

# Catalonia



From metropolitan Barcelona spreads a land of such diversity that, although its furthest-flung corner is no more than 200km away, you could spend weeks dissecting it and still feel you'd barely begun. The Costa Brava, blighted by dreary pockets of mass tourism, still boasts much of the wild beauty that first drew visitors here. Just inland are the medieval city of Girona and Figueres, home of the 'theatre-museum' of that city's zany son, Salvador Dalí.

Running across the north, the Pyrenees rise to mighty 3000m peaks from a series of green and often remote valleys, dotted with villages that retain a palpable rural and even medieval air. These mountains provide some excellent walking and skiing. Enchanting Romanesque churches are scattered across the valleys of the north.

Excitement runs thinner in the far west and south, but there's enough to keep you exploring for days, from the wetlands of the Ebro delta to the historic cities of Tarragona and Lleida. Strike out and you'll discover grand medieval monasteries, lush vineyards and hilltop villages.

Throughout Catalonia (Catalunya in Catalan, Cataluña in Castilian Spanish) the sense of difference from the rest of Spain is intense, not only in the use of Catalan (although everyone speaks Castilian too) but in the festivals, cuisine and reminders of the region's unique history.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Chill out on the Costa Brava coves and beaches near **Palafrugell** (p346) or **Begur** (p347)
- Discover the magical village of **Cadaqués** (p356) and nearby **Port Lligat**, haunted by the memory of Salvador Dalí
- Contemplate the absurd with a visit to the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** (p359) in Figueres
- Conquer the trails of the **Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici** (p375)
- Take the *cremallera* (rack-and-pinion railway) up to **Vall de Núria** (p366)
- Ski the region's premier slopes at **Baqueira-Beret** (p380)
- Explore the compact medieval city centre of **Girona** (p349)
- Contemplate Spain and France from atop the region's highest mountain, **Pica d'Estats** (p365)
- Seek out the Romanesque churches around **Boi** and **Tauill** (p376)
- Wander the monastery complex of the **Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet** (p383)



■ AREA: 32,113 SQ KM    ■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 30°C, LOW 22°C    ■ POP: 6.99 MILLION



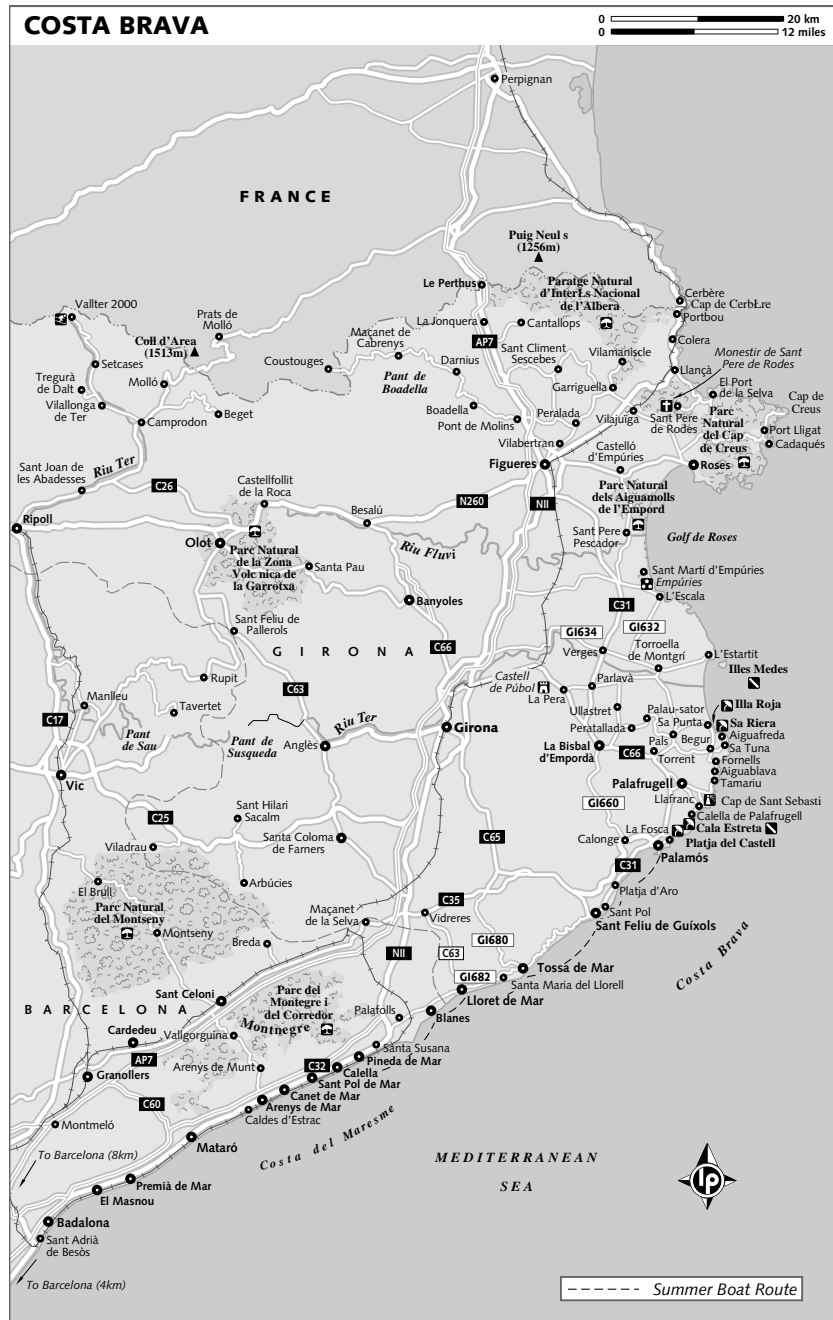
## COSTA BRAVA

The Costa Brava (stretching from Blanes to the French border) ranks with the Costa Blanca and Costa del Sol as one of Spain's three great holiday coasts. But alongside some occasionally awful concrete development, English breakfasts and *Konditoreien* (pastry shops), the 'Rugged Coast' has some spectacular stretches.

Nestling in the hilly back country – green and covered in umbrella pine in the south, barer and browner in the north – are scattered charming stone villages, the towering monastery of St Pere de Rodes and Salvador Dalí's fantasy castle home at Púbol. A little further inland are the bigger towns of Girona (Castilian: Gerona),

with a sizable and strikingly well preserved medieval centre, and Figueres (Castilian: Figueras), famous for its bizarre Teatre-Museu Dalí, the foremost of a series of sites associated with the eccentric surrealist artist Salvador Dalí.

The ruggedness of the Costa Brava continues under the sea and has some of the best diving in Spain. Diving centres with certified instructors operate at a dozen or more places. The Illes Medes, off L'Estartit, are protected islets with probably the most diverse sealife along the Spanish coast. Other top diving spots include the Illes Formigues (rocky islets off the coast between Palamós and Calella de Palafrugell with waters down to 45m) and Els Ullastres, which has three underwater hills off Llafranc, with some sheer walls and depths to 54m.



## Getting There & Away

Direct buses from Barcelona go to most towns on or near the Costa Brava. The railway between Barcelona and the coastal border town of Portbou runs inland, through Girona and Figueres, most of the way. From Girona and Figueres there are fairly good bus services to the coast.

In summer, you could take an alternative approach to the southern Costa Brava from Barcelona by a combination of *rodalies* (local trains) and boat.

The AP7 *autopista* (tollway) and the toll-free NII Hwy both run from Barcelona via Girona and Figueres to the French border, a few kilometres north of La Jonquera. The C32 *autopista* follows the NII up the coast as far as Blanes.

## TOSSA DE MAR

pop 5260

Curving around a boat-speckled bay and guarded by a headland crowned with defensive medieval walls and towers, Tossa de Mar is a village of crooked, narrow streets onto which tourism has tacked a larger, modern extension. In July and August it's hard to reach the water's edge without tripping over oily limbs, but it is heaven compared with Lloret de Mar 12km southeast – a real concrete and neon jungle of Piccadilly pubs, *Bierkeller* and soccer chants.

Tossa was one of the first places on the Costa Brava to attract foreign visitors – a small colony of artists and writers gravitated towards what painter Marc Chagall dubbed 'Blue Paradise' in the 1930s.

## Orientation & Information

The bus station is beside the GI682, where it leaves for Lloret de Mar. The main beach, Platja Gran, and the older part of town are a 10-minute walk southeast.

The tourist information office (☎ 972 34 01 08; www.infotossa.com; Avinguda del Pelegrí 25; h 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-May & Oct, 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is next to the bus station.

## Old Tossa

The walls and towers on the pine-dotted headland, Mont Guardi, at the end of the main beach, were built between the 12th and 14th centuries. The area they girdle is known as the Vila Vella (Old Town). When wandering around Mont Guardi you will come across vestiges of a castle, and the Far de Tossa (lighthouse;

☎ 972 34 12 97; adult/child €3/1.50; h 10am-10pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr). Inside there is an imaginative 20-minute walk-through display on the history of lighthouses and life inside them. Next door is a great bar (see p345).

In the lower part of Vila Vella, the **Museu Municipal** (☎ 972 34 07 09; Plaça de Roig i Soler 1; adult/student & senior €3/1.80; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun-Mon Jun-mid-Oct, to 2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, to 3pm Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun), set in the 14th- and 15th-century Palau del Batlle, has mosaics and other finds from a Tossa-roman villa, off Avinguda del Pelegrí, and Tossa-related art including Chagall's *El Violinista*.

A tangle of 18th-century lanes, Vila Nova (New Town) stretches away from the old nucleus. Further north, northwest and northeast spreads the sprawl of the really new town.

## Beaches & Coves

The main town beach, Platja Gran, tends to be busy. Further north along the same bay are the quieter and smaller Platja del Reig and Platja Mar Menuda at the end of Avinguda de Sant Ramon Penyafor. The coast to the northeast and southwest of Tossa is dotted by rocky coves, some with small beaches. You can walk cross-country from Tossa to Cala Levado and Cala d'En Carles beaches, 3km southwest, or the longer Platja de Llorell (3.5km away), or drive down to Platja de Llorell from the GI682. To the northeast, you can walk down from the GI682 to sandy coves such as Cala Pola (4km), Cala Giverola (5km), Cala Salions (8km) and Platja Vallpregona (11km).

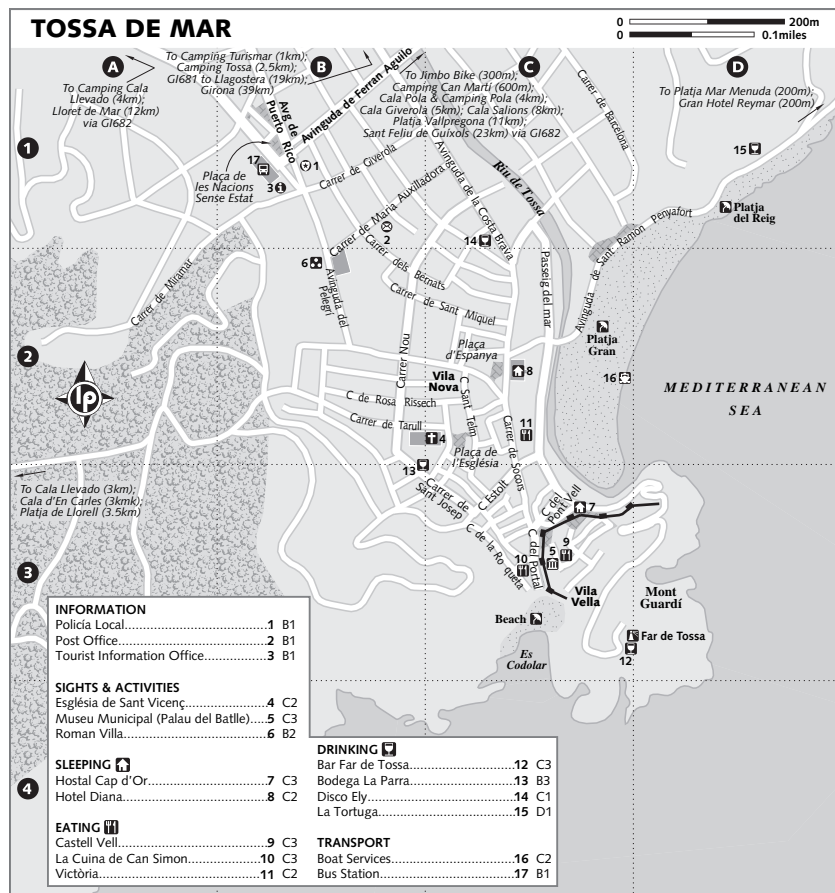
In summer (Easter to September), glass-bottomed boats (☎ 972 34 22 29; return adult/3-12yr/under 3yr €10/6/free) run about hourly to some of these northeastern beaches from Platja Gran, calling in at a few sea caves along the way. You have the option of spending the day at Cala Giverola (a pleasant sandy cove with a couple of restaurants and bars) and returning on a later boat.

## Sleeping

Tossa has around 70 hotels, *hostales* (budget hostels) and *pensiones* (small private hotels). You'll find all of them open from Semana Santa (Easter) to October, but only a handful outside those months.

## CAMPING

Five camping grounds are spread out around the town. The nearest is **Camping Can Martí** (☎ 972 34 08 51; www.canmarti.org; Rambla Pau Casals; sites per 2-person tent & car €28; h late May-mid-Sep; Ⓟ), 1km back from the beach and well equipped.



Of the others, **Camping Cala Llevadó** (9 972 34 03 14; www.calallevado.com; Cala Llevadó; sites per 2-person tent & car €31.60; h May-Sep; p s ) is probably the best. It stretches back from a cove 4km southwest of Tossa in the settlement of Santa Maria de Llorell. This high-quality facility, apart from its shady camping spots and prime location near a pretty beach, offers tennis courts, a pool, a restaurant, shops and bars.

The remaining ones, should you get stuck, are **Camping Tossa**, **Camping Turismar** and **Camping Pola**. The latter is 4km out of town on a cove below the winding road northeast of Tossa.

#### HOSTALES & HOTELS

**Hostal Cap d'Or** (9 972 34 00 81; Passeig de la Vila Vella 1; s/d incl breakfast €38/72) Rub up against the town's

history in this spot right in front of the walls. Rooms are comfortable and the best look straight onto the beach.

**Hotel Diana** (9 972 34 18 86; www.hotelesdante.com; Plaça d'Espanya 6; s/d €76/121, d with sea views €146; h Apr-Nov; a ) You'll relax simply on entering this small-scale, older hotel fronting **Platja Gran**. It has a Gaudí-built fireplace in the lounge and oozes Modernista décor and stained glass in the central covered courtyard. Prices include a buffet breakfast.

**Gran Hotel Reyomar** (9 972 34 03 12; www.bestwesternreyomar.com; Platja de Mar Menuda; r up to €248; h May-Oct; p a s ) This is the top place in town and it's a typical large-scale, multi-star job. The rooms are comfortable and many have terraces offering stunning views out to

sea. You can pamper yourself in the pools and massage facilities of the rather misnamed **Dynamic Center**.

#### Eating

**Victoria** (9 972 34 01 66; Passeig del Mar 23; mains €20-25) This eternal waterfront favourite is popular for its no-nonsense seafood cuisine. Try for a table with windows looking out to sea. Several other cheerful restaurants line this esplanade.

**Castell Vell** (9 972 34 10 30; Carrer del Abat Oliva 1; mains €30; h Tue-Sun May-Oct) This rustic stone house lurks within the walls of the old town. Take your meal, which ranges from local cuisine to more-international fare, on the terrace. Seafood predominates.

**La Cuina de Can Simon** (9 972 34 12 69; Carrer del Portal 24; mains €50-60; h Wed-Mon) Tossa's culinary star (Michelin says so!) nestles by the old walls in a former fisherman's stone house. It serves an imaginative array of Mediterranean cuisine mixed in with traditional Catalan seaside cooking. Expect an enticing parade of *amuse-gueules* followed by exquisitely prepared mains (such as *suquet de salmonetes de roca con ajo tostado*, a mullet stew with toasted garlic) and good wines from around Spain.

#### Drinking & Entertainment

Many of the old town's lively bars, some with music, are along and near **Carrer de Sant Josep**. **Bodega La Parra** (Carrer de Sant Josep 26; h 9pm-3am Apr-Oct) manages to maintain an old-fashioned wine-cellar atmosphere. Next to the lighthouse, **Bar Far de Tossa** (9 972 34 12 97; h 10am-10pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-Apr) is a groovy little bar with outdoor terrace and the best place for a morning coffee or sunrise wine. Light meals are also provided and the place is wi-fi wired.

For some sensual salsa and rumba sounds, head for the waterfront **La Tortuga** (Avinguda de Sant Ramon de Penyafort 11; h 8pm-3am Fri-Sun Apr-Jun, nightly Jul-Aug). **Disco Ely** (9 972 34 00 09; Carrer de Pola; h 10pm-5am Apr-Oct), one of a handful of clubs in town, puts on a wide range of mainstream dance music and plays some house in the mix.

