

Aragón



North to south, the land of Aragón rings the changes, from the awesome snow-plastered mountains of the Pyrenees to the arid mesas of Teruel. Between these two Spanish extremes is a more modest, even at times, dull landscape; but pinned at the very heart of the region is the great bustling city of Zaragoza, while a host of smaller towns, stone-walled villages, historic monasteries and castles pepper the landscape. Each one has written its chapter or footnote in the dramatic history of Aragón, a region whose neighbours are France, Navarra, Catalonia, Valencia and the Castilian heartland; all, at one time or another, enemies at the gate.

Today, you take your pick of Aragón's many gifts. The great mountains of the north cater for skiers and mountaineers while their foothills are a walkers' paradise of canyons, pretty villages, lonely castles and venerable monasteries with some outstanding Romanesque architecture.

For an urban fix, the region's main city, Zaragoza, bursts at the seams with sound and fury and may leave even the most streetwise reeling; but the city is big-hearted and hides an astonishing array of Roman ruins beneath its sombre monumental buildings and churches.

Central Aragón consists mainly of treeless depressions and forlorn plateaus. Further south, you reach other, thinly populated mountain regions, sprinkled with picturesque, mysterious villages. The towers of Teruel, the south's biggest town, are among the masterpieces of Spanish Mudéjar architecture.

HIGHLIGHTS

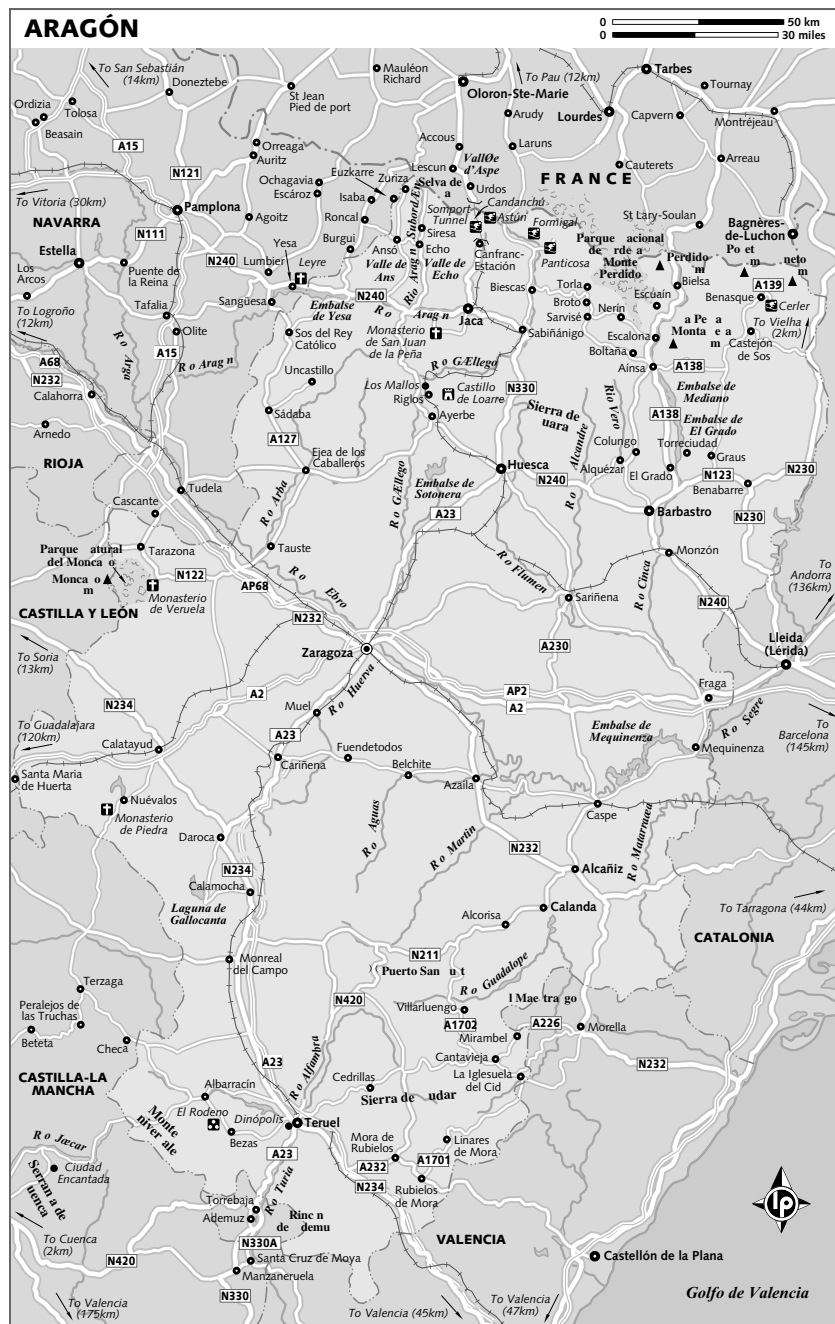
- Hit **Zaragoza's** (p415) buzzing streets and bars, with energy
- Veer off the beaten highway to fabulous old towns such as **Alquézar** (p428), **Daroca** (p442) and **Albarracín** (p445)
- Savour the wafer-thin perfection of the best **Teruel** (p443) *jamón* (ham)
- Go quietly through the beautiful Pyrenean valleys of **Echo** and **Ansó** (p440)
- Meditate on the glories of the Romanesque monastery of **San Juan de la Peña** (p439)
- Walk on the wild side in the **Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido** (p433) in the Pyrenees



■ AREA: 47, 720 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 31°C,
LOW 17°C

■ POP: 1.23 MILLION



ZARAGOZA

pop 597,472 / elevation 200m

Zaragoza (Saragossa) rocks and rolls – and that’s just the traffic. The feisty citizens of this great city on the banks of the mighty Río Ebro can rock with the best of them as well. They make up over half of Aragón’s population, the result of the most intense rural-urban drift of Spain’s past 200 years of often agonising modernisation. The result is a city bursting at the seams. Yet enshrined at the heart of the city’s encircling mass of functional modern buildings and traffic-bound streets is a more people-friendly Spanish *casco* (old town) crammed with historic buildings and with a colourful traditional identity. Intriguing archaeology, fine art and architecture, and dozens of lively bars, clubs and stylish restaurants rub shoulders happily here and with Expo 2008 looming, and ambitious building programmes planned, Zaragoza seems set for even more partying.

HISTORY

The Romans founded the colony of Caesaraugusta (from which ‘Zaragoza’ is derived) in 14 BC. As many as 25,000 people migrated to the prosperous Roman city whose river traffic brought the known world to the inland banks of Río Ebro. In Muslim times Zaragoza was capital of the Upper March, one of Al-Andalus’ frontier territories. In 1118 it fell to Alfonso I ‘El Batallador’ (Battler), ruler of the expanding Christian kingdom of Aragón, and immediately became its capital.

Centuries later Zaragoza put up unusually stiff resistance to the Napoleonic siege, although it capitulated in 1809. Industrial growth late in the 19th century made it a centre of militant trade unionism, but in 1936, when the civil war began, the Republicans had no time to organise and Zaragoza quickly fell under Nationalist control. The country’s main military academy was established here under General Franco in 1928 (still in use, it’s north of town). Zaragoza’s more recent story has been one of sometimes uncontrolled development and modernisation.

ORIENTATION

The core of old Zaragoza, with the bulk of the city’s historic monuments and many of its hotels and restaurants, lies south of Río Ebro, its former walls marked by Avenida de César

Augusto to the west and El Coso to the south. From the riverbanks, the vast Plaza del Pilar, dominated by Zaragoza’s great churches, gives way southwards to a labyrinth of lanes and alleys whose heart is known as El Tubo. The great ‘T-junction’ of the modern city is south of the old town where El Coso and the wide Paseo de la Independencia meet at Plaza de España. Busy lanes and streets with plenty of bars and eateries lie to either side of the Paseo.

The Estación Intermodal Delicias train station is about 2km west of the old centre.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librería General (☎ 976 22 44 83; Paseo de la Independencia 22) This well-stocked shop has an excellent selection of walking maps and guidebooks, as well as some English- and French-language novels.

Internet Access

Conecta-T (☎ 976 20 59 79; Murallas Romanas 4; per hr €1.60; ☎ 10am–11pm Mon–Fri, 11am–11pm Sat & Sun) A very well-organised facility with cheap international calls, mobile charge point and faxing.

Laundry

Hellespontika (☎ 976 49 55 54; Plaza Ariño 1; wash & dry per 3kg load €10; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat)

Medical Services

Hospital Clínico Universitario (☎ 976 35 75 01; Calle de San Juan Bosco 15)

Post

Main post office (Paseo de la Independencia 33; ☎ 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Zaragoza has two helpful central tourist offices, plus a branch in the Estación Intermodal Delicias.

Oficina de Turismo de Aragón (☎ 902 47 70 00; www.turismodeAragon.com; Avenida de César Augusto 25; ☎ 9am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun) Excellent information on the Aragón region.

Plaza del Pilar (☎ 976 39 35 37; www.turismozaragoza.com; ☎ 10am–8pm) Opposite the basilica in a futuristic black glass cube. This is the city information office.

Torreón de la Zuda (☎ 976 20 12 00; Glorieta de Pío XII; ☎ 10am–2pm & 4.30–8pm 7 Jan–Easter, 10am–8pm Easter–Dec) A subsidiary city information office in a 15th-century Mudéjar tower by the Roman walls. Climb the tower for panoramic views (free).

SIGHTS
Plaza del Pilar & Plaza de la Seo

In Zaragoza's old town, just south of Río Ebro, is Plaza del Pilar and its eastward continuation, Plaza de la Seo. Together, these two squares form a 500m open space and are flanked by important buildings and historic monuments.

BASÍLICA DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DEL PILAR

Brace yourself for the saintly and the sombre in this great baroque cavern of Catholicism. It was here on 2 January AD 40, that Santiago (St James the Apostle) is believed by the faithful to have seen the Virgin Mary descend atop a marble *pilar* (pillar). A chapel was built

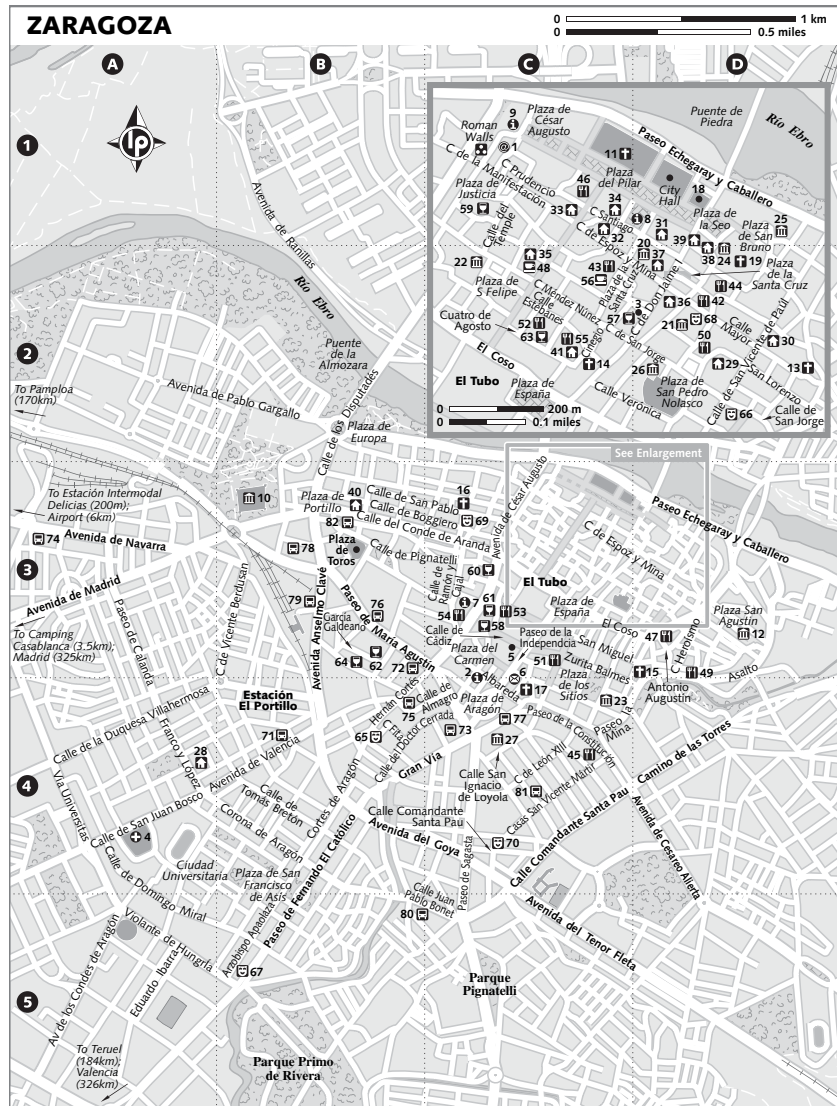
around the remaining pillar, followed by a series of ever-more-grandiose churches. This is the story behind Zaragoza's enormous **basilica** (☎ 976397497; ☎ 6.45am-9pm), designed in 1681 by Felipe Sánchez y Herrera and greatly modified in the 18th century by the heavier hand of Ventura Rodríguez. The towers were not finished until the early 20th century and are often still under scaffolding; but the roofscape transcends the gloomy interior. A splendid main dome lords it over a flock of 10 minidomes, each one encased in chunky blue, green, yellow and white tiles, creating a kind of rugged Byzantine effect. Get yourselves up to the top of the north tower (right) for the best view.

The legendary **pilar** is hidden in the Capilla Santa, inside the east end of the basilica. A tiny oval-shaped portion of the *pilar* is exposed on the chapel's outer west side. A steady stream of people (with busloads of the faithful arriving at times) line up to brush lips with its polished and seamed cheek, which even popes have air-kissed.

Hung from the northeast column of the Capilla Santa are two wickedly slim shells that were lobbed at El Pilar during the civil war. They failed to explode. A miracle said the faithful: typical Czech munitions said the more cynical.

The basilica's finest artwork is a 16th-century alabaster altarpiece by Damián Forment. It stands at the outer west wall of the choir. Goya painted *La Reina de los Mártires* (Mary, Queen of Martyrs) in a cupola above the north aisle, outside the Sacristía de la Virgen. Dulled by age and poor light it is currently being refurbished and should bring some welcome illumination when completed.

A **lift** (admission €1.50; ☎ 9.30am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat-Thu), operated by a genial attendant, whisks you most of the way up the north tower from where you climb some steps and a final steep spiral staircase to a superb viewpoint over the city. Follow the main stairs down for changing views at every turn to reach a second lift door, where you ring for service.



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ARAGÓN

ARAGÓN

BURNING FAITH

In 1484 Fernando and Isabel, the Catholic Monarchs (Los Reyes Católicos), began to extend the nascent Spanish Inquisition into Aragón. Their chief honcho Fray Tomás de Torquemada (see also the boxed text, p202) appointed two Dominicans as his local inquisitors, Gaspar Jugler and the young Canon of Zaragoza's cathedral, Pedro Arbués. Both men could smell the smoke and on 10 May of that year Jugler officiated at the first auto-da-fé (trial by fire) in Aragón. It took place in the cathedral, but resulted in the bloodless reconciliation to the faith of a handful of alleged heretics. Not to be outdone, Arbués staged a second auto-da-fé a few weeks later and managed to preach enough brimstone to condemn two men to a grisly death by fire. A few days later Gaspar Jugler died under suspicious circumstances; some believe that he was poisoned. Public repugnance at the autos-da-fé was so fierce that the Inquisition was stalled in Aragón for nearly two years, until in September 1485 Arbués was assassinated in front of the cathedral's altar. Ironically, this increased the public's taste for burning flesh. The flames rose, the Inquisition prospered, and Arbués is now a much-revered saint.

LA LONJA

Now an **exhibition hall** (☎ 976 39 72 39; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), this plain but finely proportioned Renaissance-style building, the second building east of the basilica, was constructed in the 16th century as a trading exchange. The coloured medallions on its exterior depict kings of Aragón and other historical personages.

MUSEO DEL FORO DE CAESARAUGUSTA

The rather out of place trapezoid building on Plaza de la Seo is the entrance to an excellent reconstruction of part of Roman Caesaraugusta's **forum** (☎ 976 39 97 52; Plaza de la Seo 2; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), now well below ground level.

The remains of porticoes, shops, a great *cloaca* (sewer) system, and a limited collection of artefacts dating from between 14 BC and about AD 15 are on display. Sections of lead pipes used to channel water to the city demonstrate the Romans' genius for engineering. An interesting audiovisual show, presented on the hour in Spanish, breathes life into things and audioguides are available.

LA SEO

Dominating the eastern end of Plaza del Pilar is the Catedral de San Salvador, also known as **La Seo** (☎ 976 29 12 38; Plaza de la Seo; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun Oct-Mar). Entry is at the eastern end.

La Seo, built between the 12th and 17th centuries, displays a fabulous spread of architectural styles from Romanesque to baroque.

It stands on the site of Islamic Zaragoza's main mosque (which in turn stood upon the temple of the Roman forum). The northwest façade is a Mudéjar masterpiece, deploying classic dark brickwork and colourful ceramic decoration in eye-pleasing geometric patterns. All the chapels are framed by beautiful stonework and ring the changes from the foggy gloom of St Mark's to the glorious Renaissance façade of the central Christ Chapel and the 15th-century high altarpiece in polychrome alabaster.

La Seo's **Museo de Tapices** (admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm or 7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a large collection of 14th- to 17th-century Flemish and French tapestries.

Museo del Teatro de Caesaraugusta

Discovered during the excavation of a building site in 1972, the ruins of Zaragoza's Roman theatre are the focus of this interesting **museum** (☎ 976 20 50 88; Calle de San Jorge 12; admission €3; ☹ 10am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), opened in 2003. Although the ruins aren't particularly impressive, great efforts have been made to help visitors reconstruct the edifice's former splendour, including evening projections of a virtual performance on the stage (Friday and Saturday only; consult the museum for times). The exhibit culminates with a boardwalk tour through the theatre itself.

