; ☎) Hidden along a narrow stairway that masquerades as a street, it serves light curries and other surprises. There's also a tasting menu (€29) on Wednesday nights.

**Costa Dorada** (☎ 93 894 35 43; Carrer del Port Alegre 27; meals €30; ☎ Fri-Tue, lunch Wed Jan-Nov) Old-world service in a 1970s atmosphere, perfect for seafood, paella and *fideuà* (which is similar to paella but uses vermicelli noodles as the base).

**La Nansa** (☎ 93 894 19 27; Carrer de la Carreta 24; meals €35; ☎ Thu-Mon, closed Jan) Cast just back from the town's waterfront and up a little lane in a fine old house is this seafood specialist. They do a great line in paella and other rice dishes.

## SLEEPING

**Romàntic Hotel** (☎ 93 894 83 75; www.hotelromantic.com, in Spanish & Catalan; Carrer de Sant Isidre 33; s/d €80/110, s/d with shared bathroom €68/95) Three adjoining 19th-century villas are sensuously restored in period style, and have a leafy dining courtyard. If there are no rooms available, ask about their other boutique hotel, Hotel La Renaixença.

## PENEDÈS WINE COUNTRY

Rivers of still white and bubbly, among Spain's best wines, spring forth from the area around the towns of Sant Sadurn d'Anoia and Vilafranca del Penedès. **Sant Sadurn d'Anoia**, a half-hour train ride west of Barcelona, is the capital of *cava*. **Vilafranca del Penedès**, 12km further down the track, is the heart of the Penedès DO region (*denominación de origen*, see p194), which produces light, still whites. Some good reds and rosés also gurgle forth here.

A hundred or so wineries around Sant Sadurn produce 140 million bottles of *cava* a year – something like 85% of the national output. *Cava* is made by the same method

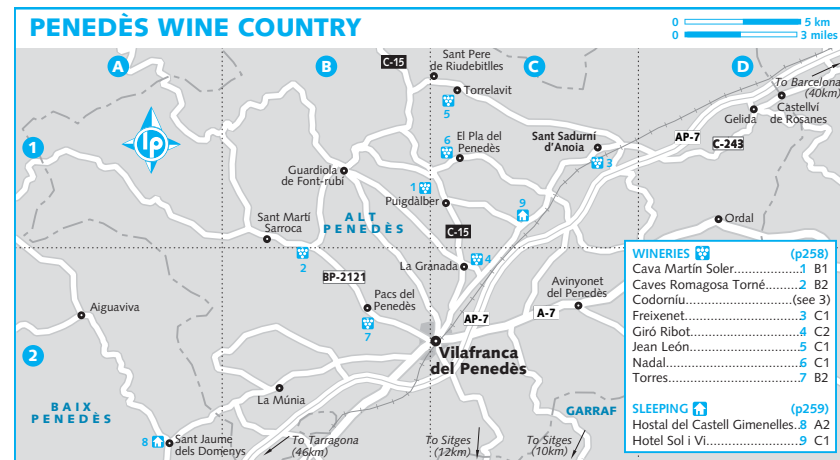
## TRANSPORT: PENEDÈS WINE COUNTRY

**Distance from Barcelona** Vilafranca del Penedès 48km

**Direction** West

**Travel time** 30 to 45 minutes

**Car** Head west along Avinguda Diagonal and follow the signs for the AP-7 motorway, then take either the Sant Sadurn d'Anoia or Vilafranca del Penedès exits. **Train** Up to three *rodalies* trains an hour run from Plaça de Catalunya and Estació Sants in Barcelona to Sant Sadurn d'Anoia (€2.60, 45 minutes from Plaça de Catalunya) and Vilafranca (€3.20, 55 minutes from Plaça de Catalunya).





## IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT TIPPLE

To do a tour of the Penedès area you will need your own transport. For suggestions on wine routes, also look up [www.enoturismaltpenedes.net](http://www.enoturismaltpenedes.net). Do not expect to wander into any old winery. Many only open their doors to the public at limited times. The more enthusiastic ones will show you how wines and/or *cava* (the Catalan version of champagne) are made and finish off with a glass or two. Tours generally last about 1½ hours and may only be in Catalan and/or Spanish. Groups must book. You can search [www.dopenedes.es](http://www.dopenedes.es) for wineries and this list should get you started:

**Cava Martin Soler** (Map p257; ☎ 93 898 82 20; [www.cavamartinsoler.com](http://www.cavamartinsoler.com); Puigdalber; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Located 8km north of Vilafranca in a 17th-century farmhouse surrounded by vineyards, this winery only makes *cava*.

**Caves Romagosa Torné** (Map p257; ☎ 93 899 13 53; [www.romagosatorne.com](http://www.romagosatorne.com); ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) This winery at Finca La Serra is on the road to Sant Martí Sarroca. *Cava* is, again, the star. Head on for a look at nearby Sant Martí Sarroca.

**Codorníu** (Map p257; ☎ 93 891 33 42; [www.codorniu.es](http://www.codorniu.es); Avinguda de Jaume Codorníu s/n, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, Sun & holidays) The Codorníu headquarters is in a Modernista building at the entry to Sant Sadurní d'Anoia by road from Barcelona. One of the biggest names in *cava*, it made its first bottle in 1872.

**Freixenet** (Map p257; ☎ 93 891 70 00; [www.freixenet.es/web/eng](http://www.freixenet.es/web/eng); Carrer de Joan Sala 2, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia; ☎ 1½hr tours 10am-1pm & 3-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 10am-1pm Fri-Sun) Easily the best-known *cava* company internationally, Freixenet owns myriad wine producers in and beyond Catalonia.

**Giró Ribot** (Map p257; ☎ 93 897 40 50; [www.giroribot.es](http://www.giroribot.es); Finca el Pont s/n, Santa Fe del Penedès; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) The magnificent winemaker's farm buildings ooze centuries of tradition. These vintners use mostly local grape varieties to produce a limited range of fine *cava* and wines (including muscat). The times given are for the shop. To visit the cellars, call ahead.

**Jean León** (Map p257; ☎ 93 899 55 12; [www.jeanleon.com](http://www.jeanleon.com); Carrer del Comerç 22, Torrelavit; tours per person €6; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun) Born in Santander as Ceferino Carrión in 1928, Jean León uses cabernet sauvignon and other grape types imported from prestigious vineyards in France to create a unique name in wines. Visits must be booked in advance.

**Nadal** (Map p257; ☎ 93 898 80 11; [www.nadal.com](http://www.nadal.com); El Pla del Penedès; tour per person €3; ☎ tours 11.30am, 3.30pm & 5.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am Sat, 10.30am & noon Sun & holidays) Nadal is just outside the hamlet of El Pla del Penedès. The centrepiece is a fine *masia* (Catalan country farmhouse) where you can join organised visits.

**Torres** (Map p257; ☎ 93 817 74 87; [www.torres.es](http://www.torres.es); tours per person €5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun & holidays) About 3km northwest of Vilafranca on the BP-2121 near Pacs del Penedès, this is the area's premier winery. The Torres family tradition dates from the 17th century, but the family company, in its present form, was founded in 1870. Torres produces an array of reds and whites of all qualities, using many grape varieties, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and more locally specific ones such as Parellada, Garnacha and Tempranillo.

as French champagne (of course, the French harrumph at such observations) and is gaining ground in international markets. If you happen to be in town during October, you may catch the Mostra de Caves i Gastronomia, a *cava*- and food-tasting festi.

The epicentre of the Penedès wine-producing district is the large yet somewhat straggly Vilafranca del Penedès. Spreading itself around the pleasant old town centre is a less captivating and sprawling new town that seems as though it's been under repair for years.

The mainly Gothic **Basilica de Santa Maria** stands at the heart of the old town. Construction began in 1285, and since then, it has been much restored. It is possible to arrange visits of the bell tower in summer at around sunset. Ask at the tourist office.