#### Getting There & Away

##### BOAT

From April to October **Dolfi-Jet** (9 972 37 19 39) runs boats several times a day between Calella, Blanes, Lloret de Mar and Tossa de Mar (one to 1½ hours), with stops at a few points en route. You could catch one of the *rodalies*

from Barcelona's Catalunya station to Calella or Blanes, then transfer to the boat. The return trip to Tossa from Calella costs €21. In many places the boats simply pull up at the beach (in Tossa, at **Platja Gran**) and tickets are sold at a booth there. From June to September a couple of other companies also kick in, some extending the route as far northeast of Tossa as Sant Feliu de Guixols.

##### BUS

**Sarfa** (9 902 30 20 25; www.sarfa.com) runs to and from Barcelona's Estació del Nord up to 11 times daily via Lloret de Mar (€8.95, 1¼ hours). Otherwise there is only a handful of summer connections to Girona and Sant Feliu de Guixols.

##### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

From Barcelona, the **C32 autopista**, which takes you almost to Blanes, saves a weary trudge on the toll-free A2. To the north, the 23km stretch of the G1682 to Sant Feliu de Guixols is a great drive, winding its way up, down and around picturesque bays.

#### Getting Around

**Jimbo Bike** (9 972 34 30 44; Avinguda de Pau Casals 12; h 9am-9pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat mid-Sep-Nov & Easter-mid-Jun) rents out mountain bikes for up to €21 for 24 hours.

#### SANT FELIU DE GUÍXOLS

pop 20,320

A snaking road hugs the spectacular ups and downs of the Costa Brava for the 23km from Tossa de Mar to Sant Feliu de Guixols. On this road Rose Macaulay, author of *Fabled Shore* (1950), 'met only one mule cart, laden with pine boughs, and two very polite *guardias civiles*'. Along the way are several enticing little inlets and largely hidden beaches.

Sant Feliu itself has an attractive waterside promenade and a handful of curious leftovers from its long past, the most important being the so-called **Porta Ferrada** (Iron Gate): a wall and entrance, which is all that remains of a 10th-century monastery, the **Monestir de Sant Benet**. A couple of nice-enough beaches can be found on either side of the town.

Sarfa buses call in here frequently (up to 16 from Easter to September) from Barcelona (€11.45, 1½ hours), on the way to **Platja d'Aro** or **Palafrugell** or both. They do *not* follow the coast road.

## PLATJA D'ARO & PALAMÓS

These spots mark the two ends of one of the Costa Brava's party spots. The beaches are OK, the high-rises are standard issue and the nightlife is busy. The area tends to attract more Spanish tourism than foreign. Around the main broad beaches and their resorts are some magnificent stretches of coast with enticing coves. Both are stops on the frequent Barcelona–Palafrugell Sarfa bus route (€11.80 and €12.65 respectively, 1½ hours to Platja d'Aro and 15 minutes more to Palamós).

The 2km-long Platja d'Aro beach is big and sandy, but for something more secluded you could head north along the GRS92 coastal walking path, which winds along the high leafy coastline for about 4km to Sant Antoni de Calonge. The first beach you hit is Platja Rovira, and soon after, the smaller and more enchanting Sa Cova. A little further on again are two small nudist coves, Platja d'en Ros and Platja d'es Canyars.

If you should end up in Palamós and wonder how it happened, all is not lost. Again you can pick up the GR92 trail and head north for Platja del Castell, a virtually untouched strand. If you don't fancy the walk, drive out of Palamós heading for Palafrugell and look for the signs that lead right to the beach. Two kilometres of partly unsealed road get you there. The northern end of the beach is capped by a high wooded promontory that hides the 'castle' (the remains of a 6th- to 1st-century-BC Iberian settlement) after which the beach is named.

## PALAFRUGELL & AROUND

North of Palamós begins one of the most beautiful stretches of the Costa Brava. The town of Palafrugell, 5km inland, is the main access point for a cluster of enticing beach spots. Calella de Palafrugell, Llafranc and Tamariu, one-time fishing villages squeezed into small bays, now constitute three of the Costa Brava's most charming, low-key resorts.

Begur (opposite), 7km northeast of Palafrugell, is an interesting village with a cluster of less developed beaches nearby. Inland, seek out the charming villages of Pals and Peratallada.

### Palafrugell

pop 17,420

Palafrugell is the main transport, shopping and service hub for the area but is of little interest in itself. The C66 Palamós–Girona road passes through the western side of Palafrugell,

a 10-minute walk from the main square, Plaça Nova. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 30 02 28; www.palafrugell.net/turisme; Carrer del Carrilet 2; h 9am–9pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jul–Aug, 9am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun May–Jun & Sep, 9am–1pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Oct–Apr) is beside the C66 Hwy. The **bus station** (Carrer de Torres Jonama 67–9) is a short walk from the tourist office.

Sarfa runs to Palafrugell from Barcelona up to 16 times daily (€13.70, two hours). Many buses also run between Girona and Palafrugell (€4.55, one hour if you get the most direct service).

### Calella de Palafrugell

pop 420

The southernmost of the Palafrugell resorts, Calella is also the most spread out. Its low buildings are strung Aegean-style around a bay of rocky points and small beaches, with a few fishing boats still hauled up on the sand. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 61 44 75; Carrer de les Voltes 4; h 10am–1pm & 5–9pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jul–Aug; 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Apr–Jun & Sep–mid-Oct) is near the seafront.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Apart from plonking on one of the beaches, you can stroll along pretty coastal footpaths northeast to Llafranc (20 or 30 minutes), or south to Platja del Golfet beach, close to Cap Roig (about 40 minutes). Atop Cap Roig, the **Jardi Botànic de Cap Roig** (☎ 972 61 45 82; admission €4; h 9am–8pm Jun–Sep, to 6pm Oct–May) is a beautiful garden of 1200 Mediterranean species, set around the early-20th-century castle-palace of Nikolai Voevodsky. He was a tsarist colonel with expensive tastes, who fell out of grace in his homeland after the Russian Revolution.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Calella stages the Costa Brava's biggest summer *cantada* de havaneres. *Havaneres* are melancholy Caribbean sea shanties that became popular among Costa Brava sailors in the 19th century, when Catalonia maintained busy links with Cuba. These folksy concerts are traditionally accompanied by the drinking of *cremat* – a rum, coffee, sugar, lemon and cinnamon concoction that you set alight briefly before quaffing. Traditionally, Calella's *cantada* is held in August.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Camping Moby Dick** (☎ 972 61 43 07; www.campingmobydick.com; Carrer de la Costa Verde 16–28; sites per

2-person tent & car €21; h Apr–Sep; p s ) Set in a pine-and-oak stand about 100m from the seaside, this camping ground is in an ideal location. It has tennis courts and offers the chance of diving in the area.

**Hotel La Torre** (☎ 972 61 46 03; www.hotel-latorre.com; Passeig de la Torre 28; s/d €59/115; h Apr–Sep; p ) Dominating a high point on the road leading north out of Calella, and in a leafy spot near an old watchtower, this hotel offers 28 rooms, most with extensive sea views and cheery balconies.

**Restaurant Tragamar** (☎ 972 61 51 89; mains €25; h lunch only Mon, Wed & Thu, lunch & dinner Fri–Sun) A little north of the arcaded seaside Plaça de Port Bo, on a separate beach, Platja Canadell, the Tragamar serves up tapas and seafood. The *escamarlans gratinats amb pasta fresca* (crayfish with a light cheese crust and fresh pasta) is typical of their original approach to dishes.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses from Palafrugell run to Calella, then Llafranc, then back to Palafrugell (€1.20, 30 minutes). They leave every half-hour or so between 7.40am and 8.30pm in July and August; the service is steadily reduced to three or four buses a day from November to February.

### Llafranc

pop 170

Barely 2km northeast of Calella de Palafrugell, and now merging with it along the roads back from the rocky coast between them, Llafranc has a smaller bay but a longer stretch of sand and gets more crowded. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 30 50 08; Carrer de Roger de Llúria; h 10am–1pm & 5–9pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jul–Aug, 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Apr–Jun & Sep–mid-Oct) is a kiosk just back from the western end of the beach.

From the **Far de Sant Sebastià** (a lighthouse) and **Ermita de Sant Sebastià** (a chapel now incorporated into a luxury hotel), up on Cap de Sant Sebastià (east of the town), there are tremendous views in both directions along the coast. It's a 40-minute walk up: follow the steps from the harbour and the road up to the right. You can walk on to Tamariu.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hostal Celimar** (☎ 972 30 13 74; www.hostalcelimar.com; Carrer de Carudo 12–14; s/d €38/60) The sunset yellow *hostal* is barely a stumble from the beach and offers bright rooms, with differing colour schemes from room to room, and spotless

bathrooms. One of the cheapest deals in town, it also happens to be one of the best.

**Hotel Far de Sant Sebastià** (☎ 972 30 16 39; www.elfar.net; d €267–321; p a ) A fine old 18th-century hostelry, with a chapel and a defence tower, has been converted into an elegant hotel with magnificent clifftop sea views. The best rooms come with a spacious terrace. Grand stone arches and sunny courtyards add a romantic touch and the fine dining in the hotel restaurant is another draw.

**Chez Tomás** (☎ 972 30 62 15; Carrer de Lluís Marqués Carbo 2; mains €25–30; h dinner only daily Jun–Sep, lunch & dinner Fri–Sun Oct–May) As the name hints, the game here has a French flavour. Its strength is the use of fresh market produce to come up with such dishes as *magret d'ànec amb figues* (duck slices with figs).

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

See Calella de Palafrugell for information on bus services (left). The Llafranc bus stop is on Carrer de la Sirena, up the hill on the Calella side of town.

### Tamariu

pop 90

About 3.5km north up the coast from Llafranc, as the crow flies, Tamariu is a small crescent cove surrounded by pine stands and other greenery. Its beach has some of the most translucent waters on Spain's Mediterranean coast. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 62 01 93; Carrer de la Riera; h 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jun–Sep) is in the middle of the village.

**Hotel Es Furió** (☎ 972 62 00 36; www.esfurio.com; Carrer del Foraió 5–7; s/d incl breakfast €74/128), set just back from the beach, has spacious, cheerfully decorated rooms. Pale oranges and aquas and other seaside colours predominate. It has its own restaurant and the beachfront is lined with seafood eateries.

Sarfa buses from Palafrugell run to Tamariu (€1.20, 15 minutes) three or four times daily, from mid-June to mid-September only. A rough road leads to the beach of Aiguablava (p348).

### Begur

pop 3990

The castell (castle), dating to the 10th century and towering above the village, is in much the same state in which it was left by the Spanish troops who wrecked it to impede the advance of Napoleon's army in 1810. Dotted around the village are six or so towers built for defence



against 16th- and 17th-century pirates. The **tourist office** (☎ 972 62 45 20; Avinguda del Onze de Setembre 5; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has loads of information.

A few steps towards the castle from the **central church is Hotel Rosa** (☎ 972 62 30 15; www.hotel-rosa.com; Carrer de Pi i Ralló 19; s/d €75/87; a i ), a little surprise package which has well-kept, spacious rooms. You can get some sun upstairs on the terrace and relax in the hydro-massage baths. Eat at their Fonda Caner at No 10.

Sarfa buses run up to four times a day from Barcelona (€14.35, 1¼ to 2¼ hours) via Palafrugell. On weekdays one Sarfa bus runs to Girona (€5.80, 1¼ hours).

### Around Begur

You can reach a series of smallish beaches, on an enticing stretch of coast, by turning east off the Palafrugell road 2km south of the centre of Begur. About 2km down is a turn-off to the black-sand **Platja Fonda** (1km). Half a kilometre further on is the turn-off to Fornells (1km), a hamlet on one of the most picturesque bays of the Costa Brava, with a marina, beach and incredibly blue water.

One kilometre on from the Fornells turn-off is **Aiguablava**, with a slightly bigger and busier beach, and the **Parador Nacional de la Costa Brava** (☎ 972 62 21 62; www.parador.es; s/d €134/178), a modern luxury hotel enjoying lovely views back across the Fornells bay (half board obligatory in July and August).

Another road from Begur leads 2km east to **Aiguafreda**, a beach on a lovely cove backed by pine-covered hills, and, a bit further south, the slightly more built-up **Sa Tuna**, on a quiet pebbly beach. You could stay in **Hostal Sa Tuna** (☎ 972 62 21 98; d €120) and gobble down a paella (around €17) in its convivial seaside eatery. A couple of kilometres north of Begur, there's another nice beach at **Sa Riera**. A walk along the coastal track brings you to the reddish sand of **Illa Roja** (Red Island), a nudist strip beyond which stretches the broad **Platja de Pals** to the north.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

A **bus platges** (beach bus) service runs from Plaça de Forgas in Begur between late June and mid-September.

### Pals

pop 2300

About 6km inland from Begur is the pretty walled town of Pals. The main monument

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Mas de Torrent** (☎ 972 30 32 92; www.mastorrent.com; Torrent; ste €390-625; p a i s ) Set in green fields by the tiny settlement of Torrent, about 2.5km southwest of Pals, this luxury rural hideaway is the antidote to worldly stress and worry. The 18th-century farmhouse has been lovingly restored and modified, and its rooms furnished with timber period items. The top-end suites each have their *own* pool (in addition to the communal one). There are tennis courts on the grounds and the hotel provides mountain bikes. In the evening, settle in for dinner in the gardens.

is the 15m **Torre de les Hores** (clock tower) but what makes the trip worthwhile is simply wandering around the uneven lanes and poking your nose into one medieval corner or another. From the **Mirador del Pedró** you can see northeast across the coastal plains to the sea, with the Illes Medes in the background. Up to four Sarfa buses come here from Barcelona (€14.80, two hours) on weekdays.

### Peratallada

The warm stone houses of Peratallada have made this village a favourite day trip for Catalans. Its narrow streets and 11th-century castle-mansion (now a luxury hotel and restaurant) are supplemented by several other places to stay, enticing restaurants and a sprinkling of low-key boutiques.

**Ca l'Àliu** (☎ 972 63 40 61; www.calaliu.com; Carrer de la Roca 6; d €60-83) is an 18th-century village home, where the old stone-and-timber frame has been teamed with modern comforts to create an atmospheric place with seven rooms for an overnight stop. There are several other such rural houses and a hotel.

Peratallada is on the Begur-Girona bus line (once daily Monday to Friday).

### CASTELL DE PÚBOL

The **Castell de Púbol** (☎ 972 48 86 55; www.salvador-dali.org; La Pera; adult/student & senior €6/4; ⌚ 10.30am-7.15pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10.30am-5.15pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-late Oct, 10.30am-4.15pm Tue-Sat Nov-Dec) is at La Pera, just south of the C66 and 22km northwest of Palafrugell. It forms the southernmost point of northeastern Catalonia's 'Salvador Dalí triangle', whose other elements

include the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** in Figueres and the Cadaqués area.

In 1968 Dalí bought this Gothic and Renaissance mansion, which includes a 14th-century church, and gave it to his wife, Gala, who lived here until her death. Local lore has it that the notoriously promiscuous Gala was still sending for young village men almost right up to the time she died in 1982, aged 88.

The castle was renovated by Dalí in his inimitable style, with lions' heads staring from the tops of cupboards, statues of elephants with giraffes' legs in the garden, and a stuffed giraffe staring at Gala's tomb in the crypt. In the garage is the blue Cadillac in which Dalí took Gala for a last drive round the estate – after she died.

Sarfa buses between Palafrugell and Girona run along the C66.

### GIRONA

pop 86,670

Northern Catalonia's largest city, Girona (Catalian: Gerona) sits in a valley 36km inland from Palafrugell. Its impressive medieval centre is a powerful reason for making a visit.

The Roman town of Gerunda lay on Via Augusta, the highway from Rome to Cádiz (Carrer de la Força in Girona's old town follows part of Via Augusta). Taken from the Muslims by the Franks in AD 797, Girona became capital of one of Catalonia's most important counties, falling under the sway of Barcelona in the late 9th century. Its wealth in medieval times produced many fine Romanesque and Gothic buildings that have survived repeated attacks and sieges through the centuries.

### Orientation

The narrow streets of the old town climb above the east bank of the Riu Onyar and are easy to explore on foot. Several road bridges and footbridges link it to the new town across the river. The train station is 1km southwest, on Plaça d'Espanya, off Carrer de Barcelona, with the bus station behind it on Carrer de Rafael Masó i Valentí.

### Information

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

**Policia Nacional** (National Police: Carrer de Sant Pau 2)

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

### Sights CATEDRAL

The billowing baroque façade of the **cathedral** stands at the head of a majestic flight of steps rising from Plaça de la Catedral. Most of the building, however, is much older than its exterior. Repeatedly rebuilt and altered down the centuries, it has Europe's widest Gothic nave (23m). The **cathedral's museum** (☎ 972 21 44 26; www.lacatedraldegirona.com; admission €4, free on Sun; ⌚ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Mar-Jun, 10am-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Feb, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays), through the door marked 'Claustre Tresor', contains the masterly Romanesque *Tapis de la Creació* (Tapestry of the Creation) and a Mozarabic illuminated *Beatus* manuscript, dating from AD 975. The Creation tapestry shows God at the epicentre and in the circle around Him the creation of Adam, Eve, the animals, the sky, light and darkness.

The fee for the museum also admits you to the beautiful 12th-century Romanesque cloister, whose 112 stone columns display some fine, if weathered, carving. From the cloister you can see the 13th-century Torre de Carlemany bell tower.