Other Roman Remains

Just across Plaza de San Bruno from La Seo is the absorbing **Museo del Puerto Fluvial** (☎ 976 39 31 57; Plaza de San Bruno 8; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) which displays the Roman city's river-port installations. There's a

quaint but enjoyable audiovisual programme every half-hour. The **Museo de las Termas Públicas** (☎ 976 29 72 79; Calle San Juan y San Pedro 3-7; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) houses the old Roman baths.

Aljafería

Islamic Spain makes its mark at the **Aljafería** (☎ 976 28 96 84; Calle de los Diputados; adult/student & pensioner/under 12yr €3/11/free, Sun free; ☹ 10am-2pm Sat-Wed, 4-6.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri & Sat Nov-Mar, 10am-2pm Sat-Wed, 4.30-8pm Fri-Wed Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, daily Jul & Aug), the country's finest Islamic-era edifice outside Andalucía, though it's not in the league of Granada's Alhambra or Córdoba's Mezquita. It's a half-hour's noisy walk west from Plaza del Pilar or a 10-minute ride on bus 32 or 36 from Plaza de España.

The Aljafería was built as a pleasure palace for Zaragoza's Muslim rulers, chiefly in the 11th century. From the 12th century Zaragoza's Christian rulers made alterations, and in the 1490s the Catholic Monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, tacked on their own palace. Later the Aljafería served as a hospital and barracks, when it was allowed to decay. From the 1940s to 1990s restoration was carried out, and in 1987 Aragón's regional parliament, the Cortes de Aragón, was established here.

Inside the main gate, cross the rather dull introductory courtyard into a second, the **Patio de Santa Isabel**, once the central courtyard of the Islamic palace. Here you are confronted to north and south by the exquisite interwoven arches typical of the opulence and geometric mastery of Islamic architecture. The innermost hall at the northern end was the throne room, now with reproductions of its delicate plaster and alabaster wall carvings. Also opening off the northern porch is a small, octagonal **oratorio** (prayer room), with a magnificent horseshoe-arched doorway leading into its *mihrab* (prayer niche indicating the direction of Mecca). The finely chiselled floral motifs, Arabic inscriptions from the Quran and pleasingly simple cupola are impressive examples of Islamic art.

Moving upstairs, you pass through rooms of the **Palacio Mudéjar**, added by Christian rulers in the 12th to 14th centuries, then to the Catholic Monarchs' **palace**, which, as though by way of riposte to the Muslim finery below, contains some exquisite Mudéjar coffered ceilings, especially that of the **Salón del Trono** (Throne Room).

Churches

Several other Zaragoza churches are well worth a look. The **Iglesia de San Pablo** (cnr Calles de San Pablo & Miguel de Ara; ☹ 9am-1pm) has a delicate 14th-century Mudéjar tower and an early-16th-century *retablo* (altarpiece) by Damián Forment. The **Iglesia de La Magdalena**, **Iglesia de San Miguel** and **Iglesia de San Gil** also boast fine 14th- and 15th-century Mudéjar towers – at their best when floodlit at night. The **Iglesia de Santa Engracia**, built in the 16th-century, has an underground crypt containing the bones of the eponymous saint and other Zaragozaan early Christian martyrs.

Museums

MUSEO DE ZARAGOZA

Devoted to archaeology and fine arts, the **city museum** (☎ 976 22 21 81; Plaza de los Sitios 6; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) displays artefacts from prehistoric to Muslim times, and an important collection of Gothic art, as well as a dozen Goya paintings.

MUSEO CAMÓN AZNAR

This eclectic **collection** (☎ 976 39 73 28; Calle de Espoz y Mina 23; admission €1, ID required; ☹ 9am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) of Spanish art through the ages features a room of Goya etchings (on the top floor) and half a dozen paintings attributed to El Greco. It spreads over the three storeys of the Palacio de los Pardo, a Renaissance mansion.

PATIO DE LA INFANTA

This **exhibition** (☎ 976 76 76 76; Calle San Ignacio de Loyola 16; admission free; ☹ 8.30am-2.30pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 6-9pm Sat) is the Ibercaja bank's collection of Goya paintings, displayed in a lovely Plateresque courtyard.

MUSEO DE PABLO GARGALLO

Within the 17th-century Palacio Argillo is a representative **display** (☎ 976 72 49 23; Plaza de San Felipe 3; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) of sculptures by Pablo Gargallo (1881–1934), probably Aragón's most gifted artistic son after Goya.

CENTRO DE HISTORIA DE ZARAGOZA

The old convent of San Agustín (only the neoclassical façade remains) is the site of this **museum** (Zaragoza History Centre; ☎ 976 20 56 40; Plaza San Agustín 2; adult/child €3.25/free; ☹ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun). Each of the eight exhibit rooms

focuses on a different aspect of the city's heritage, from trade and transport to popular celebrations. Of particular interest is a series of models depicting Zaragoza's physical transformation through four key phases of its development. Take bus 22 going east along El Coso or bus 30 at Plaza de España.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Zaragoza's biggest event is the **Fiestas del Pilar**, a week of full-on celebrations (religious and otherwise) peaking on 12 October, the **Día de Nuestra Señora del Pilar**. On 5 March, Zaragozans celebrate **Cincomarzada**, commemorating the 1838 ousting of Carlist troops by a feisty populace. Thousands head for Parque Tío Jorge, north of the Ebro, for concerts, games, grilled sausage and wine.

SLEEPING

At the time of writing, there was no camping ground operating in the area, a situation that seems likely to continue in spite of talk of a site being planned. In the run-up to Expo 2008, Zaragoza stages quite a number of trade fairs, during which central hotels are often block-booked.

Budget

Albergue Juvenil Baltasar Gracián (☎ 976 30 66 92; Franco y López 4; HI ID under 26yr/other incl breakfast €8.60/11.55) Doubling as a student residence during the school term, this HI hostel has room for 50 in quads. It's a 2km hike from El Tubo, or a quick ride on bus 22 or 38.

Hostal El Descanso (☎ 976 29 17 41; San Lorenzo 2; s/d without bathroom €14/24) This decent budget choice faces a pretty plaza near the Roman theatre. It's family-run and has 20 clean, bright rooms but fills up quickly.

Pensión Holgado (☎ 976 43 20 74; Calle del Conde de Aranda 126; s/d €27.90/39.15, without bathroom €17.70/29.90) An excellent budget option about 1km from Plaza de España and near the Aljafería. There are plenty of simple, well-tended rooms on three floors and it usually has vacancies. Bus 22 (€1, eight minutes) runs frequently from the junction of El Coso and Plaza de España to Plaza del Portillo, opposite Holgado.

Hostal San Jorge (☎ 976 39 74 62; Calle Mayor 4; s/d €31/39) Prices go up and down a bit but are mainly good-value for the simple but decent-sized rooms at this friendly place that also has a small café.

Other decent, reasonably priced places with fairly basic facilities in or near the old city:

Pensión La Peña (☎ 976 29 90 89; Cinegio 3; s/d without bathroom €12/24)

Hostal Navarra (☎ 976 29 16 84; Calle de San Vicente de Paúl 30; s/d €27/35)

Midrange & Top End

Most of these places offer parking for approximately €10 per day.

Hostal Plaza (☎ 976 29 48 30; www.hostalplaza-santiago.com; Plaza del Pilar 14; s/d €35/50; 📍) Some of the bright and neatly trimmed rooms look directly out onto Plaza del Pilar. Singles are small but adequate.

Hotel Rio Arga (☎ 976 39 90 65; www.hotelriarga.es; Contamina 20; s/d €37/54; 📍 🚰 🚿) In a quiet location, yet ideal for all central needs, there are comfy rooms here.

Hotel Las Torres (☎ 976 39 42 50; Plaza del Pilar 11; s/d €44/59) A great location on the plaza makes up slightly for fairly ordinary rooms here.

Hotel Sauce (☎ 976 20 50 50; www.hotelsauce.com; Calle de Espoz y Mina 33; s/d €48/91; 📍) This good-value, small hotel has modern but cosy rooms; bookings are advisable for weeknights.

Hotel Tibur (☎ 976 20 20 00; www.hoteltibur.com in Spanish; Plaza de la Seo 2; s/d €61/70; 📍 🚰 🚿) Business-standard rooms at this pleasant hotel, right on Plaza de la Seo, have minibars and plenty of space.

Hotel El Príncipe (☎ 976 29 41 01; www.hotel-el-principe.com; Calle Santiago 12; s/d €110/128; 📍 🚰 🚿) Just south of Plaza del Pilar, this Best Western hotel has fairly sleek modern comforts to go with the swish in-house restaurant and bar. Rates drop by half outside the high season.

Other well-equipped lodgings in the city centre:

Hotel Via Romana (☎ 976 39 82 15; Calle de Don Jaime I 54-56; s/d €57.80/82.40)

Hotel Inca (☎ 976 39 00 91; Calle de la Manifestación 33; s/d €141.25/160.50; 📍 🚰 🚿)

EATING

Tapas

The narrow streets and small plazas south of La Seo harbour some great tapas bars – ideal for lunchtime snacking or cooling off with a beer on a warm evening. On the cosy Plaza de Santa Marta, Carvercería Marpy and Casa Vitorinos II have bar-top treats in plenty, while Casa Domino offers hams and *montados* (toasted baguette slices topped with Cabrales cheese, among other tantalising spreads).

La Calzorras (Plaza de San Pedro Nolasco) With accompanying trees and fountain in the plaza, has tempting larger-than-tapas specialities for around €4.

There's another string of tapas bars towards the southern end of Calle Heroísmo (most open until midnight), including the atmospheric **Gran Taberna Pantagruel** (Calle Heroísmo 35), with some delicious pâté. Around El Tubo, **Taberna Doña Casta** (☎ 976 20 58 52; Calle Estébanes 6; 📍 Tue-Sun) does filling, simple tapas. Still more snacking options cram Calle Moneva, off Calle de Zurita east of Paseo de la Independencia, where El Calamar Bravo churns out the fried squid sandwiches (€2.30) and La Mejillonera goes through buckets of mussels (€2.30) nightly.

Cafés & Restaurants

There are well-placed cafés along Plaza del Pilar facing the basilica that offer ordinary fare, with *menús del día* (daily set menus) for around €7/8.50 indoors/outdoors.

Churrería La Fama (☎ 976 39 37 54; Calle Prudencio 25; 3 churros €1.50) La Fama is tucked away off Calle de Alfonso 1 and is a good spot for fresh *churros* (long, deep-fried doughnuts) and chocolate to go with morning coffee.

Gran Café de Zaragoza (Calle de Alfonso I 25; breakfast from €2.50) This long-established and still elegant salon is a good place for morning coffee or breakfast.

La Miguería (☎ 976 20 07 36; Calle Estébanes 4; migas €3.80, salads €7) There's filling Aragonese quick-fix food such as *migas* (breadcrumbs drenched in olive oil, and topped with sausage, egg and pineapple) at this popular place; ideal for an evening snack.

El Rincón Criollo (☎ 976 39 92 86; Antonio Agustín 1; mains €6; 📍 8pm-midnight Tue-Sun) South American specialities are the thing in this funky little place. Treats, such as fajitas and *hallacas* (a meaty stew wrapped in banana leaves) come from Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Mexico.

Mariscos y Chacinas Azoque (☎ 976 22 03 20; Azoque 37; dishes €7-18) There's a pleasant Andalusian flavour to this fine restaurant where a cluster of dangling *jamóns* and a bar-top spread of seafood greet you. Relish the selection of *gamba blanca* (white shrimps), *ostras* (oysters) and *pulpo Gallego* (Galician octopus) at the heart of landlocked Zaragoza.

Casa Juanico (☎ 976 39 72 52; Plaza de la Santa Cruz 21; meals €9.50-19; 📍) Tapas also tempt at this

excellent place where you can enjoy everything from best *jamón* (ham), *chipirones* (small squid) or a hefty *chuletón* (T-bone steak). It does a nice Montesierra Crianza for €9.80, among a good wine list.

Churrasco (☎ 976 22 91 60; Calle de Francisco Vitoria 19; menú €14, mains €19; 📍) It's meat eaters' heaven at this long-established place with *jamón Ibérico* (Iberian ham) a speciality, although there's decent fish and seafood as well. A good bet is the day's *centros* (shared platters of ham, squid and other treats).

Perrexita (☎ 976 43 83 16; Calle de Ramón y Cajal 43; mains €12.50-20) Dream of cooler climes in the smart landscape of this stylish Basque restaurant that sprinkles a few *pintxos modernos* (tapas) along the bar while you consider classic dishes such as *bacalao y pil pil* (cod in natural sauce).

DRINKING

Calle de Espoz y Mina and Calle Mayor, a stone's throw from Plaza del Pilar, have plenty of varied bars from which to choose. There's a satisfying buzz round the Plaza del Carmen area in the newer part of town where a string of café-bars and restaurants keeps things lively day and night.

Exo (☎ 609 63 98 11; Plaza del Carmen 11) You don't need to be as sleek and cool as the bar staff or as shiny as the modernist décor at this smart, but easy-going, bar. There's a great friendly mood to go with the background Spanish rock.

Novo (☎ 616 48 74 24; Calle Azoque 64) This is another smooth, easy-listening bar with lots of subtle lighting and comfy seating.

Café Praga (☎ 976 20 02 51; Plaza de la Santa Cruz 13) One of Zaragoza's favourites. Praga has several landscapes; you can cool nicely on the plaza terrace, relax quietly in the upper bar or enjoy the occasional live music in the main bar.

Rock & Blues Café (Cuatro de Agosto 5-7; 📍 from 5pm) Rock 'n' roll paraphernalia and homage to the likes of the mighty Jimi Hendrix set the tone for the music and style of this long-standing favourite, that stages live gigs midweek.

Bar Corto Maltés (Calle del Temple 23) and **La Cucaracha** (Calle del Temple 25) are among a string of nicely grubby and rowdy disco-pubs favoured by Zaragoza's lively student crowd for postmidnight action. **Chastón** (Plaza Ariño 1) is a relaxed little bar playing recorded jazz.

There are a couple of friendly gay clubs just south of Paseo de María Augustin. **Paradys** (García Galdeano 6) is a friendly, stylish place, where red satin curtains separate the bar from the crowded dance floor. Across the street is the friendly, and lesbian-friendly, **Y Que** (García Galdeano 13). Closer to the old city, **Mick Havanna** (Calle de Ramón Pignatelli 7; ☎ from 5pm) is a quiet, chatty place, frequented by a mature crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

The tourist office puts out the bimonthly *Agenda Cultural*, covering theatre, art, music and film events.

Filmoteca de Zaragoza (☎ 976 72 18 53; Plaza San Carlos 4; screenings €2; ☎ Wed-Sat night) One of the few cinemas showing films in their original language (subtitled in Spanish).

La Casa del Loco (☎ 976 39 67 71; Calle Mayor 10; cover for live music €6-8; ☎ from 9.30pm Thu-Sat) Hugely popular, especially on Thursday nights when there's a regular live concert with mainly Spanish pop and rock bands. Friday and Saturday night, it's still a lively late-night venue.

Oasis (☎ 976 43 95 34; Calle de Boggiero 28; cover €10; ☎ from midnight Fri & Sat) A few streets west of the old centre, Oasis began life long ago as a variety theatre. It's currently going strong as a disco with good techno house, but with a bit of anything goes, including drag queen extravaganzas.

El Cantor de Jazz (☎ 976 23 89 24; Calle Dato 18) This popular place pays heavy tribute, by its name alone, to the first film talkie. A nice selection of jazzy instruments is part of the décor and the sounds are a mix of blues, R&B and even a bit of jazz, with occasional live turns.

For house sessions at weekends, check out **Roxy Club Zgz** (Calle Comandante Santa Pau 4; ☎ 2am-8am Fri & Sat), then around dawn head for **Kitsch Experimental Club** (☎ 976 46 74 40; Paseo de Fernando El Católico 70; cover incl drink €8; ☎ 6am-10am Sat & Sun), where they're still shakin' well past breakfast time.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The **Zaragoza airport** (☎ 976 71 23 00) has a daily direct **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) flight to/from Stansted airport. Ryanair also flies direct to Zaragoza from Milan and there are Iberia flights to/from Madrid daily, to Barcelona daily except Sunday and to Paris and Frankfurt most days. Air Europa flies to/from Palma de Mallorca.

Bus

At the time of writing, Zaragoza's several bus lines were still scattered all over the city. The ongoing promise that they will all be based adjacent to the Estación Intermodal Delicias train station may well be realised by Expo 2008, but nobody's holding their breath on this one, so entrenched is the system. Currently, the most useful bus station is **Agreda Automóvil** (☎ 976 22 93 43; www.agredasa.com in Spanish; Paseo de María Agustín 7), where **ALSA** (☎ 902 42 22 42; www.alsa.es) operates at least 15 buses a day to/from Madrid (€11.75, 3¼ hours) and Barcelona (€11.10, 3¼ hours), and **Alosa** (☎ 976 22 93 43; www.alosa.es in Spanish) runs at least eight buses to/from Huesca (€5, one hour), half of which continue to Jaca (€10.40, 2¼ hours). Other services operating from here include Linecar (Soria, León), Hife (Valencia, Tarragona) and Suroeste (Badajoz, Mérida).

Other bus stations and the destinations they serve include the following:

Abasa & Agreda Automóvil (☎ 976 55 45 88; www.agredasa.com in Spanish; Avenida de Valencia 20) Destinations: Alcañiz, Belchite, Cariñena, Daroca, Fraga, Lleida (Lérida) and Muel.

Autobuses Conda (☎ 976 33 33 72; Avenida de Navarra 1) Destinations: Pamplona, San Sebastián and Tudela.

Automóviles Zaragoza (☎ 976 21 93 20; www.automovileszaragoza.com in Spanish; Calle de Almagro 18) Destinations: Calatayud and Monasterio de Piedra.

Fuendetodos Buses depart from in front of the Museo Pablo Serrano, Paseo de María Agustín 20. Destination: Andorra.