The basilica faces the **Vinseum** (☎ 93 890 05 82; Plaça de Jaume I, Vilafranca; adult/child under 12yr/child 12-17yr €5/free/3; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) across Plaça de Jaume I. Housed in a Gothic building, a combination of museums here cover archaeology, art, geology and bird life, along with an excellent section on wine.

## INFORMATION

**Tourist office** (☎ 93 818 12 54; [www.turismevilafranca.com](http://www.turismevilafranca.com); Carrer de la Fruita 13, Vilafranca; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 4-7pm Sun) A good source of information on wineries.

## EATING

**Cal Ton** (☎ 93 890 37 41; Carrer Casal 8, Vilafranca; meals €35-40; ☎ Wed-Sat, lunch only Sun & Tue) Hidden away down a narrow side street, Cal Ton has a crisp, modern décor and inventive Mediterranean chow.

**Fonda Neus** (☎ 93 891 03 65; Carrer de Marc Mir 14-16, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia; meal €25; ☎ Mon-Fri, lunch Sun) This classic Catalan eatery has been given an overhaul but retains a rustic flavour. Meats prepared in *cava* predominate. It has a few basic rooms too (singles/doubles €55/85).

## SLEEPING

**Hostal del Castell Gimanelles** (☎ 977 67 81 93; [www.gimanelles.com](http://www.gimanelles.com); Sant Jaume dels Domenys; r €77-130; ☎) Seven rooms with antique furniture arranged in a typical Penedès farmhouse and surrounded by vineyards, just west of the town of Sant Jaume dels Domenys.

**Hotel Sol i Vi** (☎ 93 899 32 04; [www.solivi.com](http://www.solivi.com); s/d €61/81; ☎) Occupying a renovated *masia* (Catalan country farmhouse) in Subirats, 4km south of Sant Sadurní on the C-243a road to Vilafranca, Hotel Sol i Vi has spacious rooms, a restaurant and country views.

## TARRAGONA

A hustling port city, Tarragona was once Catalonia's leading light. Roman and



## DETOUR: THE MONASTERIES ROUTE

The verdant oasis of La Conca de Barberà lies 30km west of Vilafranca del Penedès. Vineyards and woods succeed one another across rolling green hills (largely hidden from the ribbon of motorway that cuts through them), studded with the occasional medieval village and a trio of grand Cistercian monasteries (a combined ticket to all three is available for €7). With your own vehicle, it is possible to extend a Penedès wineries excursion to some of these magnificent sights. For information on the area around the monasteries, check out the Ruta del Cister (Cistercian Route) website ([www.larutadelcister.info](http://www.larutadelcister.info)).

Following the AP-7 motorway southwest from Vilafranca, take the AP-2 fork about 18km west, then take exit 11 north for the medieval **Reial Monestir de Santes Creus** (Royal Monastery of the Holy Crosses; ☎ 977 63 83 29; Plaça de Jaume el Just s/n; adult/child €3.60/2.40, Tue free; 🕒 10am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar–mid-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jan, 10am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Jan–mid-Mar). Cistercian monks moved in here in 1168 and from then on the monastery developed as a major centre of learning and a launch pad for the repopulation of the surrounding territory. Behind the Romanesque and Gothic façade lies a glorious 14th-century sandstone cloister, chapter house and royal apartments where the *comtes-reis* (count-kings; rulers of the joint state of Catalonia and Aragón) often stayed when they popped by during Holy Week. The church, begun in the 12th century, is a lofty Gothic structure in the French tradition.

Back on the AP-2, travel another 22km to the medieval town of Montblanc, still surrounded by its defensive walls, and then L'Espuga de Francolí, beyond which you continue 3km to the fortified **Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet** (Royal Monastery of Santa Maria in Poblet; ☎ 977 87 00 89; adult/student €4.20/2.40; 🕒 10am-12.45pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun & holidays mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 10am-12.45pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun & holidays mid-Oct–mid-Mar), the jewel in the crown of the Conca de Barberà and a Unesco World Heritage site. Founded by Cistercian monks from southern France in 1151, it became Catalonia's most powerful monastery (it is said to be the largest Cistercian monastery in the world) and the burial place of many of its rulers. A community of Cistercian monks moved back in after the Spanish Civil War and did much to restore the monastery to its former glory after decades of ruin. High points include the mostly Gothic main cloister and the alabaster sculptural treasures of the Panteón de los Reyes (Kings' Pantheon). The raised alabaster sarcophagi contain such greats as Jaume I (the conqueror of Mallorca and Valencia) and Pere III.