### MUSEU D'ART

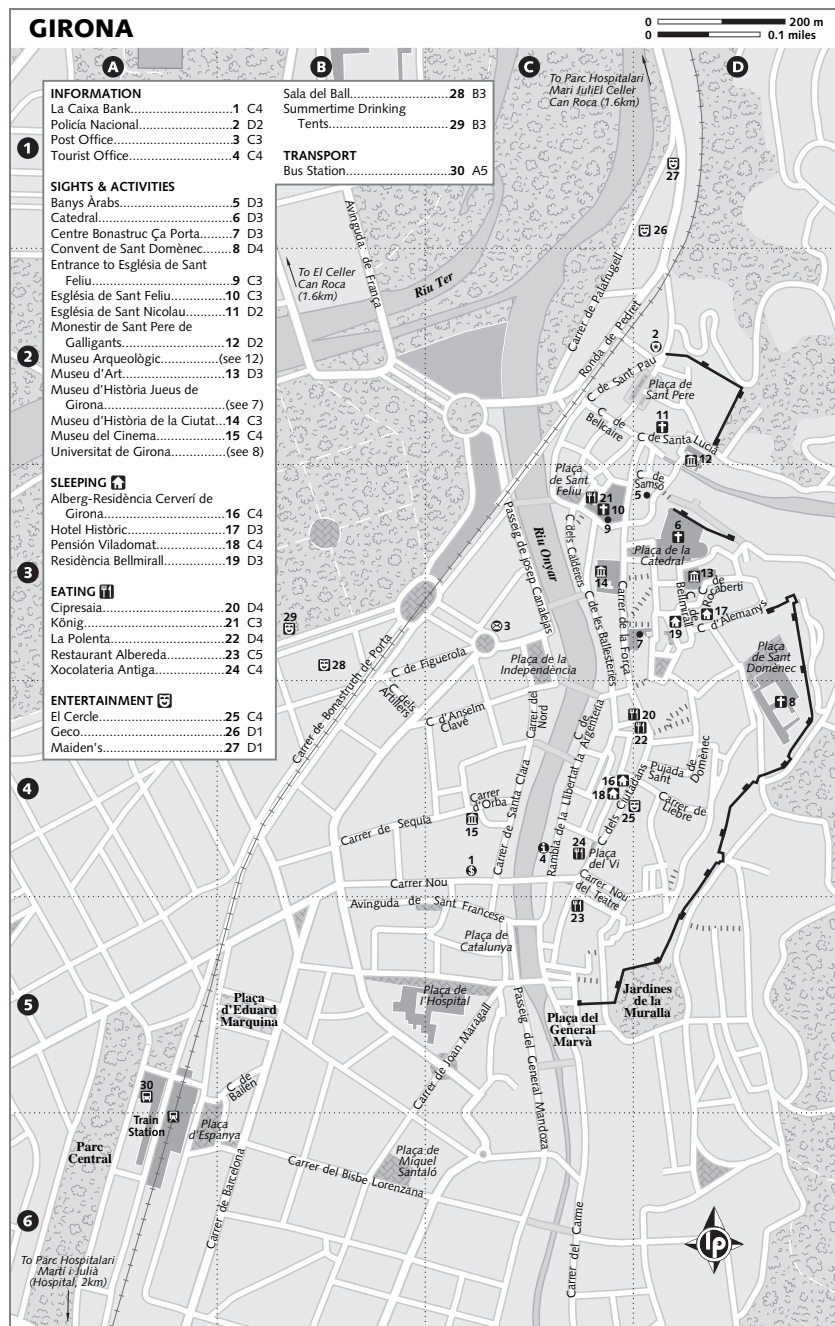
Next door to the cathedral, in the 12th- to 16th-century **Palau Episcopal**, the **art museum** (☎ 972 20 38 34; www.museuart.com; Plaça de la Catedral 12; admission €2; ⌚ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Mar-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-Feb, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays) collection ranges from Romanesque woodcarvings to early 20th-century paintings.

### ESGLÉSIA DE SANT FELIU

Girona's second great church (Plaça de Sant Feliu; ⌚ 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 4-7pm Sun) is downhill from the cathedral. The 17th-century main façade, with its landmark single tower, is on Plaça de Sant Feliu, but the entrance is around the side. The nave has 13th-century Romanesque arches but 14th- to 16th-century Gothic upper levels. The northernmost of the chapels, at the far western end of the church, is graced by a masterly Catalan Gothic sculpture, *Aloi de Montbrai's* alabaster *Crist Jacent* (Recumbent Christ).

### BANYS ÀRABS

Although modelled on earlier Muslim and Roman bathhouses, the **Arab baths** (☎ 972 21 32 62; Carrer de Ferran Còtic; admission €1.50; ⌚ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat Jul-Aug, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-2pm



Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays year-round) are a 12th-century Christian affair in Romanesque style. This is the only public bathhouse discovered from medieval Christian Spain, where, in reaction to the Muslim obsession with water and cleanliness, washing almost came to be regarded as ungodly. The baths contain an *apodyterium* (changing room), followed by a *frigidarium* and *tepidarium* (with respectively cold and warm water), and a *caldarium* (a kind of sauna).

### PASSEIG ARQUEOLÒGIC

Across the street from the Bany's Àrabs, steps lead up into lovely gardens, which follow the city walls up to the 18th-century Portal de Sant Cristòfol gate, from where you can walk back down to the cathedral.

### MONESTIR DE SANT PERE DE GALLIGANTS

Down across thin Riu Galligants, this 11th- and 12th-century Romanesque monastery has another lovely cloister with some marvellous animal and monster carvings on the capitals of its pillars. The monastery houses Girona's **Museu Arqueològic** (972 20 26 32; admission €1.80; 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat Jun-Sep, 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat Oct-May, 10.30am-2pm Sun & holidays), whose exhibits date from prehistoric to medieval times, and include Roman mosaics and some medieval Jewish tombstones.

### THE CALL

Until 1492 Girona was home to Catalonia's second-most important medieval Jewish community (after Barcelona), and its Jewish quarter, the Call, was centred on Carrer de la Força. For an idea of medieval Jewish life and culture, visit the **Museu d'Història dels Jueus de Girona** (Centre Bonastruc Ça Porta; 972 21 67 61; Carrer de la Força 8; admission €2; 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-May, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays). Named after Jewish Girona's most illustrious figure, a 13th-century cabbalist philosopher and mystic, the centre – a warren of rooms and stairways around a courtyard – hosts limited exhibitions and is a focal point for studies of Jewish Spain.

### MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE LA CIUTAT

The **City History Museum** (972 22 22 29; Carrer de la Força 27; admission €2; 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has displays covering everything from the city's Roman origins to the *sardana* (Catalonia's national round-dance) tradition.

### MUSEU DEL CINEMA

The Casa de les Aigües houses Spain's only **cinema museum** (972 41 27 77; www.museudelcinema.org; Carrer de Sequia 1; admission €3; 10am-8pm Tue-Sun May-Sep; 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Oct-Apr). The *Collecció* Tomàs Mallol includes not only displays tracing the history of cinema, but also a parade of hands-on items for indulging in shadow games, optical illusions and the like – it's great for kids.

### Sleeping

**Alberg-Residència Cerveri de Girona** (972 21 80 03; Carrer dels Ciutadans 9; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €18/21; j ) A modern youth hostel in the old town, it doubles for most of the year as a student residence.

**Pensió Viladomat** (972 20 31 76; Carrer dels Ciutadans 5; s/d without bathroom €20/38, d with bathroom €60) This is one of the nicest of the cheaper *pensions* scattered about the southern end of the old town. It has eight simple but sparsely maintained rooms.

**Residència Bellmirall** (972 20 40 09; Carrer de Bellmirall 3; s/d €35/60; 1 closed Jan-Mar; a ) This attractive spot has been carved out of a medieval building in the heart of the city. The guy who runs it is an artist and his taste is reflected in the place's overhaul. Rooms with shared bathroom are marginally cheaper.

**Hotel Històric** (972 22 35 83; www.hotelhistoric.com; Carrer de Bellmirall 4/a; s/d €109/122; a i p ) A bijou hotel in an historic building in the heart of old Girona, it has eight spacious rooms that are individually decorated. For a greater sense of home, you could opt for one of the seven self-contained apartments (going for up to €300).

### Eating

**Xocolateria Antiga** (972 21 66 81; Plaça del Vi 8; coffee & pastry €5-8; 1 Mon-Sat) Modernista décor, frilly lace in the windows and hot sticky cups of chocolate: time has stood still here. It's a great spot for breakfast.

**König** (972 22 57 82; Carrer dels Calderers 16; meals €8-15; 1 daily) For a quick sandwich, *entrepà* (filled roll) or simple hot dishes, 'King' boasts a broad outdoor terrace shaded by thick foliage. Or just stop by for a drink.

**La Polenta** (972 20 93 74; Carrer de la Cort Reial 6; meals €15-20; 1 Fri-Wed; v ) For vegetarian goodies, consider this cheerful option. The *seitan amb formatge blau i couscous* (seitan with blue cheese and couscous; €9.15) is a hit. Opening days tend to vary.

**Cipresaia** (☎ 972 22 24 49; Carrer de Blas Fournàs 2; meals €25-30; 𠄎 dinner only Fri-Sat, lunch only Mon-Wed & Sun) This tranquil, romantic option offers a range of Catalan dishes, from a succulent *arròs a llàmantol* (lobster rice; €17) to *magret d'ànec al Cabernet Sauvignon* (duck slices in Cab Sav; €13.90). Candlelit dinners for two in the heart of the old town are on the menu too.

**Restaurant Albereda** (☎ 972 22 60 02; Carrer de l'Albereda 9; meals €40; 𠄎 Tue-Sat & lunch only Mon) Elegant Albereda, the town's senior restaurant, dishes up classic Catalan cuisine. It frequently has gourmet themes, such as mushrooms (when they are in season), in which a special tasting menu includes a different kind of mushroom in every course, even dessert.

**El Cellar de Can Roca** (☎ 972 22 21 57; www.cellarcanroca.com; Carretera de Taialà 40; mains €60-80; 𠄎 Mon-Fri & dinner Sat) About 2km west of the city centre (and not the easiest place to find), this two-star Michelin choice is one of Catalonia's top-ranking restaurants. You might start with *cloïsses amb sorbet de naranja i Campari* (clams in orange sorbet and Campari) and proceed to *vieires amb carbassa, fruita de la passió, te verd i ceba tendra* (scallops with pumpkin, passionfruit, green tea and sweet onion).

## Drinking & Entertainment

Students make the nightlife here, so in summer things calm down. Thursday is the big night of the week, as most people head for the coast on weekends.

**El Cercle** (☎ 972 22 45 29; Carrer del Ciutadans 8; 𠄎 8am-3am) Carved out of a medieval warren of stone arches and timber beams, this cavernous, centuries-old house is perfect for a quiet, evening tittle.

You can keep going until the wee hours near the river north of the old town, where you will find several bars (and restaurants) along Carrer de Palafrugell and Ronda de Pedret. **Geco** (Carrer de Palafrugell 20), which hosts a mix of rock and club sounds depending on the night, and **Maiden's** (for heavy metal maniacs) at No 38 offer boisterous beer and beats nights.

In summer (May to September), a series of *drinking tents (las carpas)* is erected in the park, west of the railway line. Across the road, the cyber techno **Sala del Ball** (☎ 972 20 14 39; Carrer del Riu Güell 2; 𠄎 midnight-5am Thu-Sat) is Girona's Thursday-night clubbing destination.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Located 11km south of the centre is **Girona-Costa Brava airport**, and just off the AP7 and A2, is Ryanair's Spanish hub. **Sagalés** (☎ 902 36 15 50; www.sagales.com) operates hourly services from Girona-Costa Brava airport to Girona's main bus/train station (€1.75, 25 minutes) in connection with flights. The same company runs direct Barcelona Bus services to/from Estació Nord bus station (Map pp274-5) in Barcelona (one way/return €11/19, 70 minutes), connecting with flights. Sarfa runs a couple of buses a day in summer, from the airport to coastal destinations, including Tossa de Mar (€8, one hour) and Roses (€13, one hour 20 minutes), as well as Figueres (€13, 55 minutes). A **taxi** (☎ 972 20 33 73, 972 22 23 33) to/from the airport to central Girona costs around €15.

### BUS

**Teisa** (☎ 972 20 02 75; www.teisa-bus.com in Spanish) runs up to eight services daily (four on Sunday) to Besalú (€3.10, 50 minutes) and Olot (€5.55, 1¼ hours).

### TRAIN

Girona is on the railway line between Barcelona, Figueres and Portbou on the French border. There are more than 20 trains per day to Figueres (€2.40 to €2.70, 30 to 40 minutes) and Barcelona (€5.45 to €6.25, 1½ hours), and about 15 to Portbou or Cerbère or both (€3.60 to €4.10, 50 minutes to one hour).

## VERGES

pop 1170

About 15km east of Girona, this town has little to offer, but if in the area on Holy Thursday (Easter), make an effort to see the macabre evening procession of the *Dansa de la Mort*. People dressed as skeletons perform the Dance of Death through the streets as part of a much bigger procession enacting Christ's way to Calvary. The fun starts around 10pm. Girona-Torroella buses pass through here.

## TORROELLA DE MONTGRÍ

pop 10,230

On the Riu Ter, about 30km northeast of Girona and 15km north of Palafrugell, the agreeable old town of Torroella de Montgrí is the funnel through which travellers to L'Estartit must pass.

## Sights & Activities

Overlooking the town from the top of the 300m limestone Montgrí hills to the north, the impressive-but-empty **Castell de Montgrí** was built between 1294 and 1301 for King Jaume II, during his efforts to bring to heel the disobedient counts of Empúries, to the north. There's no road, and by foot it's a 40-minute climb from Torroella. Head north from Plaça del Lledoner along Carrer de Fàtima, at the end of which is a sign pointing the way.

In town itself, the **Can Quintana - Centre Cultural de la Mediterrània** (☎ 972 75 51 80; Carrer d'Ulla 31; admission free; 𠄎 11am-2pm & 6-9pm Wed-Sat & Mon, to 2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm Wed-Sat & Mon, 11am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) is a local museum and cultural centre housed in the Can Quintana mansion. The permanent exhibition on the 1st floor concentrates on local history, culture and music.

## Getting There & Away

**Ampsa** (☎ 972 75 82 33; www.ampsa.org; Plaça d'Espanya 19) runs buses about hourly (€1.20) to L'Estartit from June to September (half as often during the rest of the year). Sarfa has three or four daily buses to/from Barcelona (€16, 1¼ hours).

## L'ESTARTIT & THE ILLES MEDES

pop 920

L'Estartit, 6km east of Torroella de Montgrí, has a long, wide beach of fine sand but nothing over any other Costa Brava package resort -

except for the Illes Medes (Islas Medes). The group of rocky islets barely 1km offshore are home to some of the most abundant marine life on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

The main road in from Torroella de Montgrí is called *Avinguda de Grècia* as it approaches the beach; the beachfront road is *Passeig Marítim*, at the northern end of which is the **tourist office** (☎ 972 75 19 10; www.estartit.org; Passeig Marítim; 𠄎 9.30am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Jun & Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr).

## Illes Medes

The shores and waters around these seven islets, an offshore continuation of the limestone Montgrí hills, have been protected since 1985 as a *reserva natural submarina* (underwater nature reserve), which has brought a proliferation in their marine life and made them Spain's most popular destination for snorkellers and divers. Some 1345 plant and animal species have been identified here. There's a big bird population too; one of the Mediterranean's largest colonies of yellow-legged gulls (8000 pairs) breeds here between March and May.

Kiosks by the harbour, at the northern end of L'Estartit beach, offer snorkelling and glass-bottomed boat trips to the islands. Other glass-bottomed boat trips go to a series of caves along the coast to the north, or combine these with the Medes.

## DIVING OFF THE COSTA BRAVA

The range of depths (down to 50m) and underwater cavities and tunnels around the Illes Medes contribute much to their attraction. On and around rocks near the surface are colourful algae and sponges, as well as octopuses, crabs and various fish. Below 10m or 15m, cavities and caves harbour lobsters, scorpion fish and large conger eels and groupers. Some groupers and perch may feed from the hand. If you get down to the sea floor, you may see angler fish, thornback rays or marbled electric rays.

Several outfits in L'Estartit can take you out scuba diving, at the Medes or off the mainland coast; the tourist office has lists of them. It's worth shopping around before taking the plunge. Apart from price difference, try to assess the quality. Is the equipment in good shape or old? (There's nothing worse than a broken regulator.) Do they bother with safety checks? Do they provide guides? What is their attitude to touching coral and sealife? When doing courses, it is important to feel that safety aspects are properly taken into account. Sloppy dive shops often provide sloppy instruction.

If you're a qualified diver, a two-hour trip usually costs between €26 and €30 per person. Full gear rental can cost €16 a day. Night dives are possible (usually about €30 to €34). You generally pay extra to go with a guide and for insurance if you don't have any. If you're a novice, do an introductory dive for around €45 or a full, five-day PADI Open Water Diver course for around €375.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Les Medes** (☎ 972 75 18 05; www.campinglesmedes.com; Paratge Camp de l'Arbre; sites per 2-person tent & car €29; h Dec-Oct; p s ) Of the eight camping grounds in and around town, this is in a leafy location about 800m from the seaside and has a sauna. Bike rental and even massages are available.