Samar Buil (☎ 976 43 43 04; Calle de Borao 13)

Sanguesa In the car park below Estación El Portillo, Avenida Anselmo Clavé. Destination: Sos del Rey Católico.

Tezasa (☎ 976 27 61 79; Calle Juan Pablo Bonet 13)

Destinations: Burgos, Logroño, Teruel and Valencia.

Therpara (☎ 976 22 57 23; Calle del General Suevo 22) Destinations: Soria and Tarazona.

Viaci Viajes (☎ 976 28 31 00; Calle de Pignatelli 120) Destinations: Bilbao, León, Oviedo, Santander, Santiago de Compostela and Vitoria.

Train

Zaragoza's futuristic and rather impersonal **Estación Intermodal Delicias** (Calle Ríoja 33) was opened in 2003. There is a very helpful tourist office at the station. As with other major stations in Spain, luggage is scanned at platform entries.

Services include Madrid (€39.60, 1¼ hours, approximately 10 daily), Barcelona (€36.50, one to 4½ hours, approximately 12 daily), Valencia (€20.40, 5½ hours, two daily), Huesca

(€4.75, one hour, approximately four daily), Jaca (€9.90, 3½ hours, three daily) and Teruel (€11.35, three hours, three daily).

GETTING AROUND

Agreda Automóvil (☎ 976 55 45 88) runs airport buses (€1.80) to/from Paseo Pamplona via Plaza San Francisco and Gran Via 4 (the stop for municipal bus 30) that link with flights.

Most city bus routes (€0.80) go through Plaza de España on the southern edge of El Tubo. Bus 51 to/from Estación Intermodal Delicias begins/ends at Paseo de la Constitución, one block from Plaza de Aragón. A taxi to/from the station is about €17 to €20.

SOUTH OF ZARAGOZA

The following places can all be reached by bus, but having your own transport is advantageous.

Muel & Cariñena

The N330 south towards Teruel passes through Campo de Cariñena, Aragón's premier wine-producing region. The **Ermita de la Fuente** in Muel, 19km before Cariñena, has some fine paintings of saints by the young Goya.

Bodegas (cellars) dot the main road into Cariñena, and in town there's a **Museo del Vino** (☎ 902 19 07 13; Calle de la Platera 7; admission €2; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) housed in an early-20th-century warehouse.

Hostal Iiturgis (☎ 976 62 04 92; Plaza de Ramón y Cajal 1; s/d €30/35) is a refurbished 17th-century home that is a comfy option for an overnight stay.

Fuendetodos

Some of the greatest start small. One such was Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes,

born in this insignificant hamlet, 24km east of Cariñena, in 1746. The **Casa Natal de Goya** (☎ 976 14 38 30; Zuloaga 3; admission incl Museo del Grabado de Goya €1.80; ☎ both 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) stayed in his family until the early 20th century, when the artist Ignacio Zuloaga found and bought it. Partly destroyed during the civil war, the three-storey abode, which is less humble than legends make out, has since been restored. Down the road, the **Museo del Grabado de Goya** contains a seminal collection of the artist's engravings.

Samar Buil buses leave Zaragoza for Fuendetodos (€5, one hour) at 10am and 6pm Monday to Saturday.

Belchite

The twin towns of Belchite are perhaps the most eloquent reminders of the destruction wrought in the Spanish Civil War. The ruins of the old town, which have been replaced by an adjacent new village, stand as a silent memorial to a brutal tug-of-war for possession between Republican and Nationalist forces during the war. Abasa buses (€3.70, 45 minutes) arrive from Zaragoza three times daily.

A few kilometres west of Belchite stands the 18th-century baroque **Santuario de Nuestra Señora del Pueyo**.

WEST OF ZARAGOZA

Tarazona

pop 10,500 / elevation 480m

The quiet, serpentine streets of Tarazona's old town are an evocative reminder of the layout of a medieval Spanish town. The town lies on the N122. It has more than enough monuments to repay a stop, while just wandering the streets is a pleasure.

DANCING IN THE DESERT

You don't really want to linger in the relentless flatlands between Zaragoza and Valencia, but the rural town of Fraga might stop you in your tracks at **Florida 135** (☎ 974 47 02 50; www.florida135.com in Spanish; Calle Sotet 2; admission around €12; ☎ from 11.30am Sat), the temple of Spanish techno. The windowless 3000-sq-metre, graffiti-strewn space is just the most recent incarnation of a dance hall that's been going since 1942. Busloads of clubbers arrive for the club's main Saturday-night sessions, although there are sometimes sessions on Wednesday and Friday. Check the website for the monthly programme. One night back in 1994 the action boiled over to the desert, giving birth to the **Monegros Desert Festival** (www.monegrosfestival.com), formerly called the Groove Parade. Dozens of Spanish and internationally renowned DJs and bands demonstrate their skills on various stages at the event, which takes place in mid-July at Finca Les Peñetes, about 18km west of Fraga. Recent festivals have seen up to 30,000 people, three times the population of Fraga. Headliners in 2006 were The Prodigy.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 976 64 00 74; www.tarazona.org; Plaza San Francisco 1; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm or 7pm Sat & Sun) has lots of material on the town and area. Most leaflets have English versions.

SIGHTS

There are useful multilingual (including English) interpretive panels all over town, although a few have been defaced, sadly.

Tarazona's **cathedral** is a fetching concoction of Romanesque, Gothic, Mudéjar and Renaissance styles. It has been closed for restoration since 1997. At the time of writing there was no certain date of reopening. Considering that its foundations are on fairly desiccated soil it's hardly surprising that major stabilisation has been required.

Nearby, the octagonal **Plaza de Toros Vieja** (Old Bullring) is made up of 32 houses built in the 1790s as a private housing initiative complete with ringside window seats.

A signposted walking route takes you around the twisting cobbled ways of the medieval 'high part' of the town, north of Río Queiles. Most of the main monuments cannot be entered but there's enough interest in the streets and buildings themselves. From all around you can see the slender Mudéjar tower of the **Iglesia de Santa María Magdalena**. The **Palacio Episcopal** (Bishop's Palace), next door, was a Islamic fortified palace. Tarazona's medieval **judería** (Jewish area) is exceptionally well preserved. The high balconied projections of the 'hanging houses' are remarkable.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hostal Palacete de los Arcedianos (☎ 976 64 23 03; www.palacetearedianos.com in Spanish; Plaza de los Arcedianos 1; s/d €25/35) Up in the *judería* this good budget choice has unfussy, comfy rooms in a pleasant family-run place.

Hostal Santa Agueda (☎ 976 64 00 54; www.santaagueda.com; Calle Visconti 26; s/d from €59/69.50; ☎ ☎) Just off Plaza San Francisco, this 200-year-old home has lovely rooms and a charming proprietor. The little breakfast room is a glorious shrine to Raquel Meller, Aragón's queen of popular song during the early 20th century.

Hotel Condes de Visconti (☎ 976 64 49 08; www.condesdevisconti.com in Spanish; Calle Visconti 15; r incl breakfast from €72; 📍) Beautiful rooms, mostly with colourful individual décor, plus a preserved Renaissance patio, make this one-time 16th-century palace a choice stopover.

Cafetería Casino (☎ 976 64 22 17; Plaza La Seo 1) Located a short way along the riverbank from the tourist office is this friendly bar that does tasty tapas and other snacks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Up to six **Therpasa** (☎ 976 64 11 00; Avenida de Navarra 17) buses run daily to/from Zaragoza (1 ¼ hours) and Soria (one hour). **Autobuses Conda** (☎ 948 82 03 42; Parque de la Estación) goes to Tudela. Both stops are a minute's walk from Plaza de San Francisco.

Around Tarazona

Backed by the often snowcapped Sierra del Moncayo the fortified **Monasterio de Veruela** (☎ 976 64 90 25; admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Wed-Mon), founded in the 12th century, looks more like a Castilian castle than a monastery. The rather stern Gothic church is flanked by a charming cloister, which has a lower, Gothic level surmounted by a Renaissance upper gallery. There is a small wine museum within the complex. The monastery is 13km southeast of Tarazona and 1km from Vera de Moncayo. Just two of Therpasa's daily Zaragoza-Tarazona buses stop in Vera itself; the others stop at the Vera turn-off on the N122, 4km from the monastery. Having your own transport is advantageous.

In Vera, accommodation includes **Camping Vera de Moncayo** (☎ 976 64 91 54; sites per person/tent/car €3/3/3; ☎ mid-Jun-mid-Oct) and **La Casa del Carpintero** (☎ 976 64 65 65; Calle Moncayo 6; r €34), a charming country home.

Those with a vehicle can visit the **Parque Natural del Moncayo**, with several walking trails on the flank of the 2300m-plus Sierra del Moncayo.

Calatayud

pop 17,300 / elevation 530m

At the dusty core of Calatayud, just off the Zaragoza-Madrid A2 highway, is an atmospheric centre of narrow streets and enough points of interest to merit a stop. Head for the labyrinthine old town and search out the Mudéjar towers of the **Colegiata de Santa María**, **Iglesia de San Andrés** and the 14th-century **Iglesia de San Pedro** (Rúa de Eduardo Dato), which looks as though it's about to topple into the street. The baroque **Parroquia de San Juan El Real** (Calle Valentin Gómez 3) features four Goya paintings of the fathers of the church, housed in the angles below its dome.

Places to stay include the good budget option **Pensión La Perla** (☎ 976 88 13 40; Calle de San Antón 17; s/d with shared bathroom €14/24), with big sparkling rooms, and the charming **Hospedería El Pilar** (☎ 976 89 70 20; www.hospederiaelpilar.com in Spanish; Calle Baltasar Gracián 15; s/d €25/45), in a restored 17th-century inn near the Colegiata de Santa María. Both have restaurants serving all meals.

Calatayud's bus station is in a building off the central Plaza del Fuerte. Automóviles Zaragoza runs four or more buses daily to/from Zaragoza (€5.90, one hour), while ALSA runs at least three buses to/from Madrid. Three trains run to/from Zaragoza, one of which continues to/from Madrid.

Monasterio de Piedra

This one-time Cistercian **monastery** (both park & monastery adult/child €11/7.50; ☎ park 9am-dusk, monastery 10.15am-1.15pm & 3.15-7.15pm), 28km southwest of Calatayud, dates from the 13th century but was abandoned in the 1830s and then sold into private hands in 1840. Subsequent owners laid out the ground as a formal wooded park full of caves and waterfalls, the latter fed by Río Piedra. There's even a fish farm that was set up in the 1860s, the first in Spain. Incorporated into the complex is the **Hotel Monasterio de Piedra** (☎ 976 84 90 11; www.monasterio.piedra.com in Spanish; s/d €73/135).

In the lakeside village of **Nuévalos**, 3km north, a good sleeping option is **Hostal Las Rumbas** (☎ 976 84 91 12; www.lasrumbas.com in Spanish; s/d €30/46) with pleasant balconies, some overlooking the lake. The hotel has a restaurant.

On Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday (or daily in summer), Automóviles Zaragoza runs a 9am bus from Calle de Almagro 18 in Zaragoza to the monastery (€10.60, 2½ hours) via Calatayud, returning at 5pm.

THE NORTH (THE PYRENEES)

As you head north from Zaragoza's parched flatlands, a hint of green tinges the landscape and there is a growing anticipation of very big mountains somewhere ahead. And they are big. The Aragonese Pyrenees boast several peaks well over the 3000m mark and they are the most dramatic and most rewarding on the Spanish side of the range. Viewed from the south their crenellated ridges fill the northern

horizon wherever you turn and their valleys offer magnificent scenery, several decent ski resorts and great walking. There are many ways to approach the area, with several routes clawing up through the valleys and some crossing into France.

Activities

SKIING

Aragón has plenty of ski slopes in the Pyrenees, with resorts at Cerler, Formigal, Panticosa, Astún and Candanchú. Most accommodation in and near the resorts offers packages that include ski passes and some meals.

WALKING

Aragón's mountains are more popular in summer than in winter. Some 6000km of long-distance trails (Grandes Recorridos; GRs) and short-distance trails (Pequeños Recorridos; PRs) are now marked in all parts of Aragón. The coast-to-coast GR11 traverses the most spectacular Aragón Pyrenees, but there are plenty of other routes.

The best time for walking is mid-June to early September, though the more popular parks and paths can become crowded in mid-summer. The weather can be unpredictable at any time of the year, so walkers should be prepared for extreme conditions at all times. Before setting out check the latest weather reports. Carry as much water as you can and know where there are water sources along the route. Check before setting out, especially early in the season, that paths and tracks are in safe condition after winter storms and spring thaws. Know exactly where there is shelter and consider carrying a light bivvy sack.

This chapter mentions several mountain *refugios* (refuges). Some are staffed and serve meals, while others are empty shacks providing shelter only. At holiday times staffed *refugios* are often full, so unless you have booked ahead, be prepared to camp. The **Federación Aragonesa de Montañismo** (FAM; ☎ 976 22 79 71; www.fam.es in Spanish; Calle Albareda 7, Zaragoza) can provide some information, and a FAM card will get you substantial discounts on *refugio* stays.

The Aragonese publisher Prames produces some of the best maps for walkers in the Aragón Pyrenees. Editorial Alpina maps are an acceptable substitute, although not comprehensive in some instances.

HUESCA

pop 54,634 / elevation 488m

Huesca has a rough-edged charm and its old centre retains some appeal. Without any visible backdrop of great peaks, however, the town is more of a busy commercial centre than a launch pad for the big hills, although it's worth a stopover and has plenty facilities.

Orientation & Information

The old part of Huesca sits on a slight rise, with the bus and train stations sharing the modern Estación Intermodal, 500m south. There's a small bank with an ATM at the station and several banks with ATMs in and around Plaza de Navarra. Street parking is metered. There is underground parking in front of the station.

Hospital General San Jorge (☎ 974 21 11 21; Avenida Martínez de Velasco)

Osc@.com (☎ 974 21 21 58; San José de Calasanz 13; per hr €2; ☎ 4pm-midnight)

Post office (Calle del Coso Alto 14)

Tourist office (☎ 974 29 21 70; www.huescatourismo.com; Plaza López Allué 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-8pm Oct-May) Inside the old market building. Huesca Turismo also operates an information kiosk (June to September) on Plaza de Navarra.

Sights

PLAZA DE LA CATEDRAL & AROUND

Tranquil Plaza de la Catedral, at the heart of the old town, is presided over by the venerable Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 646 79 05 16; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Oct-Mar),

built between the 13th and 16th centuries. The richly carved main portal dates from 1300. The stately interior features a large, 16th-century alabaster *retablo* by Damián Forment. The adjoining **Museo Diocesano** (admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat Apr-Sep, 10.30am-1.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) exhibits religious art and artisanship from the Huesca diocese. The 16th-century **ayuntamiento** (town hall) across the square is another Aragonese gem of renaissance detail. A little way north, the octagonal **Museo de Huesca** (☎ 974 22 05 86; Plaza Universidad 1; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a well-displayed collection covering the archaeology and art of Huesca province, including works by Goya.

IGLESIA DE SAN PEDRO EL VIEJO

Another of the city's historical and architectural gems stands 250m southeast of Plaza de la Catedral. The church of **San Pedro** (adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm Oct-May) is a 12th-century Romanesque masterpiece. Worth a close look is its cloister, with beautiful Romanesque capitals that have been attributed to the same maestro who carved those at the Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña (p439). The fourth and fifth monarchs of Aragón, Alfonso I El Batallador (1104-34) and Ramiro II (1134-37), lie here in the Panteón Real, a chamber off San Pedro's cloister.

Tours

The **tourist office** (☎ 974 29 21 70; www.huescatourismo.com; Plaza López Allué) gives guided tours of the historic centre (adult/child €2/1) in Spanish, English and French at 11am and 5pm daily July to September, and 11am daily from Semana Santa (Easter) to June and in October.

Entertaining tours by vintage bus (adult/child €5/2.50, under 12 years free) are offered daily mid-June to September to the Castillo de Loarre (p428), Los Mallos (p428), the Sierra de la Guara, and other destinations of historical interest or natural beauty. Buses depart at 9am daily from the Estación Intermodal and return at 2.30pm. Tickets can be bought at the tourist office.

Sleeping

Camping San Jorge (☎ 974 22 74 16; www.campingsan Jorge.com in Spanish; Calle de Ricardo del Arco s/n; sites per person/tent/car €4/4/4; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct) A well-run, woodland site 1km west of the old town centre and with very good facilities. There's a

restaurant offering everything from filled baguettes to sit-down meals.

Hostal El Centro (☎ 974 22 68 23; hcentro@auna.com; Calle de Sancho Ramírez 3; s/d €28/40) This homely, welcoming place is on a narrow lane just outside the old town.

Hostal San Marcos (☎ 974 22 29 32; www.hostal sanmarcos.es in Spanish; Calle de San Orenco 10; s/d €28/49; ☎ ☎) In the heart of town, the San Marcos has 29 modern units above a popular bar.

Hostal Lizana/Hostal Lizana 2 (☎ 974 22 07 76; www.hostal-lizana.com; Plaza de Lizana 6; s/d Hostal Lizana €40/50, Hostal Lizana 2 €42/60; ☎) Facing each other across the street at the corner of a pleasant little plaza near the cathedral are these two worthwhile places with decent rooms in each.

Hotel Pedro I de Aragón (☎ 974 22 03 00; Calle del Parque 34; s/d €122/136) Overlooking leafy Parque Municipal Miguel Servet, this is the place for top-end comfort.

Eating & Drinking

Pizzeria La Giara (☎ 974 23 20 18; Calle de Argensolas; pizza €6-8.30; ☎ 8pm-midnight Thu-Tue) An unassuming, excellent place where delicious pizzas are baked in a wood-fired oven and topped with fresh ingredients. It also does lasagne and pasta and a selection of salads, with good Italian wines to go with it all.

Hervi (☎ 974 24 03 33; Calle Santa Paciencia 2; mains €12-20; ☎ closed Thu) A popular lunchtime scene, Hervi offers superb salads and other veggie options as well as meaty stews. There's a tasty seafood platter for two (€25).