Swinging away north from Montblanc (take the C-14 and then branch west along the LP-2335), country roads guide you up through tough countryside into the low hills of the Serra del Tallat and towards yet another Cistercian complex, the **Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Vallbona de les Monges** (Royal Monastery of St Mary of Vallbona of the Nuns; ☎ 973 33 02 66; adult/child €2.50/2; 🕒 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.45pm Tue-Sat, noon-1.30pm & 4.30-6.45pm Sun & holidays Mar-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-6pm Tue-Sat, noon-1.30pm & 4.30-6pm Sun & holidays Nov-Feb). It was founded in the 12th century and is where around 20 nuns still live and pray. You will be taken on a guided tour, probably in Catalan, in which it will become clear that it has even today not yet fully recovered from civil war damage.

medieval vestiges testify to its two greatest epochs. The Romans established the city as Tarraco in the 2nd century BC, and in 27 BC Augustus elevated it to the capital of his new Tarraconensis province (stretching from Catalonia to Cantabria in the northwest and to Almería in the southeast). Abandoned when the Muslims arrived in AD 714, it was reborn as a Christian archbishopric in 1089.

The superb **Catedral** (☎ 97 723 86 85; Pla de la Seu; admission €3.50; 🕒 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar–May, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jun–mid-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct–mid-Nov, 10am-2pm Mon-Sat mid-Nov–mid-Mar) was built between 1171 and 1331 on the site of a Roman temple (probably dedicated to Caesar Augustus), combining Romanesque and Gothic features, as typified by the main façade on Pla de la Seu. The same combi-

nation continues inside in the grand cloister, with Gothic vaulting and Romanesque carved capitals. One of the latter depicts rats conducting what they imagine to be a cat's funeral, until the cat comes back to life! The rooms off the cloister house the **Museu Diocesà**, with an extensive collection ranging from Roman hairpins to some lovely 12th- to 14th-century polychrome woodcarvings of a breastfeeding Virgin. The interior of the cathedral, which is over 100m long, is Romanesque at the northeast end and Gothic at the southwest (a result of the prolonged construction period). The aisles are lined with 14th- to 19th-century chapels and hung with 16th- and 17th-century tapestries from Brussels. As a mark of reverence for St Thecla, Tarragona's patron saint, her arm is kept as a permanent and rather gruesome souvenir

in the Capella de Santa Tecla on the southeast side. All sorts of tall tales abound about St Thecla, who was apparently so impressed by St Paul's preaching on virginity that she called off her impending wedding to follow his advice (and then him). Paul's teaching and her example were not always popular, and she escaped several attempts to have her put to death, and wound up living as a hermit.

The so-called **Museu d'Història de Tarragona** (MHT, History Museum; [www.museutgn.com](http://www.museutgn.com); adult/concession each attraction €2.45/1.25, ticket to all MHT elements €9.25/4.60; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Easter-Sep, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays Oct-Easter) is actually an ensemble of elements that includes four separate Roman sites (which together with Roman sites around the province constitute a Unesco World Heritage site) and a 14th-century noble mansion, the **Museu Casa Castellarnau**.