**Hotel Les Illes** (☎ 972 75 12 39; www.hotellesilles.com; Carrer de Les Illes 55; s/d with half-board €44/80) A decent, functional place with comfortable, if unspectacular, rooms, all with sparkling bathroom and balcony. This is basically a divers' hangout that's in a good spot back from the port. A buffet breakfast is included.

The northern end of Passeig Maritim, by the roundabout, is swarming with eateries. These places are all pretty similar, presenting a mix of basic Spanish fare and chicken-and-chips-style meals.

## Getting There & Around

Sarfa runs to and from Barcelona once daily (€16, 2¼ hours), rising to four times in peak season (July to August).

## L'ESCALA

pop 5180

L'Escala, 11km north of Torroella de Montgrí, is a pleasant medium-sized resort on the southern shore of the Golf de Roses. It's close to ancient Empúries (Castilian: Ampurias) and, about 10km further north, the wetlands of the Parc Natural dels Aiguamolls de l'Empordà.

## Orientation & Information

If you arrive by Sarfa bus, you'll alight on L'Escala's Plaça de les Escoles, where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 972 77 06 03; Plaça de les Escoles 1; h 9am-7pm daily May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-Apr). Empúries is 1km around the coast to the northwest of the town centre.

## Empúries

Empúries was probably the first, and certainly one of the most important, Greek colonies on the Iberian Peninsula. Early Greek traders, pushing on from a trading post at Masilia (Marseille in France), set up a new post around 600 BC at what is now the charming village of Sant Martí d'Empúries, then an island. Soon afterwards they founded a mainland colony nearby, which came to be called Emporion

(Market) and remained an important trading centre, and conduit of Greek culture to the Iberians, for centuries.

In 218 BC Roman legions landed here to cut off Hannibal's supply lines in the Second Punic War. About 195 BC they set up a military camp and by 100 BC had added a town. A century later it had merged with the Greek one. Emporiae, as the place was then known, was abandoned in the late 3rd century AD, after raids by Germanic tribes. Later, an early Christian basilica and a cemetery stood on the site of the Greek town, before the whole place, after over a millennium of use, disappeared altogether.

Many of the ancient stones now laid bare don't rise more than knee-high. You need a little imagination – and perhaps the aid of a taped commentary (€1.50 from the ticket office) – to make the most of it.

## THE SITE

During spring and summer there's a pedestrian entrance to the site (☎ 972 77 02 08; adult/student/under 7yr & senior €2.40/1.80/free; h 10am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-May) from the seafront promenade in front of the ruins; just follow the coast from L'Escala to reach it. At other times the only way in is the vehicle approach from the Figueres road, about 1km from central L'Escala.

The Greek town lies in the lower part of the site, closer to the shore. Main points of interest include the thick southern defensive walls, the site of the Asklepleion (a shrine to the god of medicine) with a copy of his statue found here, and the Agora (town square), with remnants of the early Christian basilica and the Greek *stoa* (market complex), beside it.

A small museum (Barcelona's Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, p299), has a bigger and better Empúries collection, separates the Greek town from the larger Roman town on the upper part of the site. Highlights of the Roman town include the mosaic floors of a 1st-century-BC house, the Forum and ancient walls. Outside the walls are the remains of an oval amphitheatre. To the great surprise of archaeologists, a 2nd-century-AD bust in Carrara marble of the Roman god Bacchus was unearthed on the site in 2005.

A string of brown-sand beaches stretch along in front of the site. On one of them, 1.2km from L'Escala, stands a Greek stone jetty. Nearby is where the 1992 Olympic flame

was landed in a remake of an ancient Greek vessel amid great theatrical circumstance.

Another few hundred metres north along the beaches from Empúries brings you to a gem, the 15th-century seaside hamlet of **Sant Martí d'Empúries**, all bright stone houses and cobbled lanes. On Plaça Major, four restaurant-bars compete for your attention under the watchful gaze of the strange, squat façade of the local church.

## Sleeping

**Hostal El Roser** (☎ 972 77 02 19; Carrer de l'Església 7; s/d €35/54; p a w) This is one of the best bets at the lower midrange level in the heart of town. A cheerful corner block with restaurant and rooms upstairs, it has clean and welcoming rooms. You can sun yourself on the terrace.

Some more expensive options line up on the waterfront.

## Eating

L'Escala is famous for its *anchoas* (anchovies) and fresh fish, both of which are likely to crop up on menus. Plenty of eateries are scattered along the waterfront parade of Port d'En Perris.

**Restaurant El Roser II** (☎ 972 77 11 02; Passeig Lluís Albert 1; mains €35; h Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) This is an excellent waterfront seafood eatery, ideal for a hearty lunch of grilled catch of the day and *suquet* (a fish-and-potato hotpot). It also comes with less common (and frequently more expensive) concoctions, such as lobster with mushroom risotto (€42).

## Getting There & Away

Sarfa has one bus from Barcelona (via Palafrugell) on weekdays (€16, up to 2¼ hours), and three on Sunday (four daily July to August). Buses also run to and from Girona.

## PARC NATURAL DELS AIGUAMOLLS DE L'EMPORDÀ

This nature park preserves the remnants of marshes that once covered the whole coastal plain of the Golf de Roses, an important site for migrating birds. Bird-watchers have spotted over 100 species a day in the March to May and August to October migration periods, which bring big increases in the numbers of wading birds and even the occasional flamingo, glossy ibis, spoonbill or rare black stork. There are usually enough birds around to make a visit worthwhile at any time of year.

Head for the **El Cortalet information centre** (☎ 972 45 42 22; h 9.30am-2pm & 4.30-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9.30am-2pm & 3.30-6pm mid-Sep-mid-Jun), 1km east off the Sant Pere Pescador-Castelló d'Empúries road. Marked paths lead to a 2km stretch of beach and several *aguaites* (hides) with saltwater-marsh views. From the top of the Observatori Senillosa, a former silo, you can observe the whole park. The paths are always open, but morning and evening are the best times for birds (and mosquitoes!).

The nearest places to El Cortalet that can be reached by bus are Sant Pere Pescador, 6km south (served by four or five Sarfa buses daily from L'Escala and Figueres), and Castelló d'Empúries, 4km north.

## CASTELLÓ D'EMPÚRIES

pop 3640

This old town was the capital of Empúries, a medieval Catalan county that maintained a large degree of independence up to the 14th century. The finest monument here is the **Església de Santa Maria** on Plaça de Jacint Verdaguer. It's a large 13th- and 14th-century Gothic church with a sturdy Romanesque bell tower.

**Hotel Canet** (☎ 972 25 03 40; www.hotelcanet.com; Plaça del Joc de la Pilota 2; s/d €49/70; p a s ) is a modernised 17th-century mansion in the centre, with elegant rooms, low-slung stone arches and a sundeck. A soothing swimming pool glistens within the stone walls of the interior courtyard. It also has a decent restaurant offering mostly Catalan fare.

Sarfa runs from about 12 (fewer on Sundays and up to 28 in July and August) buses a day from Figueres (€1.20, 15 minutes), three or four (more in July and August) from Cadaqués (€3.05, 50 minutes) and up to two from Barcelona's Estació del Nord (€15.30, 1¼ to 2¼ hours).

## ROSES & AROUND

pop 15,540

Some believe Roses is the site of an ancient Greek settlement. Rodes, although nothing remains to confirm the hypothesis. The town does boast the impressive seaward wall of its 16th-century citadel. Although this middling holiday town's beaches are OK (the tourist office has lists of accommodation), Roses is, above all, a handy base for going elsewhere.

With a vehicle, you can get well beyond the crowds of Roses into the southern end of Parc Natural del Cap de Creus. About 6km east of



Roses, a road runs up into the hills and along the rugged coast to Cala Montjoi and Spain's most renowned restaurant, El Bulli (below).

**Le Rachdingue** (☎ 972 53 00 23; www.rachdingue.com; admission €10-15), about 8km northwest of Roses on the road to Vilajuïga, is one of the Costa Brava's club meccas. Big name DJs from around Europe are wheeled in to this *masia* (country house) to spin their sets of house, deep house and even deeper house (among other grooves and beats). Clubbers from all over the continent make an effort to get here. It is especially active in summer (the pool comes in handy!), but opens on Saturday nights in winter too. Call to find out what's happening.

Sarfa buses from Barcelona run one to four times a day to Roses, depending on the day and season (€16.45, 1¼ hours). Plenty run between Roses and Figueres (€2.30, 30 minutes).

## CADAQUÉS & AROUND

pop 2620

If you have time for only one stop on the Costa Brava, you can hardly do better than Cadaqués. A whitewashed village around a rocky bay, it and the surrounding area have a really special magic – a fusion of wind, sea, light and rock – that isn't dissipated even by the throngs of mildly fashionable summer visitors.

A portion of that magic owes itself to Salvador Dalí, who spent family holidays in Cadaqués during his youth, and lived much of his later life at nearby Port Lligat. The empty moonscapes, odd-shaped rocks and barren shorelines that litter Dalí's paintings weren't just a product of his fertile imagination. They're strewn all round the Cadaqués area in what Dalí termed a 'grandiose geological delirium'.

The country here is drier than further south. The sparseness continues to dramatic Cap de Creus, 8km northeast of Cadaqués, lending itself to coastscapes of almost (ahem) surreal beauty.

Thanks to Dalí and other luminaries, Cadaqués pulled in a celebrity crowd for decades. One visit by the poet Paul Éluard and his Russian wife, Gala, in 1929 caused an earthquake in Dalí's life: he ran off to Paris with Gala (who was to become his lifelong obsession and, later, wife) and joined the surrealist movement. In the 1950s the crowd he attracted was more jet-setting – Walt Disney, the Duke of Windsor and Greek shipowner Stavros Niarchos. In the 1970s Mick Jagger and Gabriel García Márquez popped by. Today the crowd is not quite as famous, and leans heavily to day-tripping French from across the border, but the enchantment of Cadaqués' atmosphere remains.

### Information

**Clinic** (☎ 972 25 88 07; Carrer de Guillem Bruguera)  
**Polícia Local** (☎ 972 15 93 43; Carrer de Barcelona) Out of town, off the road to Port Lligat.  
**Tourist office** (☎ 972 25 83 15; www.cadaques.org; Carrer del Cotxe 2; h 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat)

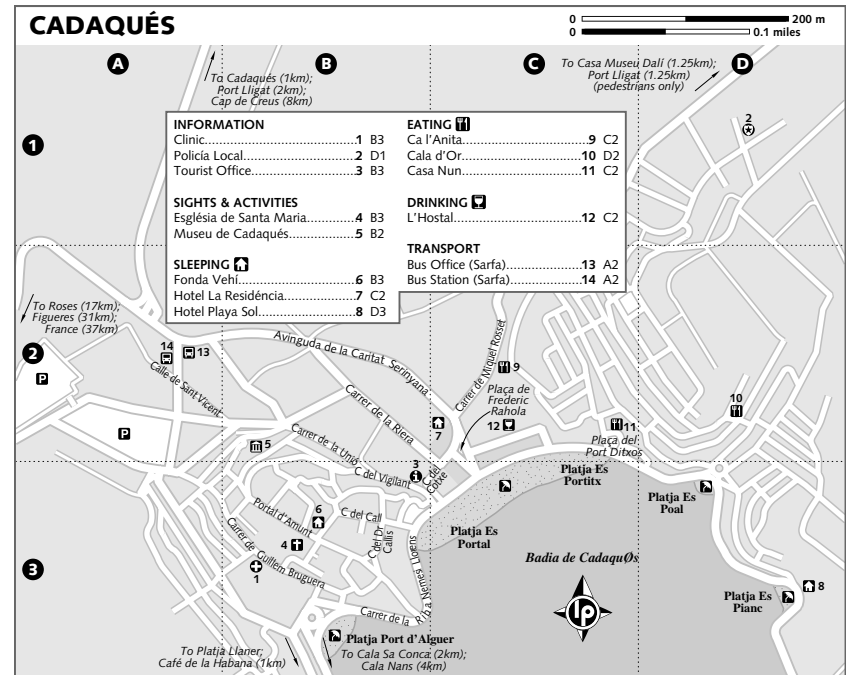
### The Town

Cadaqués is perfect for wandering, either around the town or along the coast. The 16th- and 17th-century *Església de Santa Maria*, with a gilded baroque *retablo* (altarpiece), is the focus of the older part of town, with its narrow hilly streets.

The **Museu de Cadaqués** (☎ 972 25 88 77; Carrer de Narcís Monturiol 15; h 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) includes Dalí among other local artists. The admission fee depends on the temporary exhibition being held.

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**El Bulli** (☎ 972 15 04 57; bulli@elbulli.com; Cala Montjoi; mains €150-200; h dinner daily Jul-Sep, Wed-Sun Apr-Jun) Chef Ferran Adrià, acclaimed by many to be the world's greatest chef, runs this sensorial, cliff-top restaurant (considered by some the best restaurant on the face of the earth). Each season sees Adrià indulging himself with new experiments in international and Mediterranean cooking. The setting alone is worth the effort of getting here. The restaurant has almost as many staff as tables, making service exquisite. Adrià and Co like to play with essences, so don't be surprised if many of the myriad platters that come your way seem little more than puffs of air. This place is not an eatery, it is a theatrical spectacle for the palate. Adrià and his restaurant (which can only be reached by car from Roses) have become such international icons that booking a place is nearly impossible. Well before the 2006 season began, it was completely booked out for that year.



### Beaches

Cadaqués' main beach, and several others along the nearby coast, are small, with more pebbles than sand, but their picturesqueness and beautiful blue waters make up for that. Overlooking Platja Llaner, to the south of the town centre, is Dalí's parents' holiday home. Out the front is a statue by Josep Subirachs dedicated to Federico García Lorca and in memory of his 1920s stay.

### Port Lligat

Port Lligat, a 1.25km walk from Cadaqués, is a tiny settlement around another lovely cove, with fishing boats pulled up on its beach. **Casa Museu Dalí** (☎ 972 25 10 15; www.salvador-dali.org; Port Lligat; adult/student & senior €8/5; h 10.30am-9pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jan & mid-Mar–mid-Jun) began as a fisherman's hut and was steadily altered and enlarged by Dalí, who lived here from 1930 to 1982, apart from a dozen or so years abroad during and around the Spanish Civil War. It's the house with a lot of little white chimneypots and two egg-shaped towers, overlooking the western end of the beach. You must book ahead.

### Cap de Creus

Cap de Creus is the most easterly point of the Spanish mainland and a place of sublime, rugged beauty. With a steep, rocky coastline indented by dozens of turquoise-watered coves, it's an especially wonderful place to be at dawn or sunset. On top of the cape stand a lighthouse and a curious restaurant (☎ 972 19 90 05) where you get curry and cheesecake, and sleep over in one of a handful of rooms.

### Walking

There are infinite possibilities for walking: out along the promontory between Cadaqués and Port Lligat; to Port Lligat and beyond; along the southern side of the Cadaqués Bay to the Far de Cala Nans (lighthouse); or over the hills south of Cadaqués to the coast east of Roses.

### Sleeping

**Fonda Vehi** (☎ 972 25 84 70; Carrer de l'Església 5; s/d without bathroom €25/40, d with bathroom €50) Near the church in the heart of the old town, this simple but engaging *pensión* tends to be booked up for July and August. Easily the cheapest deal in town, it got some sprucing up in 2006

and remains a popular deal because of its position and decent restaurant.

**Hotel La Residència** (☎ 972 25 83 12; www.laresidencia.net; Avinguda de la Caritat Serinyana 1; s/d €70/91; p a ) In the heart of town, with just a dozen good-sized rooms, this hotel oozes history. It opened in 1904 and Picasso stayed here six years later. Nowadays the place has a studied, classy air. A beautiful stained-glass ceiling creates a light well in the main staircase, and decorative details range from Dalí to rococo. The best rooms look out to sea.

**Hotel Playa Sol** (☎ 972 25 81 00; www.playasol.com; Platja Es Planc 3; s/d €107/171; p a s ) On the east side of the bay, this sprawling affair offers spacious rooms with cable TV, a tree-lined pool, tennis court and gardens. Prices vary according to position (those with sea views are the dearest) and, predictably, season.

## Eating

**Cala d'Or** (☎ 972 25 81 49; Carrer de Sa Fitora 1; meals €20; h daily) Tucked away back from the waterfront, this knockabout place attracts swarms of local workers after a good solid lunch at tables dressed in classic gingham. Tuck into some *llobarro a la planxa* (grilled sea perch).

**Ca l'Anita** (☎ 972 25 84 71; Carrer de Miquel Roset 16; meals €20-25; h Tue-Sun) This busy, ebullient place, where customers often find themselves elbow to elbow with perfect strangers, has a name for tasty grilled fish and other seafood delights.

**Casa Nun** (☎ 972 25 88 56; Plaça del Port Ditxos 6; meals €25-30; h Thu-Mon) Head for the cute upstairs dining area or take one of the few tables outside overlooking the port. Try the *raviolis rellenos de foie gras con salsa de albahaca* (foie gras stuffed dumplings with basil sauce; €15.50).