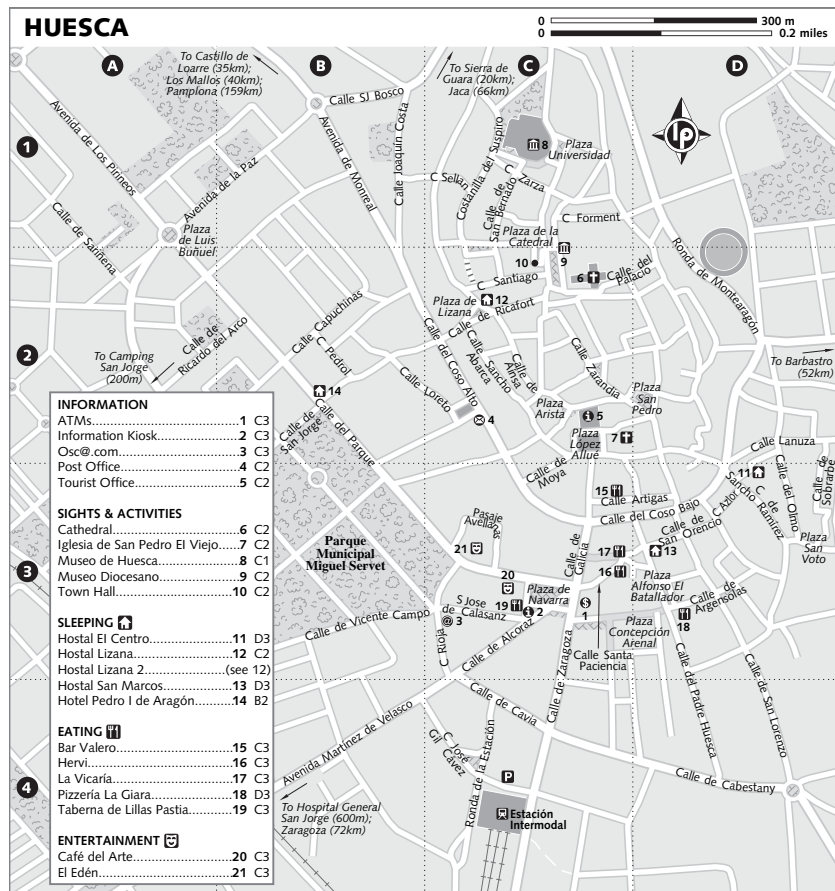
Taberna de Lillas Pastia (☎ 974 21 16 91; Plaza de Navarra 4; menú del día €30) Dress up just a little for this slightly above-itself eatery in the town's old casino. The food is excellent, however. Mains of fish and meat range from €16 to €22.

There are several rewarding tapas bars around town. A good bet is **La Vicaría** (☎ 974 22 51 95; Calle de San Orenco 9) with great fish tapas for €1 to €1.25 and *raciones* (large tapas) for €4 to €8.50. **Bar Valero** (☎ 974 22 00 29; Calle Artigas 9) is another popular place with a great selection of tapas.

Entertainment

Ask the tourist office for a copy of *Radar*, which has a rundown of the month's music, theatre and arts events, or see its website at www.huescacultura.com (in Spanish).

El Edén (☎ 974 22 76 25; Pasaje Avellanas 5; ☎ 4pm-3am) Huesca's hotspot pub hosts live rock and electronica at weekends in a big generous



space with raised seating and a happy, noisy crowd that spans the age range.

Café del Arte (☎ 974 21 16 91; Plaza de Navarra 4; ☎ closed Tue) Downstairs from the senior centre, this local alternative space hosts live music from around 10.30pm on Thursday night.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Bus company **Alosa** (☎ 974 21 07 00; www.alosa.es in Spanish) runs at least six daily buses to/from Zaragoza (€5.50, one hour), and around nine each to/from Jaca (€6, 1¼ hours), Barbastro (€3.65, 50 minutes) and Lleida (Lérida; €8.80, two hours); and five to/from Barcelona (€19.60, 4¼ hours). There's also a daily service to Benasque (€10.40) and Pamplona (€12.30).

TRAIN

Eight trains a day run to/from Zaragoza (€6.10, one hour), with one each to/from Madrid, Teruel and Valencia. Three trains daily head north to Jaca (€7.05, 2½ hours), with two continuing to Canfranc-Estación (€7.15, three hours).

AROUND HUESCA

Castillo de Loarre

The monolithic **Castillo de Loarre** (☎ 974 38 26 27; guided tour €2; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Jan-mid-Mar, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 10am-8pm Jul & Aug) stands brooding above the southern plains across which Muslim raiders once roved. Raised in the 11th century by Sancho III of Navarra and Sancho Ramírez of Aragón, its resemblance to a crusader castle has some resonance with those times.

A labyrinth of dungeons, tunnels and towers, in and around the living rock, has been left in a state of partial restoration, giving it a suitably realistic atmosphere. Some parts are so dark that a torch (flashlight) would be useful. You can climb two towers for magnificent views.

If it all looks familiar, you may have seen it in the 2005 Ridley Scott film, *Kingdom of Heaven*. The medieval fortress served as a backdrop for much of the action (though the film is set in 12th-century France), and the banquet scenes were shot in the Iglesia de San Pedro.

The castle is a 5km drive, or a 2km, one-hour, uphill walk by the PR-HU105 footpath, from the village of Loarre, 35km from Huesca.

Camping Castillo de Loarre (☎ 974 38 27 22; www.campingloarre.com in Spanish; sites per person/tent/car

€2.90/2.90/2.60) is a good site located halfway from the village to the castle, accessible by road or footpath. **Hospedería de Loarre** (☎ 974 38 27 06; www.hospederiadeloarre.com; Plaza Miguel Moya; s/d incl breakfast €67/84; ☎) is a charming, small hotel occupying a converted 16th-century mansion on Loarre village square. Its restaurant offers medium-priced to expensive meals.

Two buses run to Loarre village from Huesca (€2.35, 40 minutes) Monday to Friday; there's just one bus on Saturday.

Los Mallos

After a rather unexciting patch along the Huesca-Pamplona road, you come to a dramatic area along Río Gállego north of Ayerbe. On the eastern bank, huge rock towers known as Los Mallos (Mallets) rise up – they wouldn't look out of place in the Grand Canyon and are popular with very serious rock climbers. For a closer look, head for Riglos.

ALQUÉZAR

pop 307 / elevation 670m

Heading downriver in the Alquézar region east of Huesca means **canyoning** (*descenso de barrancos* in Spanish), which involves following canyons downstream by whatever means available – walking, abseiling, jumping, swimming, even diving. The Sierra de Guara, north of the Huesca-Barbastro road is sliced through by more than 200 dramatic canyons of the Río Vero and other river systems and is Europe's prime location for the sport.

The main base is the picturesque village of Alquézar, 20km northwest of Barbastro. Alquézar is a delightful place, well worth a detour even if you don't want to get wet and wild in a canyon, although why not, while you're there? The village has winding streets that lead eventually to the pleasant Calle Nueva with a long *mirador* (viewpoint) from where there are fine views. The rocky hill on which the village stands is topped by the **Colegiata de Santa María** (☎ 974 23 10 99; admission €3; ☎ 11am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Sep, 11am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar), a large castle-monastery. Originally built as an **Alcázar** (fortress) by the Arabs in the 9th century, it was conquered around 1060 by Sancho Ramírez. Remnants of the Augustinian monastery he established here in 1099 are still visible. The columns within its delicate cloister are crowned by perfectly preserved carved capitals depicting biblical scenes, and the walls are covered with

spellbinding murals. On the upper level is a museum of sacred art. Visits are by guided tour only. The door is locked while tours are in progress; they last for about half an hour, so simply wait patiently for the next tour.

The charming **Casa Fabián** (☎ 974 31 89 13; Calle Baja 16; admission €1.50; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 11am-2pm Tue-Sun Nov-May), a folk museum in a 17th-century house, is full of intriguing artefacts of farming and domestic life and includes an old olive-oil works, dug out of the rocky foundations.

A **tourist office** (☎ 974 31 89 40; Calle Arrabal; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Jun-Oct, Sat, Sun & festivals only Nov-May) has useful information about the town in various languages.

Several agencies, such as the well-organised **Avalancha** (☎ 974 31 82 99; www.avalancha.org; Calle Arrabal) offer guided canyoning trips costing €39 to €45 a day per person, depending on the graded difficulty of the trip. Gear is provided and it also organises rafting, trekking and mountain climbing. The main season is mid-June to mid-September. Another good local agency is **Vertientes** (☎ 974 31 83 54; www.vertientesaventura.com; Calle San Gregorio 5) at Casa Tintorero (below).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Alquézar (☎ 974 31 84 34; www.alquezar.com; sites per person/tent/car €3.80/3.80/3.50) Just outside the village, this camping ground also has two-to-six-person bungalows from €35 to €94. It organises canyoning guiding and equipment rental.

Casa Tintorero (☎ 974 31 83 54; www.vertientesaventura.com; Calle San Gregorio 5; bunks incl breakfast €15) This is a cheerfully run *albergue* (refuge), one of several in the village, with two-to-six-person rooms and great views from the upper floors.

Casa Jabonero (☎ 974 31 89 08; Calle Mayor; r with/without bathroom €30/25) The welcome is every bit as charming as the rooms in this *casa rural* (country house) in a Mudéjar building in the heart of the village.

Fonda Narbona (☎ 974 31 80 78; Calle Baja 19; d with/with shared bathroom €40/30; ☎ Sat & Sun only in winter) Rooms here are simple but very pleasant and the attached restaurant offers a *menú* for €13 and a heftier one for €21; enjoy them on its great terrace.

Hotel Villa de Alquézar (☎/fax 974 31 84 16; www.villadealquezar.com in Spanish; Calle Pedro Arenal Caverro 12; s/d incl breakfast €50/58; ☎) One of the best places in town with a lot of style in its large airy rooms; several rooms have great balcony views.

Getting There & Away

Autocares Cortés (☎ 974 31 15 52) runs a bus to Alquézar from Barbastro (€1.55) daily, except Sunday.

North of Alquézar, the road through Colungo to Aínsa is a delightful drive through pre-Pyrenean canyon country.

BARBASTRO & AROUND

pop 15,400 / elevation 341m

Barbastro's 350-year spell as one of Muslim Spain's most northerly outposts has left little traces today. It's a bit run-down, although the area around Plaza del Mercado has some character and the 16th-century **cathedral** boasts a main altarpiece – an incomplete, yet still stunning, work by the Renaissance master Damián Forment. Barbastro was also the birthplace of Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of the Catholic movement Opus Dei.

The **tourist office** (☎ 974 30 83 50; www.barbastro.org; Avenida de la Merced 64; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4.30-8pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug), next to the bullring, is combined with a **wine museum** devoted to the local Somontano vintages. The central **Hostal Pirineos** (☎ 974 31 00 00; hspirineos@eresmas.net; Calle General Ricardos 13; s/d €40/50; ☎) has bright décor and also runs the town's best café.

Enemies riding against **Monzón** (population 14,650), 19km southeast of Barbastro, must have been hugely intimidated at sight of the formidable **castle** (☎ 974 34 90 07; admission €2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun except Sun afternoon Jul-Sep, 11.30am-1pm & 3-5pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-1pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun), rising proudly above the town's jumbled streets. The Muslims built Monzón's first great fortress, later taken for Aragón by Sancho Ramírez. The Knights Templar took it over in 1143, but after the order of knights fell, the fortress decayed under several sieges in the 16th to 19th centuries. It has now been partly restored, as has the 12th-century church, the **Colegiata de Santa María del Romeral**.

Getting There & Away

Departures from Barbastro's **bus station** (☎ 974 31 12 93) most days include four buses to Barcelona; 11 to Huesca and Monzón, half of which continue to Lleida (Lérida); two to Benasque (€6.30, two hours); and one or two to Aínsa (€3.40, one hour). Several trains stop in Monzón on their way from Zaragoza to/from Lleida or Barcelona.

BENASQUE

pop 1388 / elevation 1140m

Aragón's northeastern corner is crammed with the highest and shapeliest peaks in the Pyrenees. Even in midsummer these great mountains can be capped with snow and ice. The area, much of which is protected as the Parque Natural Posets-Maladeta, offers walkers almost limitless options and climbers a wide choice of peaks. The Alpine-style nerve centre of the district is the village of Benasque (Benás in the local dialect), set in a broad, green valley with rocky mountains rising on three sides. Walkers, climbers and skiers flock here not only as a jumping-off point for mountain activities but also for a spot of after-dark bar-hopping. The narrow back streets of the village have some atmosphere, but there's a slightly hard-edged, touristy feel to the town generally.

The approach from the south suddenly jumps out at you as the A139/N260 plunges through the Congosto de Ventamillo, a narrow defile carved by the crystalline Río Ésera. There's not much quarter given by traffic in either direction. North of the defile, the village of Castejón de Sos is a paragliding centre with accommodation. For information on where to stay visit www.castejondesos.es and for paragliding outfits www.parapentepirineos.com (in Spanish) and www.volarencastejon.com.

Information

Lavandería Ecológica (☎ 974 55 15 04; Carretera de Francia; ☎ 10am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat)

Telecomunicaciones S&Z (☎ 974 55 14 59; Los Huertos 5; per hr €2; ☎ 3–10pm) Benasque's internet connection also offers cheap international calls.

Tourist office (☎ 974 55 12 89; www.turismobenasque.com in Spanish; Calle San Sebastián 5; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8pm) Offers copious information on shorter walking routes.

Plenty of outfitters offer guides and instruction for climbing, skiing and other activities; most sell or rent clothing and equipment for the hills:

Barrabés (☎ 974 55 16 81; Avenida de Francia) Stocks a vast array, including maps and guidebooks.

Casa de la Montaña (☎ 974 55 20 94; Avenida de los Tilos)

Compañía de Guías Valle de Benasque (☎ 974 55 13 36; www.guiasbenasque.com in Spanish; Avenida Luchón 19)

Gradodiez (☎ 629 18 24 82; www.grado-diez.com; Avenida Luchón) Local branch of Cerler ski shop.

Sleeping

There are several camping grounds along the A139 north of Benasque. In town you'll find a dozen hotels and *hostales* (budget hotels). During the ski season most offer packages with *media pensión* (half-board).

Camping Aneto (☎ 974 55 11 41; www.anetocamp.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.95/4.95/4.95) This is the closest camping ground to town (3.5km away). It is very well equipped and has a shop and laundry.

La Fonda de Vescelia (☎ 974 55 16 54; vescelia@terra.es; Calle Mayor 5; bunks €9, s/d with shared bathroom €27/42; ☎) Cheap, cheerful and central, accommodation here is basic, with up to 30 bunks sharing the same toilets and showers. You'll need a sleeping bag for the dorms. There's a café-bar selling snacks, including veggie burgers.

Hotel Avenida (☎ 974 55 11 26; www.h-avenida.com in Spanish; Avenida de los Tilos 14; s/d €53.50/67) Benasque accommodation at its best. Rooms are handsomely furnished and the service is friendly. There's a restaurant attached.

Hotel San Marsial (☎ 974 55 16 16; www.hotelsanmarsial.com in Spanish; Avenida de Francia 75; s/d incl buffet breakfast €65/105) The usual lodgelike touches are pleasantly done here in this comfortable, well-run hotel at the north end of town.

Eating & Drinking

The best places are along Avenida de los Tilos and its continuation, Calle Mayor.

Taberna del Ixarsó (☎ 974 55 28 32; Calle Mayor 12) Meaty tapas such as *chorizo* and *salchichón* (sausage) help the drink go down at this lively little bar, where local aficionados happily mix with tourists.

Pastelería Flor de Nieve (☎ 974 55 10 27; Calle Mayor 17) Energy-fuelling treats could be the excuse for delving into the cream and chocolate cornucopia in this traditional bakery and coffee shop.

La Buhardilla (☎ 974 55 13 20; Calle Mayor s/n; dishes €4–15.50) A plush creperie at the heart of the old town, the 'attic's' sleek modern décor is softened by a big, open fire for chilly Pyrenean evenings. Sweet and savoury crepes cost €4 to €6, fondues start at €10.50.

Restaurante El Fogaril (☎ 974 55 16 12; Calle Mayor 5; mains €18–28) Treat yourself at this elegant country dining room which serves outstanding Aragonese fare. Its specialities include young venison and stuffed partridge, *cozal* (small deer) and freshwater fish, all superbly prepared and presented.

Bar La Compañía (☎ 974 55 29 00; Avenida Luchón 19; ☎ 2–11pm, closed Wed) Nicely worn décor and an upbeat atmosphere make this a popular drinking spot where rock and ice fanciers can thump through copies of climbing mags while listening to background rock of the other sort.

Getting There & Away

Two buses operate Monday to Saturday, and one runs on Sunday, from Barbastró to Benasque (€6.30, two hours) and back. Buses to/from Huesca, Lleida (Lérida) and Barcelona connect with these buses at Barbastró.

AROUND BENASQUE

Skiing

Aragón's easternmost **ski resort** (☎ 974 55 10 12; www.cerler.com in Spanish) has two centres: one at Cerler itself, at 1500m altitude, 6km southeast of Benasque, and another at **Ampríu**, 8km beyond Cerler, at 1900m. On offer are 45 varied runs, totalling 52km at altitudes up to 2630m, plus ski and snowboard schools and equipment rentals. With limited accommodation available, many people prefer to stay in Benasque. A bus service connects Benasque and the ski stations during ski season.

Walking & Climbing

From mid-June to mid-September, bus services link Benasque with La Besurta (one-way/return €6/8.80), 16km north in the upper Ésera valley, and with the Refugio Pescadores (one-way/return €10/13.10), which is in the Valle de Vallibierna, 11km northeast of Benasque. The buses stop at camping grounds on the A139 north of Benasque – you can use them to reach many of the walks mentioned in this section. Check current timetables at Benasque's **tourist office** (☎ 974 55 12 89; www.turismobenasque.com in Spanish; Calle San Sebastián 5; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8pm).