The **Castellarnau mansion** (☎ 977 24 22 20; Carrer dels Cavallers 14) is furnished in 19th-century fashion and sheds light on how the other half lived through the centuries. For the Roman stuff, start with the **Pretori i Circ Romans** (☎ 977 23 01 71; Plaça del Rei), which includes part of the vaults of the Roman circus, where chariots would thunder along in dangerous, and often deadly, races. The 300m-long circus stretched from here to beyond Plaça de la Font. Near the beach is the well-preserved **Amfiteatre Romà** (☎ 977 24 25 79; Plaça d'Arce Ochotorena), where gladiators hacked away at each other, or wild animals, to the death. In its arena are the remains of 6th- and 12th-century churches built to commemorate the martyrdom of the Christian bishop Fructuosus and two deacons, believed to have been burnt alive here in AD 259. There was certainly no lack of excitement in Roman Tarraco! East of Carrer de Lleida are remains of the **Fòrum Romà** (☎ 977 24 25 01; Carrer del Cardenal Cervantes), dominated by several imposing columns. The **Passeig Arqueològic** ([www.museutgn.com](http://www.museutgn.com)) is a peaceful walk around part of the perimeter of the old town between two lines of city walls; the inner ones are mainly Roman while the outer ones were put up by the British in the War of the Spanish Succession.

The **Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona** (☎ 977 23 62 09; [www.mnat.es](http://www.mnat.es); Plaça del Rei 5; adult/senior & child under 18yr/student €2.40/free/1.20; 🕒 9.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays Oct-May) gives further insight into Roman Tarraco, although

most explanatory material is in either Catalan or Spanish. Exhibits include part of the Roman city walls, frescoes, sculpture and pottery. A highlight is the large, almost complete **Mosaic de Peixos de la Pineda** (Fish Mosaic) which depicts local fish and sea creatures that many can only dream about in these times of overfishing. In the section on everyday arts you can admire ancient fertility aids including an outsized stone penis, symbol of the god Priapus.

The town beach, **Platja del Mirador**, is clean but crowded. **Platja Arrabassada**, 1km northeast across the headland, is better, and the aptly named **Platja Llarga** (Long Beach), beginning 2km further out, stretches for about 3km. Local buses 1 and 9 from the Balcó stop on Via Augusta go to Platja Arrabassada and Platja Llarga.

About 11.5km southwest of Tarragona is **Port Aventura**, a massive and popular Disney-style theme park.

## INFORMATION

**Guàrdia Urbana** (☎ 977 24 03 45; Av Prat de la Riba 37)

**Hospital Joan XXIII** (☎ 977 25 22 85; Carrer del Dr Mallafre Guasch 4)

**Tourist office** (☎ 977 25 07 95; [www.tarragonaturisme.es](http://www.tarragonaturisme.es); Carrer Major 39; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays year-round)

## EATING

**Quim Quima** (☎ 977 25 21 21; Carrer de les Coques 1bis; meals €35; 🕒 lunch only Tue-Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) This

## TRANSPORT TARRAGONA

**Distance from Barcelona** 96km

**Direction** Southwest

**Travel time** One to 1½ hours

**Car** Take the C-32 toll road along the coast via Castelldefels or the AP-7 (if following Avinguda Diagonal west out of town).

**Train** At least 38 regional and long-distance trains per day run to/from Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia via Sants. The cheapest fares (for Regional and Catalunya Express trains) cost €5.15 to €5.80 and the journey takes one to 1½ hours. Long-distance trains (such as Talgo, Arco and Euromed trains) are faster but more expensive – as much as €17.70 in tourist (standard) class.

rambling medieval mansion with a charming courtyard is a fine setting for anything from fondue to crepes.

**Aq** (☎ 977 21 59 54; Carrer de les Coques 7; meals €45-55; 🗓 Tue-Sat) This is a bubbly designer haunt with stark colour contrasts (black, lemon and cream linen), slick lines and intriguing plays on traditional cooking, such as *bacallà amb crema de pèsols i calçots* (cod with a cream of pea and spring onions).

## SLEEPING

**Hotel Lauria** (☎ 977 23 67 12; www.hlauria.es; Rambla Nova 20; s/d €46/64; 🚿 🚿) Pleasant enough rooms with parquet floors, with a good location and a modest pool and sun deck.

**Pensió Plaça de la Font** (☎ 977 24 61 34; www.hotelpdelafont.com; Plaça de la Font 26; s/d €55/70; 🚿) Reasonable pension with its own restaurant on a characterful, busy old town square.