## Entertainment

**L'Hostal** (Passeig; h 10pm-5am Apr-Oct) Facing the beachfront boulevard, this classic has live music on many nights (from midnight). One evening in the 1970s, an effusive Dalí called L'Hostal the *lugar más bonito del mundo* (the most beautiful place on earth). Inside hang photos of the artist and hordes of other stars and starlets of times gone by.

**Café de la Habana** (☎ 972 25 86 89; Carrer de Dr Bartomeu, Punta d'En Pampa; h 9pm-2.30am Easter-Oct, 9pm-2.30am Fri-Sun Nov-Easter) One kilometre south of town, this icon of Cadaqués' nightlife can get lively with Latin-music nights, art exhibitions and cool cocktails (not to mention the extensive range of Caribbean rums). Come along for

Nanu's session at 11pm on Saturday nights. He does covers of anyone, such as Jacques Brel, and his own material.

## Getting There & Away

Sarfa buses to/from Barcelona (€18.05, 2¼ hours) leave two times daily (up to five daily in July and August). Buses also run to/from Figueres (€4.05, one hour) up to seven times daily (three in winter) via Castelló d'Empúries.

## CADAQUÉS TO THE FRENCH BORDER

If you want to prolong the journey to France, El Port de la Selva and Llançà are pleasant enough minor beach resorts—cum—fishing towns, and both have a range of accommodation. Portbou, on the French frontier, is less enticing. From El Port de la Selva you can undertake a wild and woolly walk along the rugged coast. The trail, which is awkward at some points, leads east to Cap de Creus.

A more spectacular stop is the **Monestir de Sant Pere de Rodes** (☎ 972 38 75 59; adult/student/senior €3.60/2.40/free, admission free Tue; h 10am-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), a classic piece of Romanesque architecture looming 500m up in the hills southwest of El Port de la Selva, with great views. Founded in the 8th century, it later became the most powerful monastery between Figueres and Perpignan in France. The great triple-naved, barrel-vaulted basilica is flanked by the square Torre de Sant Miquel bell tower and a two-level cloister.

## Getting There & Away

The monastery is on a back road over the hills between Vilajuïga, 8km to its west, and El Port de la Selva, 5km northeast. Each town is served by at least one Sarfa bus from Figueres daily, but there are no buses to the monastery. Vilajuïga is also on the railway between Figueres and Portbou.

## FIGUERES

pop 38,880

Twelve kilometres inland from the Golf de Roses, Figueres (Castilian: Figueras) is a humdrum town (some might say a dive) with a single, big attraction: Salvador Dalí. In the 1960s and '70s Dalí created here, in the town of his birth, the extraordinary Teatre-Museu Dalí. Whatever your feelings about old Salvador, this is worth every cent and minute you can spare.

## Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 972 50 31 55; www.figueresciutat.com/vis-info.html; Plaça del Sol; h 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat Sep, 8.30am-3pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Easter-Jun & Oct, 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter)

**Policia Nacional** (Carrer de Pep Ventura 8)

**Cro Roja** (☎ 972 50 17 99; Carrer de Santa Llogàia 67)

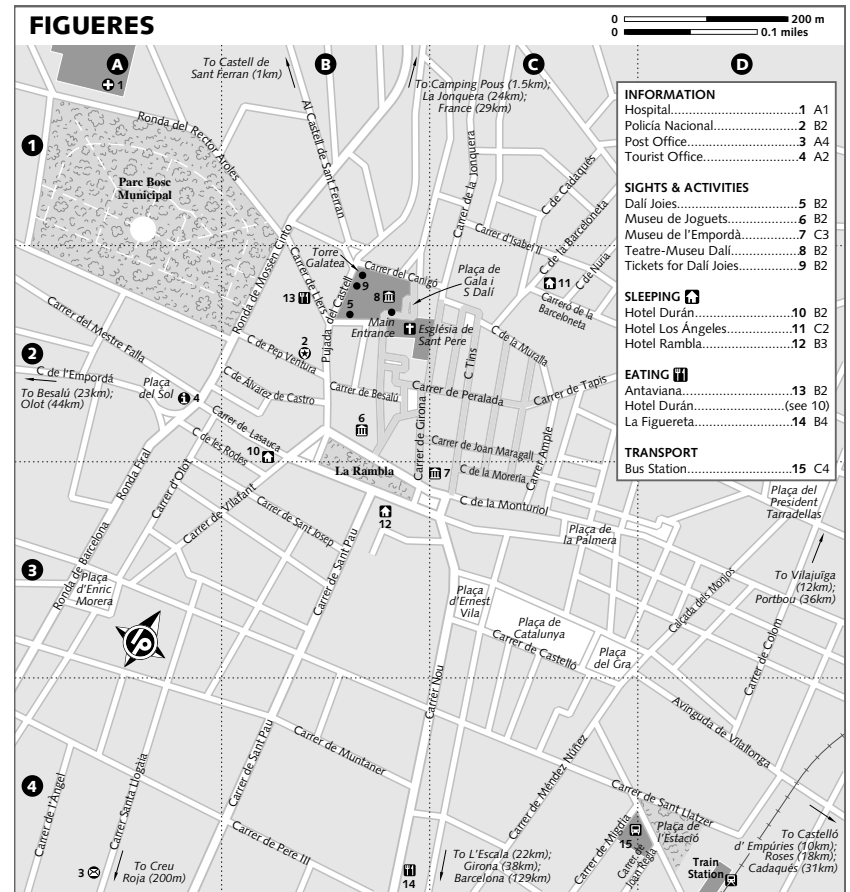
**Hospital** (☎ 972 67 50 89; Ronda del Rector Aroles)

## Sights

### TEATRE-MUSEU DALÍ

Salvador Dalí was born in Figueres in 1904. Although his career took him to Madrid, Barcelona, Paris and the USA, he remained true to his roots and lived well over half his

adult life at Port Lligat, east of Figueres on the coast. Between 1961 and 1974 Dalí converted Figueres' former municipal theatre, ruined by a fire at the end of the civil war in 1939, into the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** (☎ 972 67 75 00; www.salvador-dali.org; adult/student €10/7, summer nights €11, entry includes Dalí Joies; h 9am-7.45pm Jul-Sep, 10.30am-5.45pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun, summer nights 10pm-1am Aug; night entry includes glass of cava & is limited, tickets must be booked ahead). 'Theatre-museum' is an apt label for this multidimensional trip through one of the most fertile (or disturbed) imaginations of the 20th century. It's full of surprises, tricks and illusions, and contains a substantial portion of his life's work. Readers have reported that queues are getting so long that opening hours have been extended on an ad hoc basis.



Even outside, the building aims to surprise, from the collection of bizarre sculptures outside the entrance, on Plaça de Gala i Salvador Dalí, to the pink wall along Pujada del Castell, topped by a row of Dalí's trademark egg shapes and what appear to be sculptures of female gymnasts, and studded with what look like loaves of bread.

Inside, the ground floor (1st level) includes a semicircular garden area on the site of the original theatre stalls. In its centre is a classic piece of weirdness called *Taxi Plujós* (Rainy Taxi), composed of an early Cadillac, which was said to have belonged to Al Capone, and a pile of tractor tyres; both are surmounted by statues, with a fishing boat balanced precariously above the tyres. Put a coin in the slot and water washes all over the inside of the car. The *Sala de Peixateries* (Fish Shop Room) off here holds a collection of Dalí oils, including the famous *Autoretrat Tou amb Tall de Bacon Fregit* (Soft Self-Portrait with Fried Bacon) and *Retrat de Picasso* (Portrait of Picasso). Beneath the former stage of the theatre is the crypt, with Dalí's plain tomb.

If proof were needed of Dalí's acute sense of the absurd, *Gala Mirando el Mar Mediterráneo* (Gala Looking at the Mediterranean Sea) on the 2nd level would be it. With the help of coin-operated viewfinders, the work appears, from the other end of the room, to be a portrait of Abraham Lincoln.

A separate section is given over to the Owen Cheatham collection of 37 jewels, designed by Dalí, and called *Dalí Joies* (Dalí Jewels; adult/student €6/4 or combined entry; h same as Teatre-Museu Dalí). Also on display are the designs themselves. Dalí did these on paper (his first commission was in 1941) and the jewellery was made by specialists in New York. Each piece, ranging from the disconcerting *Ull del Temps* (Eye of Time) through to the *Cor Reial* (Royal Heart), is unique.

#### MUSEU DE L'EMPORDÀ

This local museum (9 972 50 23 05; La Rambla 2; adult/student €2/1, admission free with a Teatre-Museu Dalí ticket; h 11am-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays) combines Greek, Roman and medieval archaeological finds with a sizable collection of art, mainly by Catalan artists, but there are also some works on loan from the Prado in Madrid.

#### MUSEU DE JOGUETS

Spain's only toy museum (9 972 50 45 85; www.mjc-figueres.net; La Rambla 10; adult/student €4.70/3.80; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm

Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1.30pm Sun & holidays Oct-May) has more than 3500 Catalonia- and Valencia-made toys from the pre-Barbie 19th and early 20th centuries. The Groucho Marx doll is an odd one!

#### CASTELL DE SANT FERRAN

The sprawling 18th-century fortress (9 972 50 60 94; www.lesfortalesescatalanes.info/santferran.html; admission €2; h 10.30am-8pm Easter & Jul-mid-Sep, 10.30am-2pm Nov-Feb, 10.30am-2pm & 4-6pm rest of the year) stands on a low hill 1km northwest of the centre. Built in 1750, it saw no action in the following centuries. After abandoning Barcelona, Spain's Republican government held its final meeting of the civil war (1 February 1939) in the dungeons.

#### Sleeping

**Camping Pous** (9 972 67 54 96; www.androl.internet-park.net; sites per 2-person tent & car €21; h year-round) A small and leafy camping ground, it lies 1.5km north of the centre on the A2 towards La Jonquera. There is a little hotel (with doubles for up to €52) and restaurant on the same site.

**Hotel Los Ángeles** (9 972 51 06 61; www.hotelangeles.com; Carrer de la Barceloneta 10; s/d €45/62; p a i ) Rooms are all much the same in this spick-and-span digs. White walls, brown floor tiles and sparkling attached bathroom are standard throughout. Wi-fi works throughout the hotel (€3 a day).

**Hotel Rambla** (9 972 67 60 20; www.hotelrambla.net; La Rambla 33; s/d up to €75/85; p a i ) Hiding behind an 1860 façade on the town's central boulevard, this hotel has pleasant rooms with crisp décor in blues and beiges. The superior rooms are spacious and light, but you can drop the price by taking a standard one.

**Hotel Durán** (9 972 50 12 50; www.hotelduran.com; Carrer de Lasauca 5; s/d €62/88; p i a ) Tradition marks out this key central option. With one of the best restaurants in town on the premises, it has an advantage over much of the competition. It has been going since the late 19th century (on the site, it is said, of a wayside inn as far back as the 17th century) and offers comfortable, renovated rooms with modern decorative touches, satellite TV and hairdryers in the bathroom.

#### Eating

**La Figuereta** (9 972 67 38 45; Carrer Nou 101; meals €25; h Tue-Sat, lunch only Mon) Amid the hurly burly of a busy, somewhat down-at-heel shopping

street shines this elegant eatery, with bare brick walls and white table linen. On offer is a pleasing menu of Catalan and Mediterranean fare, such as *magret d'ànec amb salsa de fruits vermells i graten de patata* (duck with red fruit sauce and potato gratin).

**Antaviana** (9 972 51 03 77; Carrer de Llers 5; meals €30; h Wed-Sun) For a good mix of Mediterranean cooking, with some enticing seafood options and light meals, this is a tasty bet.

**Hotel Durán** (9 972 50 12 50; Carrer de Lasauca 5; meals €30-40) More than a century of tradition has not tired the Durán clan of serving up fine traditional food. Frequently the stage of gastronomic events, this place offers such Catalan affairs as *canill rostit amb cargols* (roast rabbit with snails) and seafood classics like *suquet* (stew). Salvador Dalí was a big fan of the restaurant here, and no doubt visited the wine cellar, which one can do every once and a while.

#### Getting There & Away

Sarfa serves Castelló d'Empúries (€1.20) 10 to 20 times daily and Cadaqués (€4.05, one hour) up to eight times daily.

Figueres is on the railway line between Barcelona, Girona and Portbou on the French border, and there are regular connections to Girona (€2.40 to €2.70, 30 to 40 minutes) and Barcelona (€7.90 to €9.10, 2¼ hours) and to Portbou and the French border (€1.85 to €2.10, 25 minutes).

#### AROUND FIGUERES

It is hard to imagine that, just a few kilometres outside Figueres, such pleasant countryside should soothe the eyes. Take the C252 road northeast of town for a refreshing excursion.

In **Vilabertran**, 2.5km from central Figueres, there is what started life as an Augustinian convent (9 972 50 87 87; admission €2.40, free Tue; h 10am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Oct-May). The 11th-century Romanesque church, with its three naves and Lombard bell tower, is outstanding. Also of great charm is the cloister.

Five kilometres up the road, coquettish Peralada is known for the 16th-century *Castell-Palau dels Rocaberti*. The castle, with its round towers, has a rather French air and is given over to a casino and restaurant. The only way in, if you're not eating or gambling, is to turn up for a classical-music performance during

the annual **Festival del Castell de Peralada** (9 972 50 86 46; www.festivalperalada.com; Carrer de Sant Joan s/n; h Jul-Aug) in summer.

#### BESALÚ

pop 2210

In the 10th and 11th centuries, pretty Besalú was the capital of an independent county that stretched as far west as Cerdanya before it came under Barcelona's control in 1111.

Most picturesque of all is the view of the village across the tall, crooked 11th-century **Pont Fortificat** (Fortified Bridge), with its two tower gates, from the southern side of the Fluvià.

The **tourist office** (9 972 59 12 40; Plaça de la Llibertat; h 10am-2pm & 4-7pm) is on the arcaded central square. It has a decent map-brochure and offers guided visits to the *Miqvé* (a 12th-century Jewish ritual bath by the river, €1.25), the bridge and the Romanesque *Església de Sant Vicenç*. The church and *Miqvé* are otherwise normally closed. Have a look at the 11th-century Romanesque church of the *Monestir de Sant Pere*, with an unusual ambulatory (walkway) behind the altar, and the 12th-century Romanesque *Casa Cornella*.

#### Sleeping & Eating

There are a couple of cheap *pensiones* in Besalú. Otherwise, try *Els Jardins de la Martana* (9 972 59 00 09; www.lamartana.com; s/d €83/111; p a i ), a charming mansion set on the out-of-town end of the grand old bridge. It has well-appointed rooms, with tiled floors, high ceilings and elegant curtains. Most offer views from balconies across the bridge to the town, and you'll find comfortable sitting rooms and peaceful garden terraces. Breakfast is included in the room price.

**Pont Vell** (9 972 59 10 27; Pont Vell 26; meals €25-30; h Wed-Sun & lunch only Mon, closed late Dec-late Jan) The views to the old bridge (after which the restaurant is named) are enough to tempt you to take a seat here, even without considering the wide-ranging menu. Starting from a base of standard local cuisine, the menu also offers more intriguing options, like *canill agri-dolç* (sweet-and-sour rabbit).

#### Getting There & Away

The N260 road from Figueres to Olot meets the C66 from Girona at Besalú. See the Girona (p352) and Olot (p363) sections for information on Teisa bus services to Besalú.

## THE PYRENEES

The Pyrenees in Catalonia aren't as high as those in neighbouring Aragón, but they still encompass some awesomely beautiful mountains and valleys. Above all, the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, in the northwest, is a jewel-like area of lakes and dramatic peaks. The area's highest mountain, the Pica d'Estats, is reached by a spectacular hike past glittering glacial lakes. On arrival at the top, you enjoy a privileged point with 360-degree views over France and Spain.

Aside from the natural beauty of the mountains, and the obvious attractions of walking, skiing and other sports, the Catalan Pyrenees and their foothills have a rich cultural heritage, notably many lovely Romanesque churches and monasteries, often tucked away in remote valleys. They are mainly the product of a time of prosperity and optimism in this region in the 11th and 12th centuries, after Catalonia had broken ties with France in AD 988 and as the Muslim threat from the south receded.

When looking for a place to kip, keep an eye out for *casas rurals* or *casas de pagès* (country houses converted into accommodation), usually set in old village houses and peppered across the Pyrenees. The annual *Establiments de Turisme Rural* guide, published by the Generalitat (regional Catalan government), covers most of them.

### OLOT

pop 31,270

The hills around Olot are little more than pimples, but those pimples are the volcanoes of the Parc Natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa. Admittedly they're either extinct or dormant, but one erupted as recently as 11,500 years ago.

### Information

**Casal dels Volcans** (☎ 972 26 60 12; Avinguda de Santa Coloma de Farners; 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) For information about the Parc Natural de la Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa. It's in the Jardí Botànic, 1km southwest of Plaça de Clarà.  
**Patronat Municipal de Turisme** (☎ 972 26 01 41; www.turismegarrotxa.com; Carrer del Hospici 8; 11am-

2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun late Jun-late Sep; 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun late Sep-late Jun). Near the bus station, it has some maps.