Good maps for northeast Aragón are *Aneto-Maladetas* and *Llardana-Posets* in Prames' 1:40,000 Mapa Excursionista series.

NEAR BENASQUE

Plenty of marked trails, ranging from an hour's to a day's walking, start from Benasque itself or from nearby villages, such as Eriste and Sahún.

VALLE DE VALLIBIERNIA

This valley runs southeastward up from the A139 about 5.5km north of Benasque. On foot, take the track towards Camping Ixeia,

which leaves the A139 just before the Puente de San Jaime (or Chaime) bridge, 3km out of Benasque. You're now on the GR11 coast-to-coast trail, which after a couple more kilometres diverges into Valle de Vallibierna. It's then about a 6km (2½-hour) walk, ascending nearly 600m, to the Refugio Pescadores or the Refugio Coronas, anglers' shelters that are small with no facilities. Three groups of mountain lakes, the Lagos (or Ibons) de Coronas, Llosás and Vallibierna, can each be reached in under two hours from the refuge.

GR11 TO BIELSA

Westbound, the GR11 leaves the A139 just after the Puente de San Jaime. It's an easy three-hour walk (600m ascent) up the Valle de Estós to **Refugio de Estós** (☎ 974 55 14 83; bunks adult/under 14yr €12.50/5.50). This good 115-bunk refuge is attended year-round, but it's essential to ring ahead (dinner is €12.80). A further five or so hours bring you, via the 2592m Puerto de Gistain (or Chistau) pass and some superb views of the Posets massif, to the excellent **Refugio de Viadós** (☎ 974 50 61 63; bunks €7.50, half-board €22; ☎ staffed Jun–Sep, Sat & Sun Easter–May). Viadós is a base for climbs on **Posets** (3369m), a serious undertaking that requires mountaineering skills, often requires crampons and long-shaft ice axes and is a hard six hours-plus to the summit, with potential altitude effect. Route finding is not that easy. Not a casual stroll, then... The GR11 continues some six hours west to the hamlet of Parzán in the Bielsa valley, before heading into the Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido (p433). Bielsa, 4km south of Parzán, has several *hostales* and hotels.

Autocares Bergua (☎ 974 50 00 18) runs a bus from Bielsa to Ainsa at 6am Monday, Wednesday and Friday (daily, except Sunday, in July and August).

UPPER ÉSERA VALLEY & MALADETA MASSIF

North of Benasque, the A139 continues paved for about 12km. About 10km from Benasque, a side road leads 6km east along the pretty upper Ésera valley, ending at a spot called La Besurta, with a hut selling drinks and some food.

Hospital de Benasque (☎ 974 55 20 12; www.llanosdelhospital.com; bunks €18–28, s/d incl breakfast from €73/90; ☎), a little under halfway from the A139 to La Besurta, is a large mountain lodge in a beautiful location, surrounded by handsome peaks. From early spring onwards it gets very busy

with day-trippers as well as skiers and mountain walkers. If driving you may be stopped at a lower car park about 1km from the lodge. There's a bar, restaurant, and a variety of accommodation ranging from bunks to comfy rooms. From Benasque, a summer bus makes six trips a day here (€6 return, 30 minutes); another shuttles back and forth between here and La Besurta.

An exacting trail from Llanos del Hospital heads northeast and upwards to Peña Blanca, and from there winds steeply up to the 2445m Portillón de Benasque pass on the French frontier. This should take fit walkers about 2½ hours. You could return via a visit to the Puerto de la Picada, another pass to the east – or another 3½ hours north would take you down past the Boums del Port lakes to the French town of Bagnères-de-Luchon.

South of La Besurta is the great Maladeta massif, a superb challenge for experienced climbers. This forbidding line of icy peaks, with glaciers suspended from the higher crests, culminates in Aneto (3404m), the highest peak in the Pyrenees.

Refugio de la Rencusa (☎ 974 55 21 06; bunks €12, half-board €29), staffed and serving meals from about June to mid-October and weekends from March to June, is a 40-minute walk from La Besurta. Experienced and properly equipped climbers can reach the top of Aneto from here in a minimum of five hours.

The massif offers other peaks, including Maladeta (3308m). From La Besurta or La Rencusa, walkers can follow paths southeast beneath the Maladeta massif, leading ultimately into Catalonia.

AÍNSA

pop 1650 / elevation 589m

The busy crossroads that is modern Aínsa hardly prepares you for the beautiful hilltop village of medieval Aínsa (L'Aínsa in the local dialect) that stands above, commanding panoramic views of the mountains and of the great rock bastion of La Peña Montañesa particularly. Aínsa is one of Aragón's gems, worth visiting, if possible, in the low season or late evening; during festivals and the main summer season the place is crammed with fellow visitors. You can drive up by road to a large car park, but the best way up is by age-old steps from the lower village. This takes you along cobbled streets between beautiful stone façades and eventually to the huge, arcaded Plaza Mayor and the

castle. Around the village there are excellent interpretive panels, in French and English as well as Spanish and Aragonese.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 974 50 07 67; ainsa@pirineo.com; Avenida Pirenaica 1; ☎ 9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sep-Apr, closed Sun & Mon Nov-Mar) is by the crossroads in the newer part of the village. In addition, there's an excellent **regional tourist office** (☎ 974 50 512; info@turismosobarbe.com; Plaza del Castillo 1, Torre Nordeste; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun, closed Sun afternoon) within the castle walls.

There is an internet facility at the **library** (☎ 974 10 03 88; Calle Bajo los Muros s/n; per hr €1.10; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Thu).

The restored Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María**, just outside the southeastern corner of Plaza Mayor, lights up when you pop a €1 coin into a box, with sacred music thrown in. The crypt and Gothic cloister are charming. You can also climb the **belfry** (admission €1; ☎ approximately 11am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) for great views of the mountains to the north. The **castle** and fortifications off the far end of the plaza mostly date from the 1600s, though the main tower is 11th century. It contains an **eco-museum** (☎ 974 50 05 97; admission €2.50; ☎ 10.30am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Wed-Sun Easter-Oct) on Pyrenean fauna.

Sleeping

Accommodation in the old part of town is limited and booking ahead is advisable.

Casa El Hospital (☎ /fax 974 50 07 50; www.caselhospital.com; Calle del Arco del Hospital; s/d €29/45) There's a charming mood of old Aínsa in this traditional building opposite the south door of the church. There are six comfortable rooms with brass beds.

Hotel Villa Romanica (☎ 974 50 07 50; www.hotelvilalaromanica.com in Spanish; Calle Santa Cruz 21; s/d €39/65; ☎) Run by the owners of El Hospital, this is a beautiful place; modernised, yet retaining lovely detail, with exposed stone and lots of beautiful woodwork and comfy rooms.

Hotel Los Arcos (☎ 974 50 00 16; www.hotellosarcosainsa.com in Spanish; Plaza Mayor 23; s €96.30, d €107-150; ☎) In a fine position on Plaza Mayor, this stylish hotel has luxurious rooms with canopied beds and good-sized bathrooms. The service is friendly and stylish also.

In the lower village are the jointly run **Hostal Dos Rios** (☎ 974 50 01 06; www.hotellosdosrios.com; Avenida Central 2; s/d/tr €36/55.64/73.60) and **Hotel Dos Rios** (☎ 974 50 09 61; www.hotellosdosrios.com; s/d €55/71.70), both smart, modern places that offer web booking discounts.

Eating

In summer, half the houses around Plaza Mayor seem to metamorphose into eating places and there are plenty of outside tables – the plaza is a grand place to eat in the cool of a summer evening, although prices may be a bit upmarket to go with it.

L'Alfil (☎ 974 50 02 99; Calle Traversa; dishes €3.50-9) A pretty little place, with floral accompaniment to its outside tables, in a side street along from the church, this café-bar does salads, *jamón*, cheese and shellfish dishes.

Bodegas del Sobrarbe (☎ 974 50 09 37; Plaza Mayor 2; mains from €12.50, menú €22) Just off the plaza, this fine restaurant offers meaty Aragonese fare with a few fish dishes. The stuffed pork with foie and mushrooms is delicious and the hake and mussels are pretty good, also.

There are a couple of supermarkets in the lower village that are well stocked.

Getting There & Away

From Barbastro bus station, **Autocares Cortés** (☎ 974 31 15 52) runs buses to Aínsa (€3.40, one hour) at 11am Monday to Saturday during July and August, and at 7.45pm Monday to Saturday year-round. Buses return from Aínsa at 7am and 3.10pm.

PARQUE NACIONAL DE ORDESA Y MONTE PERDIDO

This is where the Spanish Pyrenees really take your breath away. At the heart of it all is a dragon's back of limestone peaks skirting the French border, with a southeastward spur that includes Monte Perdido (3348m), the third-highest peak in the Pyrenees. Deep valleys slice down from the high ground. Most were carved by glaciers and at their heads lie bowl-like glacial *circos* (cirques) backed by spectacular curtain walls of rock. Chief among the valleys are Pineta (east), Escuaín (southeast), Bellos (south), Ordesa (southwest), Bujaruelo (west) and Gavarnie (north, in France).

The vegetation range in these valleys is fascinating. Lush mixed forest gives way higher up to scattered stands of pines that cling to sheer cliffs in places. Above the tree line is the high mountain zone where edelweiss, gentians and other wildflowers sparkle with colour across the otherwise arid ground.

Chamois (*rebeco* in Spanish but often called *sarrío* in Aragón) wander the park's upper reaches in herds of up to 50. In the skies fly the rare and formidable lammergeier or

quebrantahuesos (bearded vulture) and the always spectacular golden eagle. But in some seasons, the most numerous beast in the 156-sq-km park is *Homo sapiens*, a mix of serious skiers, mountaineers and walkers, but with the biggest input by carbound sightseers. So popular are the more accessible zones that severe restrictions have been placed on vehicle access in summer.

Orientation

The main jumping-off point is the village of Torla, 3km south of the southwest corner of the national park. From Torla a paved road leads to the Pradera de Ordesa, in the Valle de Ordesa, with a big car park, 5.5km inside the national park (for seasonal vehicle restrictions, see p436). If you don't have a vehicle and the shuttle bus isn't running, it's a walk of about 7km from Torla to Pradera de Ordesa starting by Hostal Bella Vista.

The Valle de Bujaruelo, outside the park's western boundary, is accessed by an unpaved road veering north at the Puente de los Navarros on the road north of Torla.

From Escalona, 11km north of Aínsa on the A138, a minor paved road heads northwest across to Sarvisé, a few kilometres south of Torla. This road crosses the park's southern tip, with a narrow, sinuous section winding up the dramatic Bellos valley and giving access to walks in the spectacular Cañón de Añiscol (the upper reaches of the Bellos valley).

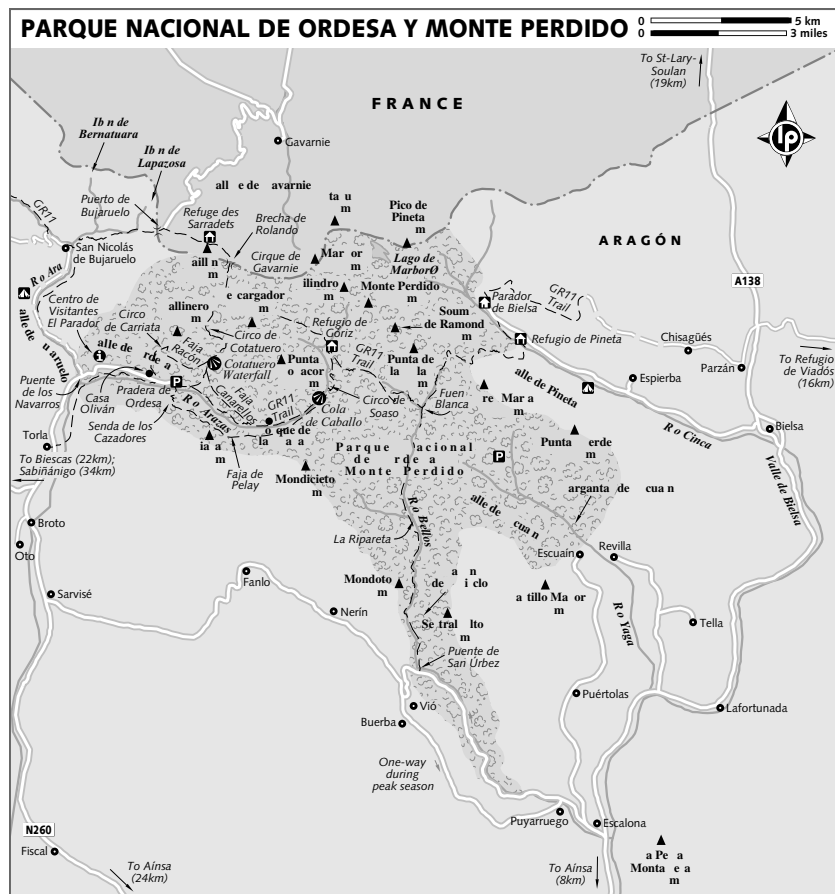
From Bielsa, a 12km paved road runs up the Valle de Pineta.

MAPS

Ordesa y Monte Perdido Parque Nacional (1:25,000), published by the Ministerio de Fomento in 2000, costs around €7 and comes with a booklet detailing 20 walks. It's available in Torla shops.

Information

The **Centro de Visitantes El Parador** (☎ 974 48 64 21; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Easter-Oct), with worthwhile displays and helpful staff, is 2km inside the park along the Torla-Pradera de Ordesa road. A second visitors centre operates the same hours at Tella in the Escuaín sector. There's also a **park information office** (☎ 974 48 64 72; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) in Torla, towards the north end of the village, opposite the Guardia Civil, and **park information centres** (☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Easter-Oct, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) in Escalona and Bielsa.



In Torla, there is a useful **tourist office** (☎ 974 48 64 72; Plaza de Aragón; ☒ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Easter-Oct, 8am-3pm Nov-Easter), a **post office** (Plaza de la Constitución), and there are banks and ATMs on Avenida de Ordesa. In addition, tourist offices operate from July to September in Broto, Fanlo and Bielsa.

Camping is allowed only above certain altitudes (1800m to 2500m), in small tents pitched at sunset and taken down at sunrise. Swimming in rivers or lakes, mountain biking, fishing and fires are banned.

Walking & Climbing CIRCO DE SOASO

A classic day walk follows the Valle de Ordesa to the Circo de Soaso, a rocky balcony whose centrepiece is the **Cola del Caballo** (Horsetail

waterfall. From the eastern end of the Pradera de Ordesa, take the path that crosses Río Arazas and climbs steeply up through woods on the valley's south side. This hardest part, called the Senda de los Cazadores (Hunters' Path), in which you ascend 600m, takes an hour. Then it's level or downhill all the way along the high Faja de Pelay path to the circo. Return by the path along the bottom of the valley, passing several waterfalls. The whole circuit takes about seven hours.

REFUGIO DE GÓRIZ & MONTE PERDIDO

Fit walkers can climb a series of steep switchbacks (part of the GR11) to the top of the Circo de Soaso and up to the **Refugio de Góriz** (☎ 974 34 12 01; bunks €12), at 2200m. This 72-place ref-

uge, attended and serving meals year-round, makes an obvious base for ascents of Monte Perdido. For July and August, book a month ahead. A lot of people end up simply camping nearby. As with Posets (p431), Monte Perdido is a serious undertaking that requires mountaineering skills and often requires crampons and ice axes. Be fit and capable.

FAJA RACÓN, CIRCO DE COTATUERO & FAJA CANARELLOS

This walk takes you along spectacular high-level paths on the north flank of the Valle de Ordesa. It takes about five or six hours, or an hour less if you omit Faja Canalleros. It should not be attempted in winter and spring, when there is a high risk of ice, falling rocks or even an avalanche.

From Pradera de Ordesa head 600m west back along the paved road to a stone building, Casa Oliván, and take the path signed 'Tozal del Mallo, Circo de Carriata'. About 1½ hours up this fairly steep, zigzag path, diverge eastward along the path signed 'Faja Racón': this high-level route of about 3km brings you out below the Circo de Cotatuero's impressive 200m **waterfall**. From here head a few minutes' downhill to a wooden shelter. Here you can either continue down the Cotatuero circo to a path junction 600m east of Pradera de Ordesa or, if you're still energetic, cross a bridge opposite the shelter to follow another high-level path of 3km to 4km, Faja Canarellos. This brings you down to the Valle de Ordesa at Bosque de las Hayas, from where it's 4km westward, gently downhill, back to Pradera de Ordesa.

BRECHA DE ROLANDO

The cool-headed may climb part of the wall of the Circo de Cotatuero by the **Clavijas de Cotatuero**, a set of 32 iron pegs hammered into the rock in 1881 by a local blacksmith. Don't worry, they've been renewed since and follow more of a rising traverse than a vertical ladder. No special equipment is needed, but you need to be fit and able. From here you are about 2½ hours' march from the **Brecha de Rolando** (Roldán; 2807m), a dramatic, breezy gap in the mountain wall on the French frontier. You can also reach the Brecha by a 3½-hour path from Refugio de Góriz. From the Brecha it's a steep 500m descent to the French **Refuge des Sarradets** (☎ France 33-06 83 38 13 24). Check ahead about conditions between the Brecha and the refuge, especially outside the summer high season.

PUERTO DE BUJARUELO

The GR11 describes a 6km arc up the very pretty Valle de Bujaruelo to San Nicolás de Bujaruelo. From there an east-northeastward path leads in about three hours (with a 950m ascent) up to the Puerto de Bujaruelo pass on the border with France. You are now in the French Parc National des Pyrénées, and in about two hours can descend to **Gavarnie** village. Alternatively you can head southeast and upwards for about 2½ hours to the **Refuge des Sarradets** (☎ France 33-06 83 38 13 24) and from there back into Spain via the **Brecha de Rolando** (left).

SOUTHERN GORGES

The **Cañón de Añiso** is a gaping wound in the earth's fabric, carved out, unlike the glacial valleys further north, by the eroding action of water on limestone. Energetic walkers can start from the Refugio de Góriz and descend the gorge from the north, but if you have a vehicle you can take a day walk from the southern end. Some 12km from Escalona on the road to Sarvisé, a broad path leads down to the dramatic **Puente de San Urbez**, then up the canyon. You can walk as far north as La Ripareta and back in about five hours, or to Fuen Blanca and back in about eight hours.

The **Gargantas de Escuaín** is a smaller-scale but still dramatic gorge on Río Yaga, further east. You can descend into the gorge in about an hour from the semi-abandoned hamlet of Escuaín, reached by a minor road off the Escalona-Sarvisé road.

Sleeping & Eating

Although Torla is the obvious base, there are many other villages near the park that offer accommodation. Broto, Escalona and Biescas each have a dozen or so hotels, *hostales* or *casas rurales*, and even tiny Nerín has a *hostal* and *albergue*.

TORLA

Torla is an Alpine-style village that has a slightly hard edge to it during the busiest times. (When a car park is almost as big as the village it serves, you know what to expect.) Yet, Torla's tall grey stone houses are an attractive sight. They cluster above Río Ara with a backdrop of the national park's mountains. Finding a bed is tricky only in the monster July-August season, when reservations are essential. There are three camping grounds within 2km north of Torla (all closed from mid- or late October till Easter).

Hostal Alto Aragón (☎/fax 974 48 61 72; Calle de Capuvita; s/d €32/40), run in harness with Hotel Ballarín, is about the cheapest choice apart from the two *refugios*. It has well-kept, charming rooms. **Hotel Ballarín** (☎/fax 974 48 61 55; Calle de Capuvita 11; s/d/tr €35/48/58) is every bit as smart and well kept, and has superb views from the top rooms. **Refugio L'Atalaya** (☎/fax 974 48 60 22; Calle de Francia; bunks €9; ☞ Apr–mid-Oct) and **Refugio Lucien Briet** (☎/fax 974 48 62 21; www.refugiolucienbriet.com in Spanish; Calle de Francia; bunks €9, d€37) are French-managed refuge-style places in the village.

All these places have restaurants with *menús* from €12 to €17. You can also stock up on supplies in small supermarkets, open seven days a week.

VALLE DE BUJARUELO

Camping Valle de Bujaruelo (☎ 974 48 63 48; www.campingvalledebjaruelo.com in Spanish; sites per person/tent/car €4.10/4.10/4.10, r€36-50; ☞ Easter-Oct) Located 3.5km up the Valle de Bujaruelo, this camping ground features a refuge with bunks, a restaurant and a supermarket.

Mesón de Bujaruelo (☎ 974 48 64 12; www.mesondebjaruelo.com in Spanish; dm €10, half-board €27) At San Nicolás, 3km further up the valley, this old hostelry provides bunks and meals in a particularly pretty location by the Puerto de Bujaruelo.

SOUTH OF TORLA

The nicest place in Broto, nestled in the Río Ara valley 3km south of Torla, is the stone **Casa O'Puente** (☎ 974 48 60 72; Calle Porches 7; r incl breakfast €45), beside a piece of the old bridge.

Among a handful of lodgings in Sarvisé, the next village south, is the handsome **Casa Frauca** (☎ 974 48 63 53; www.casafrauca.com; s/d/tr €35/43/52; ☞ Mar-Dec), with a dozen delightfully decorated rooms, a dining room and fireplace.

Nerin, a tiny huddle of houses 3km from the Cañón de Aníscolo, and high in the mountains, has one of the most beautiful outlooks in the area with a sweeping view to the great buttelike mass of Peña Montañesa. Check the wonderful spoonmakers' workshop in the little square. **Albergue Aníscolo** (☎ 974 48 90 10; www.nerinerural.com in Spanish; dm €8) is open all year and has fabulous terrace views. It offers meals as well as excellent cheap lodging. Downhill is the more business-like, custom-built **Hotel Palazio** (☎ 974 48 90 02; www.hotelpalazio.com in Spanish; s/d €40/66) with smart, spacious rooms with terraces.

EAST OF THE PARK

Escalona, a roadside village at the park's southeastern corner, boasts several attractive lodgings, including the friendly **Casa Carpintera** (☎ 974 50 51 69; www.casa-carpintera.com; Avenida Pineta; half-board €37), with seven comfortably crafted rooms and lavish breakfasts.

From Escalona you can head up the steep-sided Valle de Pineta, which is crowned by an impressive cirque. Along the way you'll find the shady **Camping Pineta** (☎ 974 50 10 89; www.campingpineta.com; sites per person/tent/car €4.30/4.30/4.30; ☞ Apr–mid-Oct), a *zona de acampada* (camping zone); the always-attended **Refugio de Pineta** (☎ 974 50 12 03), with meals; and the luxurious **Parador de Bielsa** (☎ 974 50 10 11; s/d €120/150).

Continuing north on the A138 takes you to the Túnel de Bielsa and into France. Heading south from Escalona towards Aínsa, at the tiny village of Labuerda is **Hotel Turmo** (☎ 974 50 08 32; www.hotelturmo.com in Spanish; s/d €40/60), a modern roadside stopover with excellent, spacious rooms and back balcony views of the mighty Peña Montañesa.

Getting There & Away BUS

A daily **Hudebús** (☎ 974 21 32 77) bus runs at 11am from Sabiñánigo, on the N330 between Huesca and Jaca, to Torla (noon), Broto, Sarvisé and Aínsa (1pm). It heads back from Aínsa at 2.30pm. In addition, in July and August a 6.30pm bus makes the Sabiñánigo–Sarvisé (but not Aínsa) run daily, returning at 8pm.

A daily Alosa bus leaves Zaragoza (Paseo de María Agustín 7) at 8.30am, and arrives in Sabiñánigo at 10.20am, in time to connect with the Torla bus. From Jaca, there's a 10.15am bus to Sabiñánigo daily, except Sunday (€1.25, 20 minutes).

PARK ACCESS

See Orientation (p433) for details of road approaches to the park. The following scenario has remained unchanged for several years. Private vehicles may not drive from Torla to Pradera de Ordesa during Easter week and July to mid-October. During these periods a shuttle bus (€2.40/3.40 one-way/return) runs between Torla car park and Pradera de Ordesa. On the upward run, the bus's only stop is at the Centro de Visitantes El Parador; on the way back, it will stop if requested at the Puente de los Navarros and three hotels or camping grounds between there and Torla. The last

run back is at 10pm in July and August, 9pm in September. A maximum of 1800 people are allowed in the park at any one time.

During the same periods, a one-way system is enforced on part of the Escalona–Sarvisé road. From the Puyarruego turn-off, 2km out of Escalona, to a point about 1km after the road diverges from the Bellos valley, only northward traffic is allowed. Southeastward traffic uses an alternative, more southerly road.

JACA

pop 14,700 / elevation 820m

You can feel a mountain nip in the air at Jaca, where the 2007 European Youth Olympic Winter Sports Festival was to have its scheduled base in February 2007, an expected boost to the town's reputation as a winter sports capital. At all times of the year, this busy and amiable town is a good starting point for reaching the valleys of the western section of the Aragonese Pyrenees. It also has enough remnants of its past as the capital of the nascent 11th-century Aragón kingdom to repay a short stay and the old town has

a sprinkling of good restaurants and bars. On winter weekends it rocks a fair bit with après-ski funsters.

Information

There are several banks with ATMs, including a couple on Calle Mayor.

Ciberciva (Avenida del Regimiento de Galicia 2; per hr €2; ☞ 11am-1.30pm & 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 5.30-10pm Sun) Internet access next door to the tourist office.

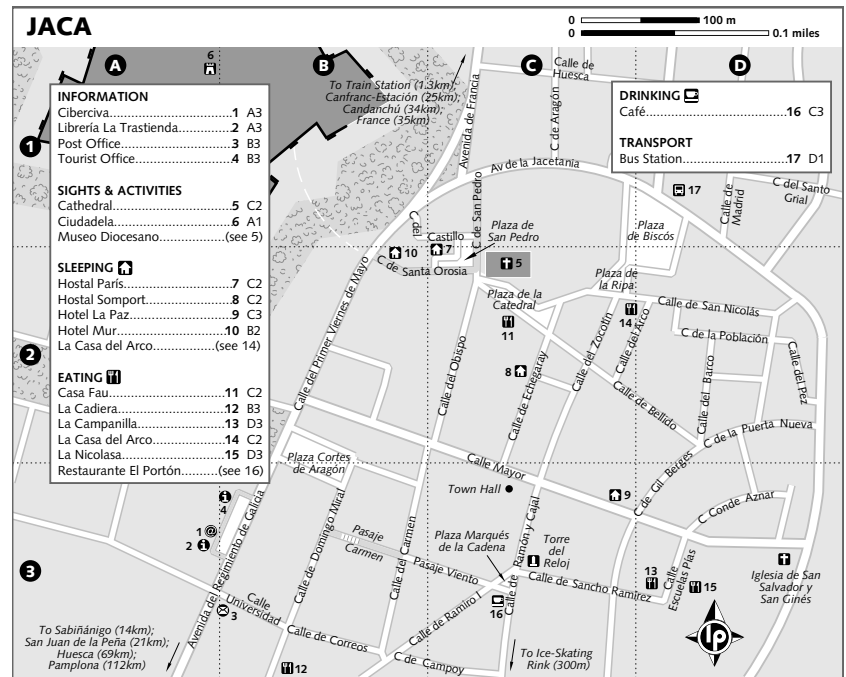
Librería La Trastienda (☎ 974 36 34 38; Avenida del Regimiento de Galicia 2a) A useful source of maps and guidebooks for the region, next door to the tourist office.

Post office (Calle Universidad)

Tourist office (☎ 974 36 00 98; Avenida del Regimiento de Galicia 2; ☞ 9am-1.30pm or 2pm & 4.30-7.30pm or 8pm Mon-Sat)

Sights & Activities

Jaca's 11th-century **cathedral** is a powerful building. It was once more gracefully French Romanesque in style and retains some fine features still. Worth a look is the side chapel dedicated to Santa Orosia, the city's patron saint, whose martyrdom is depicted in a series of mysterious murals. Overhead the



vaulted ceiling is studded with gold stars. In the cloister, the **Museo Diocesano** has a remarkable collection of frescoes and sculpture from churches throughout the region.

The star-shaped, 16th-century **Ciudadela** (Citadel; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 11am-noon year-round, 4-5pm Nov-Mar, 5-6pm Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 6-8pm Jul & Aug) now houses an army academy, but visits are permitted, with 40-minute guided tours (in English, Spanish or French). Deer graze in the surrounding moat.

At the time of writing the town's long-established **ice-skating rink** was due to be supplanted by a brand-new rink for hosting the ice skating and ice hockey events of the 2007 European Youth festival. Check with the tourist office for current details.

Festivals & Events

Jaca puts on its party gear for the week-long **Fiesta de Santa Orosia**, which revolves round the saint's day of 25 June. To see displays of medieval archery, visit on the first Friday of May, when Jaca celebrates a **Christian victory** over Muslims in 760. The **Festival Folklorico de los Pirineos**, held in late July and early August, provides 1½ weeks of international music, dance, crafts and theatre. It's held on odd-numbered years in Jaca and even-numbered years in Oloron-Ste-Marie, France.

Sleeping

It's worth booking ahead at weekends throughout the year and during the skiing season, July and August.

Hostal Paris (☎ 974 36 10 20; www.jaca.com/hostal-paris in Spanish; Plaza San Pedro 5; s/d with shared bathroom €25/30) Close to the cathedral this friendly, central option has spotless, ample-sized rooms and smart shared bathrooms. It has pleasantly old-style décor and everything is spotless.

Hostal Somport (☎/fax 974 36 34 10; Calle de Echegaray 11; s/d with shared bathroom €23/46) Family-run and with clean decent rooms, the Somport lacks sparkle but is still a good option.

Hotel Mur (☎ 974 36 01 00; www.hotelmur.com in Spanish; Calle de Santa Orosia 1; s/d incl breakfast €47.20/63.80) A pleasantly large and rambling place, this long-established hotel provides above-average comfort and style.

Several standard hotels cater for the ski trade but are worthwhile for a summer stop-over. A decent place is **Hotel La Paz** (☎ 974 36 07 00; Calle Mayor 41; s/d €37/54).

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Casa del Arco (☎ 974 36 44 48; www.laca.sadelarco.net; Calle de San Nicolás 4; 2-/3-course menú €15; ☎ ☑) Among the meat-eating mountains of Jaca, La Casa del Arco is a haven of excellent vegetarian food that is prepared with imagination and flair. All ingredients are carefully sourced. There's a lovely alternative ambience in this friendly place. Downstairs is a nice little bar, the **Tetaría el Arco**, which stages occasional music sessions and other events and is a good late-night venue. Rooms are cheerfully otherworldly, also (singles, doubles and triples €50, singles/doubles with shared bathrooms €18/36).

Eating

La Campanilla (☎ 974 36 14 48; Calle Escuelas Pías 8; menú €10) Fill up with a hearty, good-value lunch at this popular place.

La Cadiera (☎ 974 35 55 59; Calle de Domingo Miral 19; menú €11; ☎ closed Wed afternoon & Mon) The emphasis at this popular eatery is on meaty northern fare. Sure-fire bets include the garlic soup, *ternasco* (lamb), *migas* and *trucha de la Val* (trout).

Restaurante El Portón (☎ 974 35 58 54; Plaza Marqués de la Cadena 1; menú €32) Located in a little tree-shaded plaza this classy venue serves *haute-cuisine* versions of Aragonese fare. Reservations are a must. It also does a decent *menú del día* for €12.

For good tapas, head to **Casa Fau** (☎ 974 36 15 94; Plaza de la Catedral) or **La Nicolasa** (☎ 974 35 54 12; Calle Escuelas Pías 3; ☎ closed Tue).

Entertainment

Lively late-night bars line Calle de Gil Berges and trickle off into the neighbouring lanes. **Café** (Plaza Marqués de la Cadena 2), a small place with big sounds, is a popular local place that stays open into the small hours. Another late night venue with a more laid back style is **Tetaría el Arco** (see the boxed text, above).

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 974 35 50 60; Plaza de Biscós) is at the centre of town. Five buses go to Huesca (€5.95, 1¼ hours) and Zaragoza (€11.40, 2¼ hours) most days, and two go to Pamplona (€6.40, 1¼ hours).

The **train station** (☎ 974 36 13 32) is a half-hour walk northeast of the town centre, with three

trains daily south to Huesca and Zaragoza, and two north to Canfranc-Estación.

AROUND JACA

The N330 leads north from Jaca, via the pretty Río Aragón valley, to the Somport road tunnel into France passing **Canfranc-Estación** after 25km. Opened in 1928, this enormous station's distinctive architecture reflected the Modernista style. At the time it was Europe's second-largest station. For years it was Spain's principal connection with France until the French unilaterally halted the service after an accident in 1970. There is ongoing talk of reopening the line; it's more out of nostalgia than necessity, however. Two trains a day from Zaragoza via Huesca and Jaca stop here and three daily buses continue to the Vallée d'Aspe and Oloron-Ste-Marie, connecting with trains or buses for Pau, France.

Ski Resorts

To help with booking accommodation in any of these resorts, you can contact the resort information numbers and websites. All the resorts have ski and snowboard schools, as well as equipment for hire. You can also rent gear in Jaca.

CANDANCHÚ & ASTÚN

A major winter sports stadium is scheduled to open at **Candanchú** (☎ 974 37 31 94; www.candanchu.com) for the 2007 European Youth Olympic Winter Sports Festival. It seems likely to boost the reputation of the resort, which is 28km north of Jaca. Some 42km of widely varied pistes make it appealing to most grades of skiers. Accommodation in Candanchú includes three hotels, one *pensión* (small, private hotel), several apartments, and four cheap *albergues*. The small town is reasonably well equipped with general stores and ski-hire shops.

One advantage of visiting Candanchú is that another good resort, **Astún** (☎ 974 37 30 88; www.astun.com in Spanish), is just 3km east. Astún's 42km of pistes are largely for capable skiers; accommodation is more limited and generally more expensive than in Candanchú.

Five daily buses head from Jaca to Candanchú and Astún (€2.25, 45 minutes), via Canfranc-Estación.

PANTICOSA & FORMIGAL

The comparatively small resort of **Panticosa** (☎ 974 48 72 48; www.panticosa-loslagos.com in Spanish),

northeast of Biescas in the Gállego valley, has a bigger counterpart, **Formigal**, which is about 10km further north. The runs at Panticosa aren't too difficult and the nearly 2km Mazaranuala ski run is a must for adept skiers.

A livelier place with far more infrastructure than Panticosa, **Formigal** (☎ 974 49 00 00; www.formigal.com) is a regular host for ski competitions. Here you have the full range of facilities, including restaurants, bars, discos and saunas, as well as 57km of ski runs and 22 lifts.

From Jaca, one or two daily buses wind over to Panticosa and Formigal (€4.70, two hours).

Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña

High in a mountain eyrie 21km southwest of Jaca, this is Aragón's most fascinating monastery – but, like any eagle's nest, it's not reachable by public transport. Gateway to the monastery is **Santa Cruz de la Serós**, a pretty village 4km south of the N240. The monastery is another 7km uphill from here. You can buy a joint ticket for the monastery and the Iglesia de Santa María in the village for €6, which also covers bus transport from the village.

From Santa Cruz, a seemingly endless, winding road climbs the Sierra de la Peña to the **Monasterio Viejo** (Old Monastery; ☎ 974 35 51 19; www.monasteriosanjuan.com; admission incl Iglesia de Santa María €4.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm 16 Mar-31 May & 1 Sep-15 Oct, 10am-2.30pm & 4-8pm Jun & Aug, 11am-2pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Sun 16 Oct-15 Mar), tucked under an overhanging lip of rock at a bend in the road. For walkers, a stiff 4km marked path (the GR65.3.2) leads up from Santa Cruz to the monastery in about 1½ hours, with an ascent of 350m. At very quiet times of year drivers may be able to park on the roadside near the Monasterio Viejo; but during *Semana Santa*, June, July and August don't even think of parking; there's a hard team organising the whole banana, amiably but firmly. You have to continue uphill from the Monasterio Viejo for another 1.3km to the car park near the Monasterio Nuevo (New Monastery). At busy times a shuttle bus (€2), first boarded at Monasterio Nuevo, takes people down to Monasterio Nuevo and Monasterio Viejo.