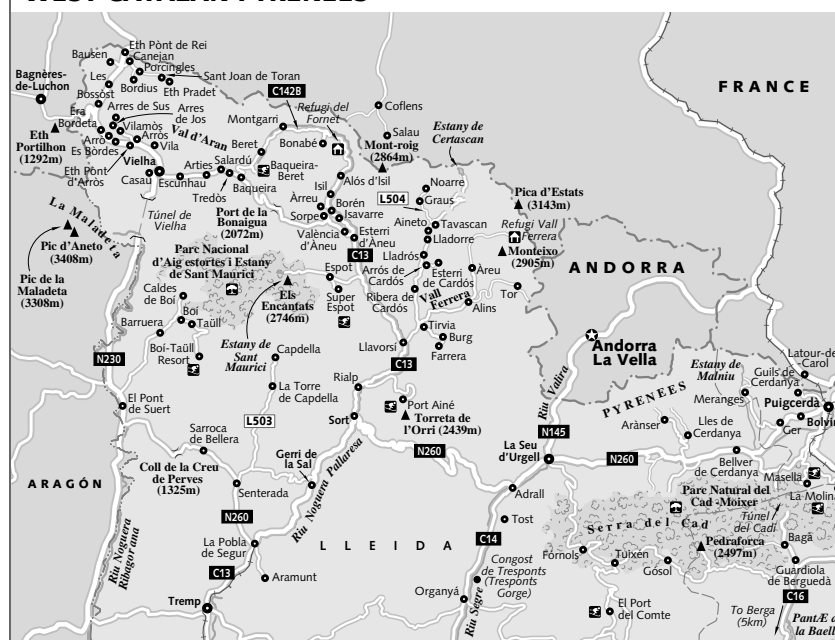
### Sights

**The Museu Comarcal de la Garrotxa** (☎ 972 27 91 30; Carrer de l'Hospici 8; adult/senior/student & child combined with Museu dels Volcans €3/1.50/free; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays), in the same building as the tourist office, covers Olot's growth and development as an early textile centre and includes a collection of local 19th-century art.

The **Jardí Botànic**, a botanical garden of Olot-area flora, contains the interesting **Museu dels Volcans** (☎ 972 26 67 62; adult/senior/student & child combined with Museu Comarcal de la Garrotxa €3/1.50/free; 11am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays), which covers local flora and fauna as well as volcanoes and earthquakes.

Four volcanoes stand sentry on the fringes of Olot. Head for Volcà Montscapça, 500m north of the centre, or Volcà La Garrinada, 1km northeast of the centre. In both cases paths climb to their craters.

## WEST CATALAN PYRENEES



## Sleeping & Eating

Several simple eateries are clustered around Plaça Major but the best restaurants are out of the town centre.

**Torre Malagrida** (☎ 972 26 42 00; Passeig de Barcelona 15; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €16/19) This youth hostel is set in an unusual early-20th-century Modernista building surrounded by gardens. The accommodation is unadorned dorm-style and you can purchase meals and rent bicycles.

**Pensió La Vila** (☎ 972 26 98 07; www.pensiolavila.com; Carrer de Sant Roc 1; s/d €37/51; a i √) Smack in the middle of town and overlooking Plaça Major, this straightforward pension has perfectly comfortable rooms over three floors with satellite TV. Cheaper rooms with shared showers are also available.

**Les Cols** (☎ 972 26 92 09; www.lescolds.com; Carretera de la Canya s/n; meals €35-45; lunch & dinner Wed-Sat, lunch only Mon-Tue) Set in a converted *masia*, more than 100 years old, Les Cols is about 4km north of central Olot. Inside the décor has 21st-century edge, with iron and glass walls, and gourmet ambitions. Dishes with local products are prepared with a silken touch, from chicken and duck to wild boar.

## Getting There & Away

**Teisa** (☎ 972 26 01 96; www.teisa-bus.com) runs buses to/from Barcelona (via Banyoles) up to seven times a day (€13.60, two to 2½ hours) and Girona via Banyoles and Besalú up to 15 times a day (€5.55, 1¼ hours). The easiest approach by car from Barcelona is by the AP7 and C63.

## PARC NATURAL DE LA ZONA VOLCÀNICA DE LA GARROTXA

The park completely surrounds Olot but the most interesting area is between Olot and the village of Santa Pau, 10km southeast.

Volcanic eruptions began here about 350,000 years ago and the most recent one, at Volcà del Crosca, happened 11,500 years ago. In the park there are about 30 volcanic cones, up to 160m high and 1.5km wide. Together with the lush vegetation, a result of fertile soils and a damp climate, these create a landscape of unusual beauty. Between the woods are crop fields, a few hamlets and scattered old stone farmhouses.

The main park information office is the **Casal dels Volcans** in Olot. Another is the **Centre d'Informació Can Serra** (☎ 972 19 50 74), beside the G1524 Olot-Banyoles road 4.5km from the centre of Olot.



**AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Mas Pau** (☎ 972 54 61 54; www.maspau.com; s/d €88/105; h closed 6 Jan–mid-Mar; p a i s ) Five kilometres southwest of Figueres on the road to Olot, and near the village of Avinyonet de Puigventós, is this breathtaking country hotel and restaurant. With its stone and ochre plaster walls, shady timber verandah and peaceful gardens, it makes a perfect rural getaway. The spacious rooms are immaculate, with antique furnishings and art on the walls. There are some more luxurious suites too. Breakfast is extra (€11). The restaurant (meals €60 to €80; lunch and dinner Wednesday to Saturday, lunch Sunday, dinner Monday to Tuesday) is a paradise of delicate flavours, with local products lovingly arranged into *haute cuisine* masterpieces.

The old part of Santa Pau village, perched on a rocky outcrop, contains a porticoed plaza, the Romanesque Església de Santa Maria, and a locked-up baronial castle.

**Castellfollit de la Roca**, on the N260 about 8km northeast of Olot, stands atop a crag composed of several layers of petrified lava – it's most easily viewed from the road north of the village.

Several good marked walks, which you can complete in less than a day, allow you to explore the park with ease. Inquire at the park information offices about routes.

Just off the GI524, and close to the most interesting parts of the park, are some pleasant, small country camping grounds. Wild camping is banned in the Garrotxa district, which stretches from east of Besalú to west of Olot, and from the French border to south of Sant Feliu de Pallerols. **Camping La Fageda** (☎ 972 27 12 39; www.campinglafageda.com; Batet de la Serra; sites per 2-person tent & car €16.95; p s w), 4km east of the centre of Olot, has a pool, bar-restaurant, picnic areas and a children's playground.

**RIPOLL**

pop 10,760

Ripoll, 30km west of Olot and in the next valley, is a shabby industrial town. However, it can claim, with some justice, to be the birthplace of Catalonia. At its heart, in the Monestir de Santa Maria, is one of the finest pieces of Romanesque art in Spain.

In the 9th century, Ripoll was the power base from which the local strongman, Guifré el Pilós (Wilfred the Hairy), succeeded in uniting several counties of the Frankish March along the southern side of the Pyrenees. Guifré went on to become the first Count (Comte) of Barcelona. To encourage repopulation of the Pyrenees valleys, he founded the Monestir de Santa Maria, the most powerful monastery of medieval Catalonia.

**Orientation & Information**

The **tourist office** (☎ 972 70 23 51; www.elripolles.com & www.ajripoll.org; Plaça del Abat Oliba; h 9.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) is by the Ribes de Freser–Sant Joan de les Abadesses road, which runs through the north of town. The Monestir de Santa Maria is virtually next door.

**Monestir de Santa Maria**

Following its founding in AD 879, the monastery grew rapidly rich, big and influential. From the mid-10th to mid-11th centuries it was Catalonia's spiritual and cultural heart. A five-naved basilica was built, and adorned in about 1100 with a stone portal that ranks among the high points of Romanesque art. Two fires had left the basilica in ruins by 1885, after which it was restored in a rather gloomy imitation of its former glory. The most interesting feature inside is the restored tomb of Guifré el Pilós.

You can visit the basilica and its great **portal** (admission free; h 10am–1pm & 3–7pm), now protected by a wall of glass. A chart near the portal (in Catalan) helps to decipher the feast of sculpture: a medieval vision of the universe, from God the Creator, in the centre at the top, to the month-by-month scenes of daily rural life on the innermost pillars.

Down a few steps, to the right of the doorway, is the monastery's beautiful **claustr** (cloister; admission €2). It's a two-storey affair, created in the 12th to 15th centuries.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Ca la Paula** (☎ 972 70 00 11; www.elripolles.com/cala paula; Carrer dels Pirineus 6; s/d €24/41; p ) This friendly family establishment is barely a stone's throw from the Monestir de Santa Maria. It has modern rooms with sparkling bathrooms.

**Can Nerol** (☎ 972 70 18 94; Carrer del Pla d'Ordina 11; meals €30; h lunch only Sun–Fri, lunch & dinner Sat) In a lovely house surrounded by gardens, this

restaurant serves a mix of Catalan and French cooking. You'll need to ask for directions: from Carretera de Ribes follow the winding lane of Carrer dels Hortolans down to the Riu Freser and cross the bridge. Turn right and head upstream to the highway overpass – the restaurant is just beyond it.

**Getting There & Away**

The bus and train stations are almost side by side on Carrer del Progrés, 600m southeast of the centre. Connections with Barcelona, Ribes de Freser and Puigcerdà are better by train. About 12 trains a day run to/from Barcelona (€5.50, about two hours), up to seven to Ribes de Freser (€1.90, 20 minutes) and six to Puigcerdà (€2.90, 1¼ hours).

**AROUND RIPOLL**

A short way north of Ripoll, the GI401 branches west from Campdevànol, passes through Gombrèn and then proceeds in twisting and turning fashion on to La Pobla de Lillet, set a short way below the source of one of Catalonia's more important rivers, the Llobregat.

The grey stone village started life as a Roman outpost and grew to some importance

as a local agricultural centre. People still cross its beautiful 12th-century Romanesque bridge and the town is also known for its delightful Jardins Artigas, a Modernista landscaped garden spread out along the river. You can sleep in one of three simple pensions.

Follow the road up into the mountains from La Pobla de Lillet to the source of the Llobregat. Just half a kilometre on and you reach the mountain hamlet of **Castellar de n'Hug**, over the shoulder from the La Molina ski resort (see p369). The hamlet was founded in the 13th century under the lords of Mataplana (based in Gombrèn). A tight web of alleys is bundled around the Romanesque Església de Santa Maria (much remodelled over the centuries), and from the square by the church you look north across a valley to the bare mountains beyond.

Six *pensions* are gathered about the hamlet, three of them on Plaça Major. Most have a bar attached, where you can get something to eat.

One **Transports Mir** (☎ 972 70 30 12; www.auto carsmir.com) bus a day (except Sunday) runs between Ripoll and Bagà via Campdevànol, Gombrèn, Castellar de n'Hug and La Pobla de Lillet. The journey (€4) takes 1½ hours.

**OUT & ABOUT IN THE PYRENEES**

The Catalan Pyrenees provide magnificent walking and trekking. You can undertake strolls of a few hours, or day walks that can be strung together into treks of several days. Nearly all can be done without camping gear, with nights spent in villages or *refugis* (mountain shelters).

Most of the *refugis* mentioned in this chapter are run by two Barcelona mountain clubs, the **Federació d'Entitats Excursionistes de Catalunya** (FEEC; ☎ 93 412 07 77; www.feec.org) and the **Centre Excursionista de Catalunya** (CEC; ☎ 93 315 23 11; www.ccc-centre.org in Spanish). A night in a *refugi* costs around €11.50 to €12.50. Normally FEEC *refugis* allow you to cook; CEC ones don't. Moderately priced meals are often available.

The coast-to-coast GR11 long-distance path traverses the entire Pyrenees from Cap de Creus on the Costa Brava to Hondarribia on the Bay of Biscay. Its route across Catalonia goes by way of La Jonquera, Albanyà, Beget, Setcases, the Vall de Núria, Planoles, Puigcerdà, Andorra, south of Pica d'Estats (3143m), over to the Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, then on to the southern flank of the Val d'Aran and into Aragón.

The best season for walking in the high Pyrenees is from late June to early September. Earlier than that, snow can make things difficult, and avalanches are possible. Later, the weather can turn poor. It can get very hot in midsummer even at high altitudes, but nowhere in the Pyrenees is the weather reliable; even in July and August you can get rainy days, fog and cloud – and cold temperatures at high altitude.

Local advice from tourist offices, park rangers, mountain *refugis* and other walkers is invaluable and you should look out for hiking maps of the kind mentioned in the Directory (p851).

There's boundless scope for **climbing** – Pedraforca in the Serra del Cadí offers some of the most exciting ascents. For more information on walking and trekking in Spain, see the Spain Outdoors chapter (p83).

## VALL ALTO DEL TER

This upper part of the Riu Ter valley reaches northeast from Ripoll to the pleasant towns of Sant Joan de les Abadesses and Camprodon, then north west to the modest **Vallter 2000 ski centre** (☎ 972 13 60 75; www.vallter2000.com; day lift pass €26), just below the French border and at 2150m. It has 12 pistes of all grades, nine lifts and a ski school, but snow can be unreliable (most is usually artificial). The area makes a more pleasant overnight stop than Ripoll, and from the upper reaches there are some excellent walks to the Vall de Núria. Get the Editorial Alpina *Puigmal* map guide.

The C38 road leaves the Ter valley at Camprodon to head over the 1513m Collado d'Ares into France.

## Sant Joan de les Abadesses

pop 3620

In Sant Joan de les Abadesses the restored 12th-century bridge over the Ter and the **Museu del Monestir** (☎ 972 72 00 13; Plaça de l'Abadessa; admission €1; 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Oct-Apr, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm May-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Jul & Aug) are worth a look. This monastery, another founded by Guifré el Pilós, began life as a nunnery but the nuns were expelled in 1017 for alleged licentious conduct. Its elegant 12th-century church contains the marvellous *Santíssim Misteri*, a 13th-century polychrome woodcarving of the descent from the cross, composed of seven life-size figures. Also remarkable is the Gothic *retablo* of Santa Maria La Blanca, carved in alabaster. The elegant 15th-century late-Gothic cloister is charming.

**Hostal Janpere** (☎ 972 72 00 77; Carrer del Mestre Andreu 3; s/d per person €20) is one of two simple *hostales* here. It has good if somewhat clinical rooms. Prices haven't budged in years! You can opt for half (€25) or full board (€35).

**Teisa** (☎ 972 70 20 95) operates up to seven buses daily from Ripoll to Sant Joan de les Abadesses (€1.15, 15 minutes). One daily bus runs from Barcelona (Carrer de Pau Claris 117) at 7.15pm to Camprodon via Ripoll (€8.85, two hours).

## Beget

Capping the end of a winding mountain lane that trails off here into a heavily wooded valley, this hamlet is a joy. The 12th-century Romanesque church is accompanied by an implausible array of roughly hewn houses, all

scattered about stone-paved lanes. Through it gushes a mountain stream. Beget is on the GR11 walking route.

**El Forn** (☎ 972 74 12 31; Carrer de Josep Duñach 9; full board per person €64), a well-kept cosy stone-and-timber house in the heart of the hamlet, is the best of the handful of accommodation and eating options.

There is no public transport to Beget.

## VALL DE NÚRIA & RIBES DE FRESER

Around AD 700, the story goes, Sant Gil (St Giles) came from Nîmes in France to live in a cave in an isolated mountain valley 26km north of Ripoll, preaching the Gospel to shepherds. Before he left, four years later, apparently fleeing Visigothic persecution, Sant Gil hurriedly hid away a wooden Virgin-and-child image he had carved, a cross, his cooking pot and the bell he had used to summon the shepherds. They stayed hidden until 1079, when an ox led some shepherds to the spot. The statuette, the *Mare de Déu de Núria*, became the patron of Pyrenean shepherds and Núria's future was assured. The first historical mention of a shrine was made in 1162.

Sant Gil would recoil in shock if he came back today. The large, grey sanctuary complex squatting at the heart of the valley is an eyesore and the crowds would make anyone with hermitic leanings run a mile. But otherwise Núria remains almost pristine, a wide, green, mountain-ringed bowl that is the starting point for numerous walks. Getting there is fun too, either on foot up the Gorges de Núria – the green, rocky valley of the thundering Riu Núria – or from Ribes de Freser town, by the little *cremallera*, which rises over 1000m on its 12km journey up the same valley.

## Orientation

Unless you're walking across the mountains to Núria, you must approach from the small town of Ribes de Freser, on the N152 14km north of Ripoll. The *cremallera* (rack-and-pinion railway) to Núria starts at Ribes-Enllaç station, just off the N152 at the southern end of Ribes. There's a road from Ribes to Queralbs, but from there on it's the *cremallera* or your feet.

## Information

Núria's **tourist office** (☎ 972 73 20 20; www.valldenuria.com; 10 8.30am-5.45pm mid-Sep–mid-Jul, 8.30am-6.45pm mid-Jul–mid-Sep) is in the sanctuary.