The rock shelter where the Monasterio Viejo is built, perhaps used by Christian hermits as early as the 8th century, became a monastery in the 10th century, when the Mozarabic lower church was constructed.

The monastery emerged as the early spiritual and organisational centre of the medieval kingdom of Aragón. A Romanesque church was built above it in the late 11th century.

The first three kings of Aragón – Ramiro I (1036–64), Sancho Ramírez (1064–94) and Pedro I (1094–1104) – are among those buried at the Monasterio Viejo. The greatest highlight is the Romanesque **cloister**, with marvellous carved 12th- and 13th-century capitals depicting Genesis and the life of Christ.

A fire in 1675 led the monks to abandon the old monastery and build a new one in brick further up the hill. **Monasterio Nuevo** (☎ 10am–2pm & 4–7pm 16 Mar–31 May & 1 Sep–15 Oct, ☎ 10am–2.30pm & 4–8pm Jun & Aug, 11am–2pm & 4–5.30pm Tue–Sun 16 Oct–15 Mar) has been undergoing extensive restoration for some time. By 2007 its three buildings may have *parador*-style accommodation, a large visitors centre devoted to the Aragonese kings and an archaeology museum.

In Santa Cruz de la Serós, the 11th-century Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María** (☎ 10am–2pm & 4–7pm; admission €2) dominates the village. It has a stark beauty and you can climb the tower. **Hostelería Santa Cruz** (☎ 974 36 1975; www.santacruzdelaseros.com; Calle Ordana; r incl breakfast €51), near the church, is a beautiful place with friendly service and lovely rooms. Its restaurant serves mainly meat dishes (€7.50 to €15) and there's a good *menú del día* (€12).

VALLES DE ECHO & ANSÓ

The verdant Echo and Ansó valleys are mountain magic at its best. Old stone villages punctuate slopes of dense mixed woods of beech, pine, rowan, elm and hazel and, as the valleys narrow to the north, 2000m-plus peaks rise triumphantly at their heads. Go quietly through these beautiful valleys; they encourage a gentle touch and deserve a less conspicuous tourism than the more spectacular territory further east.

Most places to stay have good information on walking and exploring the area. Take a reasonable map/guide, such as Prames' *Ansó-Echo Aragüés-Jasa* or Alpina's *Ansó-Echo*.

A bus to Jaca leaves Ansó at 6.30am, Siresa at 6.53am and Echo at 7am, Monday to Saturday, returning from Jaca at 6.50pm. There are no buses further up either of the valleys. A road, improved and resurfaced in 2006, links the two villages, a distance of about 9.5km.

Echo (Hecho)

pop 650 / elevation 833m

Lovely Echo is a place to linger in, although you'll have company in the high season. It's the biggest village in the valley, an attractive warren of solid stone houses with steep roofs and flower-bedecked balconies. There's a charming artistic riff, in the form of street sculptures and a hillside sculpture park.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 974 37 55 05; www.valledehecho.net in Spanish; Carretera Oza s/n; ☎ 10am–1.30pm & 5.30–8pm Mon–Sat, ☎ 10am–2pm Sun Jul–Oct) is in a wonderful building that also contains the **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo**, a basement art gallery of changing exhibitions. The front of the building sports a cheerful mural and alongside is the **Museo de Escultura al Aire Libre**, a hillside sculpture park. At the heart of the village is the endearing **Museo Etnológico Casa Mazo** (Calle Aire; admission €1; ☎ 10.30am–1.30pm & 5–8pm), with displays on rural life including a terrific swathe of photographs of villagers from the 1920s and 1930s.

Echo has only a few sleeping options. **Casa Blasquico** (☎ 974 37 50 07; Plaza de la Fuente 1; r €45; ☎ usually closed 1st half Sep) has a half-dozen charming rooms, although they're right above the much-lauded and usually very busy **Restaurante Gaby**. **Hotel de la Val** (☎ 974 37 50 28; Cruz Alta 1; s/d €30/47), a big chalet-type lodging, also has a decent restaurant with a *menú del día* for €9. South of town, **Camping Valle de Hecho** (☎ 974 37 53 61; sites per adult/tent/car €4/4/4; 🚰) is a pleasant, well-kept camping ground.

Siresa & Around

pop 133 / elevation 850m

A couple of kilometres north of Echo, Siresa is another charming village. It boasts the formidable, 11th-century **Iglesia de San Pedro** (admission €1.50; ☎ 11am–1pm & 5–7pm, closed Wed afternoon),

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Usón (☎ 974 37 53 58; www.hoteluson.com in Spanish; s/d incl breakfast €45/60; ☎ Easter–Oct; 🚰 ☎) There's perfect peace in fabulous surroundings at this outstanding place, high in the Echo valley, 5km north of Siresa on the road to the Selva de Oza. Peace extends to the total absence of TVs; but there are great books in plenty. The restaurant offers excellent home-cooked meals.

which originally comprised part of one of Aragón's earliest monasteries.

Albergue Siresa (☎/fax 974 37 53 85; www.albergue-siresa.com in Spanish & French; Calle Reclusa s/n; bunks incl breakfast €12.50, sheets €1.50; ☎) is a cheerful hostel providing bunk-and-breakfast accommodation in clean conditions, with other meals available. It also rents mountain bikes (€12 per day) and has a library. **Hotel Castillo d'Acher** (☎ 974 37 53 13; www.castillodacher.com; Plaza Mayor; s/d €38/50) has a pleasant mix of rooms, some rather old-fashioned, others pine-clad and modern, but all spotless. It also has *casas rurales* (doubles €27) in the village. The big in-house restaurant does a good *menú del día* (€13.50).

Selva de Oza

This top end of the Valle de Echo is particularly beautiful, with the road running parallel to Río Aragón Subordán as it bubbles its way through thick woodlands. About 6km from Siresa is the **Centro de Interpretación del Megalitismo** (☎ 11am–2pm & 4.30–8.30pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 11am–2pm & 4–6.30pm mid-Sep–mid-Jun), with displays, in Spanish, about the prehistoric stone burial chambers that are located throughout the area. About 14km from Siresa the paved road ends, shortly after it connects with the GR11 path en route between Candanchú and Zuriza. At least half a dozen mountain peaks sit in an arc to the north for strenuous day ascents.

Ansó

pop 540 / elevation 860m

Ansó takes you even further into a world of high places and harmony. The rough-hewn stone houses here are in grey stone, their roofs are of red tiles. Some walls are whitewashed making a pleasing checker-board pattern. Forested slopes climb ever upwards from where Ansó straggles along a low escarpment above a partly covered streambed.

There's a car park before you turn up into the village. A grid of narrow streets surrounds the main square, Plaza Mayor, where there is a bank and ATM. The **tourist office** (☎ 974 37 02 25; Plaza Mayor; ☎ 9am–1.30pm & 5–8pm Easter & Jul–Sep) is in the town hall and has lots of information, but mainly in Spanish.

Adjoining the rough-walled church and seeming to grow out of it, the delightful **Posada Magoria** (☎ 974 37 00 49; Calle Milagros 32; s/d €35/48–53; 🚰) is crammed with character and lovingly kept

by a charming family with lots of local knowledge. In the kitchen *comedor* (dining room) you can enjoy an excellent €12 *menú* of organically sourced vegetarian dishes, while vegans are catered for too. At **Casa Baretón** (☎ 974 37 01 38; www.casabareton.com; Calle Pascual Altamir 16; s/d €27/41), the craftsman owner of this lovingly restored stone house has retained a number of old features to add to the general comfort and charm of the rooms.

Bar Zuriza (☎ 639 28 45 90; Mayor 71) is near the top end of the village in the main street and is popular place serving decent tapas.

SOS DEL REY CATÓLICO

pop 610 / elevation 625m

Born in this handsome hilltop village in 1452 was the other half of one of the most formidable double acts in history, Fernando II of Aragón. He and his wife, Isabel I of Castilla, became known as the Catholic Monarchs (Los Reyes Católicos). They conquered the last Muslim kingdom of Granada and united Spain and were patrons of Christopher Columbus – and of the dreaded Inquisition.

Sos, as the village is universally and unsurprisingly known, is 80km west of Jaca. The old medieval town is a glorious maze of twisting, cobbled lanes that wriggle between dark stone houses with deeply overhung eaves. On summer weekends and holidays Sos can be overrun with visitors.

There's a bank in Plaza del Mesón and a post office in Calle E Alfaro.

The keep of the **Castillo de la Peña Feliciano** crowns the hilltop, and the Gothic **Iglesia de San Esteban** (admission €1.50; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3.30–5.30pm) below it, with a weathered Romanesque portal, has a deliciously gloomy crypt with terrific frescoes and huge wooden birds as light holders.

Fernando is said to have been born in the **Casa Palacio de Sada**, now containing the **tourist office** (☎ 948 88 85 24; www.sosdelreycatolico.com in Spanish; Plaza Hispanidad; ☎ 10am–2pm & 4–8pm Jun–Aug, 10am–1pm & 4–7pm Wed–Fri, 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Sat & Sun Sep–May) and an **interpretive centre** (adult/child €2.40/1.20), with fine exhibits on the history of Sos and the life of the king. The admission price includes a tour of the adjoining San Martín de Tours chapel.

Sleeping & Eating

Albergue Juvenil Sos del Rey Católico (☎ 948 88 84 80; Calle Meca; per person under/over 26yr €13.50/17) Enjoy

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

As Bruixas (☎ 948 88 84 15; www.asbruixas.com in Spanish; Calle Mayor 25; s/d €40/50; ♿) Ironically named 'The Witches' by its charming management this terrific place has three rooms offering a refreshing blend of vivid style and comfort, with plump mattresses, gleaming bathtubs and boho objects fished out of thrift shops.

Its similarly postmodern dining room, with a view to swoon over, offers cuisine that gives traditional ingredients a fresh twist, whipping up dishes such as pigeon with prawns (€12.60) and mushroom-stuffed pigs' trotters (€10.60).

life in a restored medieval tower in superb modern conditions at this excellent hostel that has bright, stylish décor. Free bicycle rental is available, and all meals are served.

Fonda Fernandina (☎ 948 88 81 20; Plaza del Mesón s/n; s/d €18/35, half-board €28/54) At the south end of the village is this down-to-earth place with simple, but decent rooms and a popular restaurant that has a good *menú del día* of hearty country fare.

Parador de Sos del Rey Católico (☎ 948 88 80 11; Calle Arquitecto Sainz de Vicuña 1; s/d €103/129) A place that might just have pleased Los Reyes themselves, this grand building is modern, but its style fits with the rest of Sos.

Getting There & Away

A **Gomez** (☎ 976 67 55 29) bus from Zaragoza to Sos del Rey Católico (€8.50) departs from below the old El Portillo train station at 7pm Monday to Friday. It returns from Sos at 7am.

THE SOUTH

Flat by nature and flat by appeal, the vast sweeps of countryside immediately south of Zaragoza are either dreary plains or bald, uninviting ridges; however, head further south or southeast and you'll encounter a more dramatic landscape, along with some intriguing towns and villages. Among these are Teruel, a storehouse of some of the best Mudéjar architecture you'll find anywhere in the country, and tucked away in deep hill country above Rio Guadalaviar, is Albarracín, a medieval delight.

DAROCA

pop 2250

Daroca is something of a well-kept secret, hidden away as it is in central Aragón's often anonymous countryside. This one-time Muslim stronghold later became Christian Aragón's fortress town in the early medieval wars against Castilla. Its well-preserved old quarter is laden with historic references.

Daroca lies in a valley, neatly side-stepping the traffic torrent of the N234 Calatayud-Teruel highway that skirts it. Rocky hills stand above and on their crests are the crumbling remnants of once-extensive walls, which originally boasted 114 military towers. Coming from north or south, you slip quietly away from the highway and enter Calle Mayor, the cobbled main street, through monumental gates. About midway along and up to the west is the attractive main square, Plaza de España, dominated by the large Romanesque-cum-Mudéjar-cum-Renaissance **Iglesia Colegiata de Santa María**.

There's lots of enthusiasm at the **tourist office** (☎ 976 80 01 29; www.daroca.info; Plaza de España 4; ☎ 10.30am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm), where you can get excellent information, in several languages, including English, about walks round the town and along the old walls. There's free internet access too.

La Posada del Almudí (☎ 976 80 06 06; www.staragon.com/posadadelalmudi in Spanish; Grajera 5; s/d incl breakfast €42/60) was a one-time 16th-century palace and today is an attractive place to stay. Its comfy rooms retain some old features including big wooden beams. An attached restaurant offers good traditional cuisine.

Big meat dishes are the favourite at **Restaurante Legido** (☎ 976 80 01 90; Carretera 234, Km220; menú €10), a roadside eatery at the northern entrance to Daroca. It also has basic rooms (singles/doubles €20/35).

Buses stop outside the Mesón Félix bar, at Calle Mayor 104. Four buses a day, run to Zaragoza and Teruel, Monday to Saturday.

LAGUNA DE GALLOCANTA

Some 20km south of Daroca and a similar distance west of Calamocha on the N234, this is Spain's largest natural lake, with an area of about 15 sq km (though it can almost dry up in summer). It's a winter home for some 70,000 cranes and many other water fowl. A **Centro de Interpretación** (☎ 978 72 50 04; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Nov & Feb, Sat & Sun only rest of year), with information and exhibitions, is on the Tornos-Bello road

near the southeast corner of the lake where the cranes gather. Take binoculars.

TERUEL

pop 31,000 / elevation 917m

Too long dismissed as being outside Spain's mainstream renaissance, Teruel is fast re-asserting itself as a city with cultural attitude and economic potential. The culture and the history are palpable; this ancient capital on its hilltop site, above the flatlands of southern Aragón, boasts some of the most ornate and striking Mudéjar monuments in Spain. The city has several absorbing museums and the *casco viejo* (old town) supports a lively social and commercial life that complements all that antiquity.

History

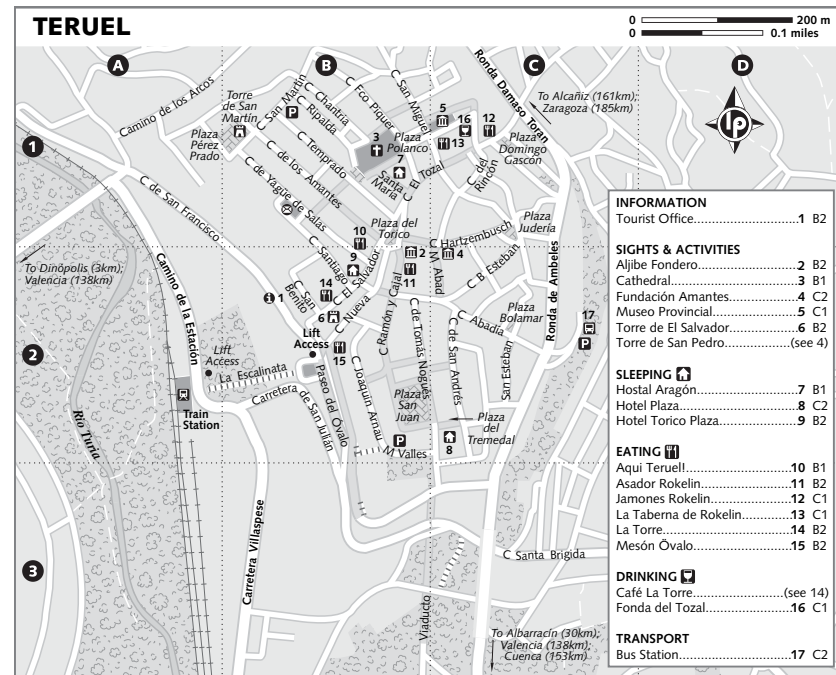
During the 11th century Teruel was briefly part of a Muslim *taifa* (small kingdom) based in nearby Albarracín. Taken for Christendom by Alfonso II of Aragón in 1171, it became an operational base for Jaime I of Aragón in his 1230s campaign to wrest Valencia from Muslim hands. When the Christians got round to

building monumental churches in the 13th and 14th centuries, they adorned several with the beautiful Mudéjar towers for which Teruel is now famous.

Orientation & Information

The train station is downhill on the western edge of the old town, and is reached by the grand staircase of the 1920 neo-Mudéjar La Escalinata, which descends from Paseo del Óvalo, or by a free lift alongside. The bus station is on higher ground on the eastern edge of town. From either it's a short walk into the town centre. Teruel's main square is Plaza del Torico, a lively focus of city life. From here the main street, Calle de Ramon y Cajal, leads to the big Plaza San Juan. Driving in town is quite complex. It's best to make for one of several signposted underground car parks.

Teruel's modern **tourist office** (☎ 978 64 14 61; Calle de San Francisco 1; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-7.30pm) is rather anonymous and not overwhelmingly helpful. It's about 100m to the north of the top of the Escalinata staircase and lift. There is an **internet facility** (per hr €1.50) at the bus station.



Sights

CATHEDRAL

Teruel's **cathedral** (☎ 978 61 80 16; Plaza de la Catedral; adult/child €3/2; 🕒 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Easter-Oct, 4-7pm Nov-Easter) is a rich example of the Mudéjar imagination at work with its kaleidoscopic brickwork and colourful ceramic tiles. The superb 13th-century bell tower has hints of the Romanesque in its detail. Inside, the coffered roof of the nave is covered with paintings that add up to a medieval cosmography – from musical instruments and hunting scenes to coats of arms and Christ's crucifixion.