## Santuari de Núria

The large 19th- and 20th-century building that dominates the valley contains a hotel, restaurants and exhibition halls as well as the *santuari* (sanctuary) itself and its sacred *símbols de Núria*. The *santuari* has the same opening hours as the information office. The Mare de Déu de Núria sits behind a glass screen above the altar and is in the Romanesque style of the 12th century, so either Sant Gil was centuries ahead of his time or this isn't his work! Steps lead up to the bell, cross and cooking pot (which all date from at least the 15th century). To have your prayer answered, put your head in the pot and ring the bell while you say it.

## Skiing & Walking

In winter, Núria is a small-scale ski resort with 10 short runs. A day lift pass costs €24.75 (€20.30 on weekdays).

Walkers should get Editorial Alpina's *Puigmal* map guide before coming to Núria. You can walk up the gorge to Núria but skip the first unexciting 6km from Ribes de Freser by taking the *cremallera* (or road) to Queralbs, thus saving your energies for the steepest and the most spectacular part of the approach, which is about three hours' walk up. Or take the *cremallera* up and walk down!

From the Vall de Núria, you can cap several 2700m-to-2900m peaks on the main Pyrenees ridge in about 2½ to four hours' walking for each (one way). The most popular is *Puigmal* (2913m).

## Sleeping & Eating

Wild camping is banned in the whole Ribes de Freser-Núria area.

## NÚRIA

Behind the sanctuary there's a basic **zona d'campada** (bookings ☎ 972 73 20 20; sites per adult/tent €2/2), a camping area with limited facilities.

**Alberg Pic de l'Aliga** (☎ 972 73 20 48; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €19/23) The youth hostel is at the top of the cable car (*telecabina*) on the eastern side of the valley. Dorm rooms sleep from four to 14, and the price includes breakfast. The cable car runs 9am to 6pm daily (to 7pm mid-July to mid-September). On Friday evenings it also runs to meet the *cremallera* train at around 7pm and 9pm.

**Hotel Vall de Núria** (☎ 972 73 20 20; half-board per person up to €107) Housed in the sanctuary

building, the hotel has comfortable rooms with bathroom and satellite TV. Apartments are also available most of the year.

In the sanctuary building, **Autoservei** self-service cafeteria and Bar Finestrelles both have starters in the €6 region and main courses for around €10 to €12. La Cabana dels Pastors specialises in fondue and braised meats (€20 to €25 for a meal). A shop in the sanctuary building sells food. The bar and restaurant are closed during slow periods, but the Autoservei is generally open daily.

## RIBES DE FRESER

**Hotel Els Caçadors** (☎ 972 72 70 77; www.hotelsderibes.com; Carrer de Balandrau 24; s/d €22/44, half-board per person €38) A family-run business, this small hotel offers simple rooms with bathroom and TV. The buffet breakfast is grand – loads of cold meats, cheeses, juice, cereal and sweet pastries. Or try their three-star place across the road (half-board €55), where the best rooms are spacious, with parquet and timber, and, in some cases, have a hydromassage bathtub.

## QUERALBS

This delightful hamlet of stone houses with slate roofs makes a prettier base. Try for a room at **Pensió L'Avet** (☎ 972 72 73 77; Carrer Major 7; half-board per person €39; 10 daily mid-Jun–mid-Sep, Sat, Sun & holidays rest of year). It's a pleasant old house that is the only option in the village itself (often open only at weekends and hard to get a hold of). A couple of restaurants open up on weekends and during holiday periods.

## Getting There & Away

Transports Mir runs services between Ripoll and Ribes de Freser, with two or three buses a day Monday to Friday, and one on Saturday.

Up to seven trains a day run to Ribes-Enllaç from Ripoll (€1.90, 20 minutes) and Barcelona (€6.05, 2¼ hours).

The *cremallera* (☎ 972 73 20 20) is a narrow-gauge electric-powered rack-and-pinion railway that has been operating since 1931. It runs from Ribes-Enllaç to Núria and back six to 12 times a day; depending on the season (one way/return €9.55/15.25, 45 minutes one way). All trains stop at Ribes-Vila and Queralbs (1200m). It's a spectacular trip, particularly after Queralbs, as the train winds up the Gorges de Núria. Some services connect with Renfe trains at Ribes-Enllaç.

## CERDANYA

Cerdanya, along with French Cerdagne across the border, occupies a low-lying basin between the higher reaches of the Pyrenees to the east and west. Although Cerdanya and Cerdagne, once a single Catalan county, were divided by the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659, they still have a lot in common. Walkers should get a hold of Editorial Alpina's *Cerdanya* map and guide booklet (scaled at 1:50,000).

## Puigcerdà

pop 8850

Just 2km from the French border, Puigcerdà (puh-cher-da) is not much more than a way station, but it's a jolly one, particularly in summer and during the ski season. A dozen

Spanish, Andorran and French ski resorts lie within 45km. At a height of just over 1200m, Puigcerdà is the capital of Cerdanya.

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Puigcerdà stands on a small hill, with the train station at the foot of its southwest side. A few minutes' climb up some flights of steps takes you to Plaça de l'Ajuntament, off which is the **tourist office** (☎ 972 88 05 42; Carrer de Querol 1; h 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun).

The **Hospital de Puigcerdà** (☎ 972 88 01 50; Plaça de Santa Maria 1) is up the road from the tourist office.

### SIGHTS

The town was heavily damaged during the civil war and only the tower remains of the 17th-century **Església de Santa Maria** (Plaça de Santa Maria). The 13th-century Gothic **Església de Sant Domènec** (Passeig del 10 d'Abril) was also wrecked but later rebuilt. It contains 14th-century Gothic murals that somehow survived (opening times are erratic). The *estany* in the north of town, created back in 1380 for irrigation, is surrounded by turn-of-the-20th-century summer houses, built by wealthy Barcelona families.

### SLEEPING

The town is home to 13 varied hotels and *pensiones*.

**Camping Stel** (☎ 972 88 23 61; www.stel.es; sites per 2-person tent & car €31.50; h Jun-Sep; s p ) Out along the road to Llívia, this is the only nearby camping option and a pleasant one, with a pool, basketball and a football pitch. You can also rent bungalows by the month between October and May.

**Hotel del Lago** (☎ 972 88 10 00; www.hotellago.com; Avinguda del Dr Píguillem 7; s/d €81/118; p i s ) Near the *estany* (lake), this hotel has old-fashioned style and a nice leafy garden. The rooms vary greatly; some have heavy timber beams, while corner ones have windows opening in several directions out to the leafy exterior. The best doubles have hydromassage bathtubs.

### EATING

**Braseria St Jordi** (☎ 972 94 03 66; Plaça de Cabrinetty 15; meals €20-25; h Mon-Sat) A cheerful spot for all sorts of meat goodies, this makes an inviting, modestly priced option. Try for a seat by the window for the valley views and tuck into a *filet de bou* (fillet of beef; €15.50).

**La Vila** (☎ 972 14 08 04; Carrer d'Alfons I 34; meals €35; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun) Wander into this rustic, welcoming den in the heart of the town for a serving of lovingly prepared Catalan dishes with an original touch. A sweet and savoury combination is the *colomi amb tofona negra i salsa d'albercoc sec* (pigeon with black truffles and dry apricot sauce).

**El Pati de la Tieta** (☎ 972 88 01 56; Carrer dels Ferrers 20; pizza €9, meals €35-45; h daily in high season, Thu-Sun Jul-May) One of the best choices, this understated restaurant offers a creative range of dishes, from *broquetes de cangur i verdures* (kangaroo on a skewer with vegetables) to *vieires a la crema de coliflor i pisto de coriandre* (coquille St Jacques in a cauliflower cream sauce with coriander stew). Shame about the gaudy plastic seats in this rustic stone setting.

### ENTERTAINMENT

**Discoteca Gatzara** (☎ 972 88 07 57; Rambla de Josep Martí 1; h 10pm-5am Tue-Sun) This club has been keeping Puigcerdà's après-ski set dancing into the wee hours for years now. It remains a classic and is easy to roll home from. A couple of others are located outside town and require transport to reach.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Bus

**Alsina Graells** runs two daily buses (one at weekends) from Barcelona (€15, three hours) via the 5km Túnel del Cadí and two or three to **La Seu d'Urgell** (€5.10, one hour). They stop at the train station.

#### Car & Motorcycle

From Barcelona, the C16 approaches Puigcerdà through the Túnel del Cadí. Bicycles are not allowed in the tunnel, which is a tollway.

The N152 from Ribes de Freser climbs west along the northern flank of the Rigard valley, with the pine-covered Serra de Mogrony rising to the south, to the 1800m Collado de Toses (pass), then winds down to Puigcerdà.

The main crossing into France is at Bourg-Madame, immediately east of Puigcerdà, from where roads head to Perpignan and Toulouse.

#### Train

Six trains a day run from Barcelona to Puigcerdà (€7.90, 3¼ hours) via Ripoll and Ribes de Freser. Five in each direction make the seven-minute hop over the border to

Latour-de-Carol in France, where they connect with trains from Toulouse or Paris, and with the narrow-gauge Train Jaune (yellow train) down the Têt Valley to Perpignan.

## Llívia

Six kilometres northeast of Puigcerdà, across flat farmland, Llívia is a piece of Spain within France. Under the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees, Spain ceded 33 villages to France, but Llívia was a 'town' and so, together with the 13 sq km of its municipality, remained a Spanish possession.

The interest of Llívia's tiny medieval nucleus, near the top of the town, centres on the **Museu Municipal** (☎ 972 89 63 13; Carrer dels Forns 4; admission €1; h 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-May, 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays year-round) and the 15th-century Gothic **Església de Nostra Senyora dels Àngels**, just above the museum. The museum is in what's claimed to be Europe's oldest pharmacy, the *Farmacia Esteva*, founded in 1415. From the church you can walk up to the ruined **Castell de Llívia** where, during the short-lived period of Islamic dominion in the Pyrenees, the Muslim governor Manussa enjoyed a secret dalliance with Lampègia, daughter of the Duke of Aquitaine (or so legend has it).

Dine on the balconies of **Restaurant Can Ventura** (☎ 972 89 61 78; Plaça Major 1; meals €30-35; h Wed-Sun), a ramshackle building dating from 1791. The food is delightful – traditional Catalan fare that comes from a discreetly hidden modern kitchen.

Two or three buses a day run from Puigcerdà train station to Llívia. Otherwise, it's not a long walk, and the road is flat and quiet. You only cross about 2km of France before entering the Llívia enclave.

## La Molina & Masella

These ski resorts lie either side of Tosa d'Alp (2537m), 15km south of Puigcerdà, and are linked by the Alp 2500 lift. The two resorts have a combined total of 96 runs (day lift pass for the whole area €33) of all grades at altitudes of 1600m to 2537m. Information, rental equipment and ski schools are available at both resorts (☎ 972 89 20 31, www.lamolina.com; ☎ 972 14 40 00, www.masella.com).

### SLEEPING

Many skiers choose to stay in Puigcerdà or further afield.



**Alberg Mare de Déu de les Neus** (‰ 972 89 20 12; dm student & under 26yrs/26yrs & over €19/23; p ) At the bottom part of La Molina, near the train station, this is a handy youth hostel. Rooms range from doubles to eight-bed dorms. Many of the rooms have a bathroom.

**Hotel Adserà** (‰ 972 89 20 01; www.hoteladsera.com; half-board per person from €69; p s ) From the rooms of this mountain hotel, surrounded by greenery, the eye takes in the sweep of the valleys below. The rooms and public areas have warm parquet floors. The hotel has a pool (for the summer) and activities ranging from table tennis to archery.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

In the ski season there's a bus service from Puigcerdà. Most people come by car; the easiest route from Barcelona is by the C58 toll road and the C16 through the Túnel del Cadí. Roads also wind down to La Molina and Masella from the N152 west of the Collado de Toses.

#### Northern Cerdanya

The N260 Hwy runs southwest from Puigcerdà along the Riu Segre valley towards La Seu d'Urgell. It cuts its path between the main Pyrenees chain to the north and the range made up mainly of the Serra del Cadí and Serra de Moixeró to the south. Up to three buses a day run along this valley between Puigcerdà and La Seu d'Urgell.

About 6km from Puigcerdà, Bolvir has a little Romanesque church and, more importantly, a luxurious and characterful place to stay, Torre del Remei (right).

Another kilometre on from Bolvir, take the Ger turn-off for an excursion into the mountains. A minor asphalted road winds its way west and north through the broad, arid Valltova Valley to Meranges, a dishevelled, stone farming village that makes few concessions to the passing tourist trade. You can stay in the charming **Can Borrell** (‰ 972 88 00 33; www.canborrell.com; Carrer de Retorn 3; s/d from €78/91), a rustic hideaway tastefully decorated for a modestly discerning clientele. The rooms are all different, loaded with timber beams and high ceilings, and there is also a fine restaurant (meals €35), where the meals are prepared with mostly local products. You can opt for family rooms.

Those with cars can proceed along a sliver of road to the **Refugi de Malniu** (h daily Jun-Sep,

#### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Torre del Remei** (‰ 972 14 01 82; www.torredelremei.com; Camí Reial s/n, Bolvir; d €257-385; p a s ) This tastefully decorated Modernista mansion (which during the civil war was requisitioned as a school and later as a hospital by the Republican government) sits majestically amid tranquil gardens, and is a romantic and stylish getaway. The rooms, exquisitely furnished and each one different, are superb and the dining is equally tempting. You can go to gastronomic heaven for €70 to €80 a head. Big spenders could try the main tower suite (€664).

Sat & Sun rest of year), at 2130m. Right behind the *refugi* is the reed-covered **Estany Sec** (the misnamed Dry Lake). The *refugi* is on the path of the long-distance GR11 walk, which approaches from Guils de Cerdanya (also reachable by car) in the east, and continues west to Andorra.

#### SERRA DEL CADÍ

The N260 runs west along the wide Riu Segre valley from Puigcerdà to La Seu d'Urgell, with the Pyrenees climbing northwards towards Andorra, and the craggy pre-Pyrenees range of the Serra del Cadí rising steep and high along the southern flank. Although this face of the Cadí – rocky and fissured by ravines known as *canals* – looks daunting enough, the range's most spectacular peak is **Pedraforca** (2497m), a southern offshoot with the most challenging rock-climbing in Catalonia. Pedraforca and the main Cadí range also offer some excellent mountain walking for those suitably equipped and experienced.

#### Orientation

The Pedraforca area is most easily reached from the C16, then along the B400, which heads west 1.5km south of Guardiola de Berguedà. Pedraforca looms mightily into view about halfway to the village of Saldes, which sits 1215m high at its foot, 15km from the C16. The main Cadí range runs east–west, about 5km north of Saldes. The **Refugi Lluís Estasen** (see opposite) nestles below the northern face of Pedraforca, 2.5km northwest of Saldes. You can reach it by footpath from Saldes or by a partly paved road that turns north off

the B400 about 1km west of Saldes. Park at the Mirador de Gresolet (nice views), from where it's a 10-minute walk up to the refuge.

#### Information

The Parc Natural del Cadí-Moixeró's main **Centre d'Informació** (‰ 938 24 41 51; Carrer de la Vinya 1; h 9am–1.30pm & 3.30–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm & 4–6.30pm Sat, 9am–1pm Sun & holidays) is in **Bagà**, a quiet village (walk down to the stone bridge that crosses the stream) 4km north of Guardiola de Berguedà on the C16.

In Saldes, the **Centre d'Informació Massís del Pedraforca** (‰ 938 25 80 46; h 10am–2pm & 5–7.30pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun Jul–Aug, 11am–1pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Fri, 11am–2pm & 5–7pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun Sep–Jun) has information on the Saldes and Pedraforca area only.

#### Walking

##### PEDRAFORCA

The name means 'stone fork' and the approach from the east makes it clear why. The two separate rocky peaks, the northern **Pollegó Superior** (2497m) and the southern **Pollegó Inferior** (2400m), are divided by a saddle called **L'Enforcadura**. The northern face, rising near vertically for 600m, has some classic rock climbs; the southern has a wall that sends alpinists into raptures.

Pedraforca is also possible for walkers. From **Refugi Lluís Estasen** you can reach the **Pollegó Superior** summit in about three strenuous hours – either southwards from the refuge, then up the middle of the fork from the southeastern side (a path from Saldes joins this route); or westwards up to the **Collada del Verdet**, then south and east to the summit. The latter route has some hairy precipices

and requires a good head for heights. It's not suitable for coming down: you must use the first route.

#### Gósol, Tuixén & Beyond

The B400 is paved from Saldes to the pretty stone village of Gósol, 6km further west. The original Gósol (the Vila Vella), which dated back to at least the 9th century, is now abandoned on the hill south of the present village.

A road west from Gósol climbs the 1625m **Coll de Josa** pass, then descends past the picturesque hamlet of Josa del Cadí to **Tuixén** (1206m), another attractive village on a small hill and sometimes written **Tuixent**. From **Tuixén**, scenic paved roads lead northwest to **La Seu d'Urgell** (36km) and south to **Sant Llorenç de Morunys** (28km), which is on a beautiful cross-country road from **Berga** to **Organyà**.

#### Sleeping & Eating

##### SALDES & AROUND

There are at least four **camping grounds** along the B400 between the C16 and Saldes, some open year-round. In Saldes you'll find a handful of *pensiones* and a larger hotel.