FUNDACIÓN AMANTES

Teruel's flagship attraction is the redesigned **Mausoleo de los Amantes** and **Torre de San Pedro**, which under the umbrella of the **Fundación Amantes** (☎ 978 61 83 98; Calle Matías Abad 3; admission €5; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sep-Jul, 10am-8pm Aug; 🚰) pulls out the stops on the city's famous legend of Isabel and Diego, tragic 13th-century lovers who died of grief at seeing their love frustrated. The Mausoleum of the Lovers contains the mummified remains of the pair. They lie in modern alabaster tombs, sculpted by Juan de Ávalos with their heads tilted endearingly towards each other. Round this centrepiece has been shaped a remarkable audiovisual exhibition, featuring music, theatre and the world league of star-crossed duos, from Romeo and Juliet to Tristan and Isolde. It all skates very close to glorious kitsch, but is entirely persuasive. Part of the ambivalent charm is the complex menu of admission prices for various combinations of tower, church and exhibition.

TORRE DE EL SALVADOR

The most impressive of Teruel's other Mudéjar monuments is the **Torre de El Salvador** (☎ 978 60 20 61; Calle El Salvador; adult/child €2.50/1.80; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Easter-Oct, 11am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Nov-Easter), an early-14th-century extravaganza of brick and ceramics built around an older Islamic minaret. You climb the narrow stairways and passages occupying the gap between the inner and outer towers. Along the way, you'll find exhibits on Mudéjar art and architecture.

MUSEO PROVINCIAL

Teruel's **Provincial Museum** (☎ 978 60 01 50; Plaza Polanco; admission free; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is housed in the 16th-century Casa de la Comunidad, a fine work of Renaissance

architecture. The archaeological sections are a highlight, and there are changing exhibitions of contemporary art.

ALJIBE FONDERO

At the entrance to Plaza del Torico is the metrolike entrance to the **Aljibe** (☎ 978 61 99 03; Calle Ramón y Cajal; adult/child €1/0.60; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4.30-7pm), a fascinating 14th-century underground water-storage facility.

DINÓPOLIS

It's fun for all at this large, modern **dinosaur theme park** (☎ 902 44 80 00; www.dinopolis.com; adult/child €18/14; 🕒 10am-8pm Jul-mid-Sep, Wed-Sun only May & Jun, Fri-Sun Mar-Apr & Sep-mid-Oct). It's 3km from the town centre, well signposted just off the Valencia road. A highlight is 'El Ride', a motorised trip through time spiced up with animated dinosaur robots.

Festivals & Events

On the weekend closest to 14 February, thousands of Teruel's inhabitants don medieval dress for a gala event and a **re-enactment of the Diego and Isabel legend** (see left). The **Día de San Cristóbal** (St Christopher's Day, held on 10 July) is the hub of the week-long **Feria del Ángel**, which commemorates the founding of Teruel.

Sleeping

Hostal Aragón (☎ 978 61 18 77; Calle Santa María 4; s/d €24/42) An unassuming place with well-kept wood-panelled rooms and on a narrow side street. Booking at weekends and on holidays is advised.

Hotel Plaza (☎ 978 60 86 55; www.bacohoteles.com; Plaza del Tremedal 3; s/d €57/86; 🚰 🚰 🚰) Standard business comfort, but with a friendly vibe, makes this place, in a quiet location off Plaza San Juan, a good choice. There's a useful café-bar attached.

Hotel Torico Plaza (☎ 978 60 86 55; Calle de Yagüe de Salas 5; s/d incl breakfast €82/101; 🚰 🚰 🚰) Part of the same chain as the Hotel Plaza, this pricier place has similar facilities and is in the heart of town.

Eating

Landlocked Teruel is fairly devoted to meat eating and promotes its local *jamón* with enthusiasm.

Jamones Rokelin (Calle del Rincón 2) Up the street from La Taberna de Rokelin, here you can

load up with smoked meats, sausages and cheeses for a week's worth of picnics.

La Taberna de Rokelin (☎ 978 78 60 60; Calle El Tozal 33; tapa/ración of ham €3.50/12) A great rack of smoked pig hocks sets the pace at one of Teruel's best and most popular tapas bars. It's part of the Rokelin chain.

Aquí Teruel! (Calle de Yagüe de Salas 4; tapa/ración €3.50/12) Lots of choices at this quietly atmospheric place that runs the gamut of *jamón*, *chorizo* and *morcilla* (black pudding).

Asador Rokelin (☎ 978 60 93 63; Calle Ramón y Cajal 7; dishes €7-15) Yet more Rokelin at this useful sit-down restaurant that offers the whole range of meat dishes, but also does enormous salad plates with plentiful curls of *jamón*.

La Torre (☎ 978 61 73 76; Calle El Salvador; dishes €12-18) Right opposite the Torre de El Salvador, this smart restaurant with attached café (below) raises the stakes on style with its *nouveau cuisine Aragonesa*, with subtle dishes such as quail in a fruity sauce and cod with mushrooms.

Mesón Óvalo (☎ 978 61 82 35; Paseo del Óvalo 8; menú €11, main dishes €14-20; 🕒 closed Mon) There's a strong emphasis on regional Aragonesa cuisine at this pleasant place with meat and game dishes to the fore.

Drinking

Fonda del Tozal (Calle del Rincón 5) The cavernous ground-floor bar is a rough-and-ready old place in which to unwind. It was formerly the stables of a very old inn. There are exuberant rock bands at weekends.

Café La Torre (☎ 978 61 73 76; Calle El Salvador) Part of the restaurant complex of the same name, this stylish place has a lively morning scene and is also good for late-night drinks, especially in the upstairs bar with its views of the Torre de El Salvador opposite.

Getting There & Away

From Teruel's **bus station** (☎ 978 61 07 89), Tezasa runs up to five buses daily to/from Zaragoza (€9, 2½ hours). Samar runs five buses to/from Valencia (€8.40, 2¼ hours) most days, and four buses to/from Madrid (€17.50, 4½ hours). La Rápida offers service to/from Barcelona (€23.70, six hours) and Cuenca (€8.70) daily, except Sunday. For more local services see destination sections.

Teruel is on the railway between Zaragoza (€11.35, three hours) and Valencia (€10.20, 2½ hours), with three trains each way daily.

RINCÓN DE ADEMUZ

Heading south from Teruel, the N330 crosses Sierra de la Matanza and enters the 'Ademuz Corner', a mountainous detached piece of Valencia province between the provinces of Teruel and Cuenca (Castilla-La Mancha). It makes a picturesque alternative route between Teruel town and Valencia or Cuenca provinces. The most spectacular stretch is the rough and winding 17km of the old N330A, south of the town of Ademuz to Santa Cruz de Moya. Starting along the deepening gorge of the upper Río Turia, the road crosses into Castilla-La Mancha in quite spectacular fashion. This section (and Ademuz town itself) is bypassed by the main N330, so you need to head into Ademuz via Torrebaja at the junction of the N330 and the N420, or, if coming from the south through Manzanerueta to Santa Cruz de Moya.

The N420 west from the Rincón de Ademuz skirts the southern hills of the Serranía de Cuenca en route to Cuenca.

Hostal Casa Domingo (☎ 978 78 20 30; Avenida Valencia 1; s/d €32/55), in Ademuz, has well-kept, comfy rooms and there's a restaurant attached. Buses to/from Teruel (one a day, except Sunday and holidays) and Valencia (twice daily) stop outside.

ALBARRACÍN

pop 1060 / elevation 1180m

It takes time to get to Albarracín, 38km west of Teruel, but it's worth it, not least for the marvellous sense of timelessness that is still patent in this lovely hill town, in spite of the modern onslaught of summer coach tours and fellow travellers. Built on a steep, rocky height carved out by a meander of Río Guadalaviar, Albarracín was, from 1012 to 1104, the seat of a tiny Islamic state ruled by the Berber Banu Razin dynasty. From 1170 to 1285 it was an independent Christian kingdom sandwiched between Castilla and Aragón. Ragged, fortress walls still rise up the surrounding slopes and the town's streets retain their mazelike charm, with centuries-old buildings leaning over them.

Information

There are a couple of banks, one with an ATM behind an iron grill, just off Plaza Mayor.

Post office (Calle de la Catedral)

Tourist office (☎ 978 71 02 51; www.albarracin.org;

Calle Diputación 4; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun except Sun afternoon) In the Casa de la Sierra, at the top of the approach steps that lead up from the car park.

Sights

The **cathedral** (☎ 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm except Sun afternoon, until 8pm Jul-Sep), with its cupola typical of the Spanish Levant, has an elaborate gilded altarpiece. The **Palacio Episcopal** (Bishop's Palace), to which it's connected, houses the **Museo Diocesano** (admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm except Sun afternoon, until 8pm Jul-Sep), with 16th-century paintings, tapestries, and religious *objets d'art*.

The **Museo de Albarracín** (Calle San Juan; admission €2; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 4-5.30pm except Sun afternoon), in the old city hospital, is devoted to the town's Islamic heritage.

The castle, near the southern end of town, and the **Torre del Andador** (Walkway Tower), at the top of the walls at the north, both date from the 9th century, when Albarracín was already an important Muslim military post. Walk up to the Torre del Andador for fine panoramas, then just enjoy exploring the streets. Nearly every brick, stone, slab of concrete and slap of mortar in the place is in some earthy shade of red or pink, making for wonderful plays of colour, particularly in the evening.

Tours

El Andador (☎ 667 26 06 01) conducts 1½-hour walks through Albarracín's medieval core for €3.50, departing from outside the tourist office at 11am, 12.45pm and 4.30pm.

Sleeping & Eating

For weekends in summer and all holiday times it's worth booking ahead.

Camping Ciudad de Albarracín (☎ 978 71 01 97; www.campingalbarracin.com; sites per person/tent/car €3/3/3; ☎ Apr-Oct) Pleasant, small and shaded, the camping ground is 2km from the heart of Albarracín, off the Bezas road. It also has timbered four-person chalets for €55.

Habitaciones Los Palacios (☎ 978 70 03 27; www.montepalacios.com in Spanish; Calle Los Palacios 21; s/d €25/40) This charming place has spotless rooms, some with balconies and gorgeous views. It's about 250m from Plaza Mayor, starting along Calle de Santiago and exiting through Portal de Molina. If driving from the Teruel direction, pass through the tunnel under the town and take the first road up to the right.

Hotel Mesón del Gallo (☎ 978 71 00 32; Calle de los Puentes 8; s/d €30/40) Below the main town, and just below the tunnel entrance, these adequate rooms do not enjoy the full Albarracín charm, and are above a restaurant.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Casa de Santiago (☎ 978 70 03 16; www.casa-desantiago.net; Subida a las Torres 11; s/d €48/64) A beautiful place, with lots of exposed wood, tiled floors and with charming service to go with it, the Casa lies at the heart of the old town a few steps up from Plaza Mayor. You step off the street into an immediate comfort zone. The restaurant has a *menú* for €18.

Posada del Adarve (☎ 978 70 03 04; www.posada-adarve.com; Calle Portal de Molina 23; s €33, d €45-70) A typical Albarracín townhouse, this place has been lovingly restored and is by the Portal de Molina (Molina Gateway). Its five rooms are stylish and comfy.

La Taberna (☎ 978 70 03 17; Plaza Mayor 6; platos combinados €6-9) Standard mountain fare, including wild boar and other game, is on offer at this central eatery.

All the accommodation options have restaurants offering *menús* from €10 to €14.

Getting There & Away

Autotransportes Teruel buses leave daily, except Sunday, from Teruel for Albarracín (30 minutes) at 3.30pm, and from Albarracín for Teruel at 8.45am.

EL RODENO

The back road leading southeast from Albarracín towards Bezas passes near a series of Neolithic rock paintings of bulls, horses and deer, known as the **Conjunto de Arte Rupestre del Rodeno**, among boulder-strewn countryside. There are 12 lots of paintings in total, in five groups. Five key trails, varying in distance from 2.2km to 15km, traverse the zone; the Albarracín **tourist office** (☎ 978 71 02 51; www.albarracin.org; Calle Diputación 4; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun except Sun afternoon) gives out maps and information.

THE SOUTHEAST

The sparsely populated ranges stretching east of Teruel into the Valencia region present a bleached maze of rocky peaks and dramatic gorges, among which the quiet and ancient stone *pueblos* (villages) seem to be left to their own devices. This is wonderful country for exploring, well off the beaten track, but unless you have a lot of time, you need a vehicle.

Buses serve most places, but rarely more than once daily and often not at all on weekends.

A worthwhile route from Teruel for those with their own transport leads 43km southeast to **Mora de Rubielos** in the foothills of the Sierra de Gudar. A massive 14th-century **castle** (admission €1.30; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun) towers over the village amid a sea of red and pink stone. Across the way is the 15th-century Gothic **Ex-Colegiata de Santa María**, notable for its single very broad nave.

Another 14km southeast along the A232 is pretty **Rubielos de Mora**, a quiet web of narrow streets whose houses have typically small Aragonese balconies. The friendly **Hotel Los Leones** (☎ 978 80 44 77; www.losleones.info in Spanish; Plaza Igual y Gil 3; s/d €72/105) has attractive period décor and comfortable rooms, and has a fine restaurant with a €27 *menú*.

In the north of the region is **La Iglesia del Gid**. Here you have entered El Maestrazgo, a medieval knightly domain centred on Sant Mateu (p607) in Castellón province. La Iglesia is worth a quick visit to see its church and old town hall, sharing a tight little medieval plaza with the classy **Hospedería de la Iglesia del Gid** (☎ 964 44 34 76; Ondevilla 4; s/d €83/118; P) (☎) in an 18th-century mansion. At **Casa Amada** (☎ 964 44 33 73; Fuentesueva 10; s/d €25/39) you'll find simple accommodation and a good restaurant.

Cantavieja, 13km northwest of La Iglesia, was reputedly founded by Hannibal. It later became a seat of the Knights Templar. The best-preserved (and partly restored) part of town is the porticoed Plaza Cristo Rey. A decent stopover is **Pensión Julián** (☎ 964 18 50

05; Calle García Valiño 6; d with/without bathroom €27/18) where you enter through a cavernous old carriage yard. There are decent home-cooked meals available.

If you're heading for Morella in the Valencian Maestrazgo, the A226 northeast of Cantavieja will take you, snaking down past ragged cliffs and then via **Mirambel**, a fine example of a gently decaying, walled medieval town without the usual modern-day additions. For an overnight stay **Hostal Guimerá** (☎ 964 17 82 69; Calle Pastor 28; s/d €24/30, without bathroom €15/20) has simple rooms and simple, but filling, meals.

Getting There & Away

One of the more useful bus services is the 3pm Monday-to-Friday bus from Teruel to La Iglesia del Gid (€7.65, two hours) via Cantavieja (€6.75, 1½ hours). In the opposite direction, the bus departs from La Iglesia at 6.15am. Another Monday-to-Friday bus leaves Cantavieja at 5.45am bound for Morella via Mirambel. Yet another early morning weekday bus journeys from Cantavieja to Villarluengo and Alcorisa, where you can connect for Alcañiz (see p448).

CALANDA

From Teruel, the N420 heads north through mountainous terrain, reaching the foggy heights of pass Puerto San Just (1400m) before descending to meet the east-west N211 which leads to Calanda, at the confluence of Rios Guadalupe and Guadalopillo. The chief reason to visit Calanda is the **Centro Buñuel Calanda** (☎ 978 84 65 24; Calle Mayor 48; admission €5; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm

LUIS BUÑUEL & THE DRUMS OF CALANDA

Luis Buñuel's earliest memories were of the drums of Calanda. In the centuries-old ritual of the lower Aragón town, the film director's birthplace, Good Friday noon marks the *rompida de la hora* (breaking of the hour). At that moment thousands commence banging on *tambores* (snare drums) and *bombos* (bass drums), together producing a thunderous din. The ceremony goes on for the next 24 hours, only ceasing for the passage of the standard Easter processions. The drumming rages all over the region with drum parades at Alcañiz also.

'The drums, that amazing, resounding, cosmic phenomenon that brushes the collective subconscious, causes the earth to tremble beneath our feet', Buñuel recalls in his memoir, *Mi Último Suspiro* (My Last Sigh). 'One has only to place his hand on the wall of a house to feel the vibrations. Nature follows the rhythm...which goes on all night. Anyone who manages to fall asleep, lulled by the banging, awakes with a start when the sound trails off. At dawn, the drum skins are stained with blood: hands bleed after so much banging. And these are the rough hands of peasants.'

This clamour worked its way into Buñuel's dreams and nightmares, and eventually into his surreal films; the drums left their imprint, along with a taste for ritual, costumes and disguises.

Tue-Sun), a museum devoted to the life and films of Luis Buñuel. The museum tries to remain faithful to the surrealist spirit of the Calanda native (see the boxed text, p447), cleverly weaving images from his oeuvre into the tour. For true aficionados, a filmography room has computers with details of all 32 of Buñuel's films, accompanied by screenings of key scenes and commentary by the director. The décor throughout is bright and colourful.

The museum is 500m from the bus stop on the edge of town. Look for Plaza de España and follow Calle Mayor three or four blocks east.

Calanda is served by buses (€7.10, two hours) from Teruel and Alcañiz.

ALCAÑIZ

Alcañiz is the administrative centre for lower Aragón and is fairly overwhelmed by commerce, although it's an engagingly busy town and useful for an overnight stop if you're head-

ing north or south. The huge castle is now a *parador*. A series of vivid, intricately detailed murals dating from the 14th century cover the walls of the **keep** (admission €4.50; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm, later in summer), which can be ascended for views.

The monumental **Iglesia de Santa María La Mayor** dwarfs the central Plaza de España and has a huge baroque portal. A **tourist office** (☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm except Sun afternoon) gives access to 'hidden Alcañiz', a series of **underground passages** (admission €2) that was used as store-rooms and ice store.

Of a dozen lodgings, **Hostal Aragón** (☎ 978 87 07 17; Calle Espejo 3; s/d €30/50) is an excellent, central choice – a tall, old house with sturdy balconies.

Up to four buses travel daily to/from Zaragoza, and two stop here (€8.90, 2½ hours) en route between Teruel and Barcelona. Look immediately for signposted underground car parks if you're driving.