**Refugi Lluís Estasen** (‰ 608 31 53 12; h daily Jun–Sep; Sat, Sun & holidays rest of year) Run by the FEEC and near the Mirador de Gresolet, this *refugi* has 87 places, meals and a warden in summer. In winter it has about 30 places. When it's full you can sleep outside, but not in a tent.

##### GÓSOL & TUIXÉN

You'll find a handful of *casas rurals* in both villages, although some are rented out only on weekends or for a week at a time in summer.

#### INTREPID TREMENTINAIRES

As late as the 1960s, the village of Tuixén was known for its natural herbs and remedies and for the extraordinary women who would head off (often on foot) to sell them, the so-called **Trementinaires** (named after *trementina*, or turpentine, which was one of their more popular items). Since the late 19th century, these wandering saleswomen would head off for as long as four months and walk as far afield as Barcelona, leaving their menfolk behind to tend the fields and farm animals, and only returned home when they had sold all their wares. Among the latter were *te de roca* ('rock tea' for upset tummies) and *orella d'ós* ('bear's ear' for coughs and colds). The women generally travelled in pairs, but even so, unaccompanied women travellers were otherwise virtually unheard of in Spain, much less from deep inland villages! The last **Trementinaire**, **Sofia d'Ossera**, undertook her last trip in 1982! You can learn more about these women in Tuixén's **Museu de les Trementinaires** (‰ 973 37 00 30; admission free; h 11am–2pm & 5–8pm daily Easter & Jul–Sep, 11am–2pm & 5–8pm Sat & Sun rest of the year), on the village square.



**Cal Fusté** (☎ 973 37 00 83; Plaça Major 9, Gósol; d €35) Right in the middle of town, this stone house with its own courtyard contains smallish spick-and-span rooms that are as good as any in the *cases rurals*.

**Forn Cal Moixó** (☎ 973 37 02 74; Carrer del Canal 2, Gósol; meals €15-18; h lunch daily, dinner only Fri & Sat) This bakery doubles as a homy restaurant. Tuck into filling and tasty local food, such as a tender *filet de vedella* (fillet of beef). The *menú del dia* is good lunch value at €11.

**Can Farragetes** (☎ 973 37 00 34; www.calfarragetes.com; Carrer del Coll 7, Tuixén; d €23 per person; p ) A big, friendly stone place set over two floors around a sprawling courtyard, this country village house has smallish but immaculate rooms featuring iron bedsteads and wood panelling.

### Getting There & Around

You need your own vehicle to reach Saldes, Gósol or Tuixén.

## LA SEU D'URGELL

pop 12,320

The lively valley town of La Seu d'Urgell (la *seu* - *dur-zhey*) is Spain's gateway to Andorra, 10km to the north. It's a pleasant place to spend a night, with an admirable medieval cathedral.

When the Franks evicted the Muslims from this part of the Pyrenees, in the early 9th century, they made La Seu a bishopric and capital of the counts of Urgell. It has been an important market and cathedral town since the 11th century.

### Information

**Hospital** (☎ 973 35 00 50; Passeig de Joan Brudieu 8).

**Policia Municipal** (☎ 973 35 04 26; Plaça dels Oms 1) In the Casa de la Ciutat (Town Hall).

**Tourist office** (☎ 973 35 15 11; www.laseu.org/turisme; Avinguda de les Valls d'Andorra 33; h 9am-9pm Jul-Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) At the northern entrance to town.

### Catedral de Santa Maria & Museu Diocesà

On the southern side of Plaça dels Oms, the 12th-century *seu* (cathedral; admission free; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-May) is one of Catalonia's outstanding Romanesque buildings despite various remodellings. It's one of more than a hundred Romanesque churches lining what has come to be known as the Ruta Romànica, from Perpignan (France) to the Urgell district.

The fine western façade, through which you enter, is decorated in typical Lombard style. The inside is dark and plain but still impressive, with five apses, some murals in the southern transept, and a 13th-century Virgin-and-child sculpture in the central apse.

From inside the cathedral you can enter the **Museu Diocesà** (☎ 973 35 32 42; www.museudiocesaurgell.org; admission €2.50; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, noon-1pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun Oct-May). This good museum encompasses the fine cloister and the 12th-century Romanesque **Església de Sant Miquel** (€1.50 without Museum; h 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Oct-May) as well as some good medieval Pyrenean church murals, sculptures and altarpieces, and a rare 10th-century Mozarabic Beatus (illustrated manuscript of the Apocalypse).

### Sleeping

**Pensió Jové** (☎ 973 35 02 60; Carrer dels Canonges 42; r per person €15) One of two basic digs on the same street in the old town, this place has clean, simple rooms with basin and shared bathroom.

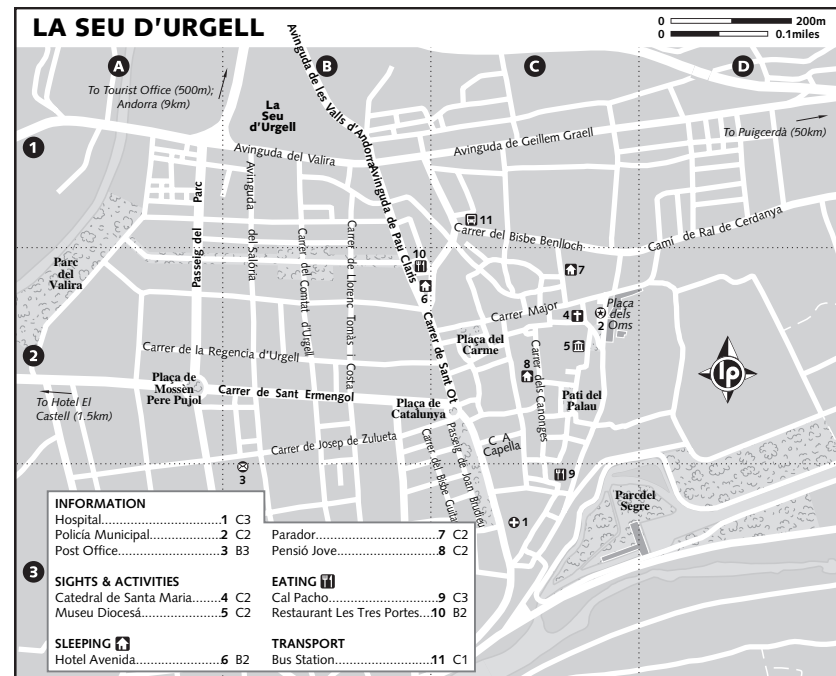
**Hotel Avenida** (☎ 973 35 01 04; www.avenhotel.com; Avinguda de Pau Claris 24; s/d €33/56) This hotel has a range of mostly sunny rooms. Although not overly characterful, the rooms are big enough and kept spick-and-span. Its Italian restaurant, Miscela, is not bad.

**Parador** (☎ 973 35 20 00; www.parador.es; Carrer de Sant Domènec s/n; s/d €103/129; pas) Built around the restored cloister of the 14th-century Sant Domènec convent, this is a modern establishment. Rooms are comfortable without being luxurious. What makes it is the setting, and extra touches such as the pool and sauna.

**Hotel El Castell** (☎ 973 35 00 00; www.hotelescastell.com; Castellciutat; s/d up to €343/396; pais) Set in a castle in a hilltop jumble of lanes about 1.5km west of central La Seu, this spa hotel is a world of its own. Run by the Relais & Châteaux team, it is the classiest hotel for miles around, with soothing gardens, a gym, sauna and gourmet restaurant.

### Eating

**Cal Pacho** (☎ 973 35 27 19; Carrer de la Font 11; meals €15-20; h Mon-Sat) Hidden away in the old town, this is a marvellous den serving old-fashioned local grub. Try a dish of *cargols a la llaua* (baked snails; €10) or *cabrit at forn* (roast kid). The *menú del dia* offers a broad variety of options for €8.50.



**Restaurant Les Tres Portes** (☎ 973 35 29 07; Carrer de Garriga i Massou 7; meals €30-35; h Thu-Sun) This is a homy spot, where you can chow down on mixed Spanish cuisine in the peaceful garden. It presents an array of options taking in fish, seafood and meat mains. The *mitjana de cavall amb alls* (horsemeat prepared in garlic) is hearty at €16.

### Getting There & Away

**BUS**  
The bus station is on the northern edge of the old town. **Alsina Graells** (☎ 973 35 00 20) runs four or five buses daily to Barcelona (€20.80, 3½ hours): two each via Solsona and Ponts, and one, which does not run on Sunday, via the Túnel del Cadí. There are also three to Puigcerdà (€5.10, one hour) and two to Lleida (€14.15, 2½ hours).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N260 HWY heads 6km southwest to Adrall, then turns off west over the hills to Sort. The C14 carries on south to Lleida, threading the towering Trespons gorge about 13km beyond Adrall.

## VALL DE LA NOGUERA PALLARESA

The Riu Noguera Pallaresa, running south through a dramatic valley about 50km west of La Seu d'Urgell, is Spain's best-known white-water river. The main centres for white-water sports are the town of Sort and the villages of Rialp and Llavorsí. You'll find companies to take you rafting, hydrospeeding, canoeing and kayaking or canyoning, climbing, mountain biking, horse riding and ponting (basically bungee jumping from bridges).

The main **tourist office** (☎ 973 62 10 02; Avinguda dels Comtes del Pallars 21; h 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 3pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-3pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2.30pm Sat Sep-Jun) for the area is in Sort.

### White-Water Rafting

The Riu Noguera Pallaresa has no drops of more than grade 4 (on a scale of 1 to 6), but it's exciting enough to attract a constant stream of white-water fans between April and August. It's usually at its best in May and June.

The best stretch is the 14km or so from Llavorsí to Rialp, on which the standard raft outing lasts one to 1½ hours and costs €30 to €35 per person depending on the company and season.

A trip down the same stretch on a hydrospeed costs from €34 (5km) up to €60 (14km). Longer rides to Sort and beyond will cost more.

At least one company, **YetiEmotions** (☎ 973 62 22 01; www.yetiemoitions.com; Carrer de Borda Era d'Alfons s/n, Llavorsí), organises high-grade trips, for experienced rafters only, further upstream. Several other rafting companies operate from Llavorsí and other points like Sort. Canoeing trips on the same river start at €34 per hour.

You need to bring your own swimming costume, towel and a change of clothes. All other gear is usually provided.

### Sleeping

Llavorsí is the most pleasant base, much more of a mountain village than Rialp or Sort, with a couple of camping grounds and four hotels.

**Camping Aigües Braves** (☎ 973 62 21 53; sites per 2-person tent & car €18; h mid-Mar–Aug; p s ) About 1km north of Llavorsí proper, this pleasant riverside camping ground has a pool, restaurant and mini-market.

**Hotel Riberies** (☎ 973 62 20 51; www.riberies.com; Camí de Riberies s/n; s/d €83/133; p s ) This is by far the most pleasant choice. Timber ceilings and wooden floors give the spacious rooms a warm feel, and the price includes breakfast. Throw in comfort factors like the verdant site, good restaurant and a heated swimming pool.

### Getting There & Away

Alsina Graells runs one daily bus (at 7.30am) from Barcelona to Sort, Rialp, Llavorsí (€26.50, 5½ hours) and Esterrí d'Aneu (€28.30). From June to October it continues to Vielha (€32.90) and the Val d'Aran. The return bus leaves Llavorsí at 1.56pm. The Barcelona–Vielha trip is shorter and cheaper via Lleida (€27.60, 5½ hours)

### NORTHWESTERN VALLEYS

North of the highway that leads northwest from Llavorsí towards the Port de Bonaigua pass, stretches a series of verdant valleys leading up to some of the most beautiful sights in the Catalan Pyrenees.

The Vall de Cardós and Vall Ferrera, heading back into the hills northeast of Llavorsí, lead to some remote and, in parts, tough mountain walking country along and across the Andorran and French borders, including Pica d'Estats, the highest peak in Catalonia. Editorial Alpina's *Pica d'Estats* and *Montgarrí* maps will help.

### Vall de Cardós

Heading north into the hills along the L504 road from Llavorsí, this pretty valley leads to challenging mountain-walking possibilities. Editorial Alpina's *Pica d'Estats* map-guide is useful here. There is no public transport up the valley.

**Lladrés** and **Lladorre**, the latter graced with a charming Romanesque church, are pretty stone hamlets oozing bucolic charm. **Tavascan** marks the end of the asphalt road. It's a huddle of well-kept houses and a launch pad for numerous excursions. The most stunning piece of scenery is a crystal-blue glacial lake (the largest in the Pyrenees), **Estany de Certascan**, about 13km away along a tough road best negotiated by 4WD. Just out of view of the lake is the **Refugi de Certascan** (☎ 973 62 13 89; €13; h daily early mid-Jun–mid-Sep, some weekends & holidays rest of year), which has room for 40 people, showers and offers meals. More trails and lakes await in this frontier mountain territory. The valley's towns are littered with charming *cases de pagès* (country guesthouses), along with three hotels in Tavascan.

### Vall Ferrera

Greener than the Vall de Cardós and at the heart of the Parc Natural de l'Alt Pirineu (Catalonia's biggest nature reserve), this valley is another pleasant surprise, hiding several pretty villages and bringing even more good walking country within reach. The ascent of the Pica d'Estats (3143m), the region's highest peak, is generally undertaken from here. There is no public transport.

The prettiest hamlet, **Àreu**, is a popular base for walkers. It is divided into two separate settlements, each with a Romanesque church: **Sant Climent** is in the lower part and **Sant Feliu de la Força** up the road. The ascent of and return from the Pica d'Estats is an all-day affair and only for the fit. You need to be at the **Refugi de Vall Ferrera** (☎ 973 62 43 78; h Easter & mid-Jun–mid-Oct), 10km to the north of Àreu, at dawn. On the way up you will pass glacial lakes, high pastures and ever-changing scenery, before ascending the bare rocky summit.

There are several *cases de pagès* and one hotel in Àreu, and more options in **Alins**. **Casa Besolí** (☎ 973 62 44 15; La Plaça s/n; d €40), in the lower part of the village, is one of the few that rents out rooms by the night. Rooms are small but immaculately kept affairs.

### Valls d'Aneu

To proceed to the next valleys west, you return to Llavorsí and the C13 Hwy, along which you proceed north. After 12km you pass the turn-off on the left for Espot – this is the most popular way into the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici.

Six kilometres further on from the turn-off, after passing an artificial lake on the right where you can hire rowing boats and canoes to potter about in, you'll arrive at **Esterrí d'Aneu**, a popular, if distant, base for the ski fields of Baqueira–Beret (p380) in the Val d'Aran. Of the various valleys that make up the Valls d'Aneu, the Vall d'Isil is the most intriguing. Follow the C13 directly north through Esterrí d'Aneu and it will lead you over a bridge across the Riu Noguera Pallaresa. You then follow this back road (the C147) up into a mountain valley, passing through the villages of **Borén**, **Isil** and the half-abandoned **Alós d'Isil**.

### PARC NACIONAL D'AIGÜESTORTES I ESTANY DE SANT MAURICI & AROUND

Catalonia's only national park extends 20km east to west, and only 9km from north to south, but packs in more beauty than most areas 100 times its size. The product of glacial action over two million years, it's essentially two east–west valleys at 1600m to 2000m altitude lined by jagged 2600m to 2900m peaks of granite and slate. Against this backdrop, pine and fir forests, and open bush and grassland, bedecked with wildflowers in spring, combine with some 200 small *estanyis* (lakes) and countless streams and waterfalls to create a wilderness of rare splendour.

The national park, whose boundaries cover 141.2 sq km, lies at the core of a wider wilderness area, whose outer limit is known as the *zona perifèrica* and includes some magnificent high country to the north and south. The total area covered by the wilderness area is 408.5 sq km and is monitored by park rangers.

### Orientation

#### APPROACHES

The main approaches are via the village of Espot (1320m), 4km east of the park's eastern boundary, and Boí, 5.5km from the western side.

#### THE PARK

The two main valleys are those of the Riu Escrita in the east and the Riu de Sant Nicolau in the west. The Escrita flows out of the

park's largest lake, the 1km-long **Estany de Sant Maurici**. The Sant Nicolau's main source is **Estany Llong**, 4km west of Estany de Sant Maurici across the 2423m Portarró d'Espot pass. Three kilometres downstream from Estany Llong, the Sant Nicolau runs through a particularly beautiful stretch known as **Aigüestortes** (Twisted Waters).

Apart from the valley openings at the eastern and western ends, virtually the whole perimeter of the park is mountain crests, with numerous spurs of almost equal height reaching in towards the centre. One of these, from the south, ends in the twin peaks **Els Encantats** (2746m and 2733m), towering over Estany de Sant Maurici.

#### MAPS & GUIDES

Editorial Alpina's map guides are adequate, although they don't show every single trail. *Sant Maurici – Els Encantats* covers the eastern half of the park and its approaches; *Vall de Boi* covers the western half and its approaches; *Montserrat de Pallars* covers the northern Vall Fosca; and *Val d'Aran*, naturally, covers the Val d'Aran. A better map of the whole area is the Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya's *Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici*, scaled at 1:25,000 – but even it is not perfect. The help of guides can be enlisted at the Espot and Boi information offices.

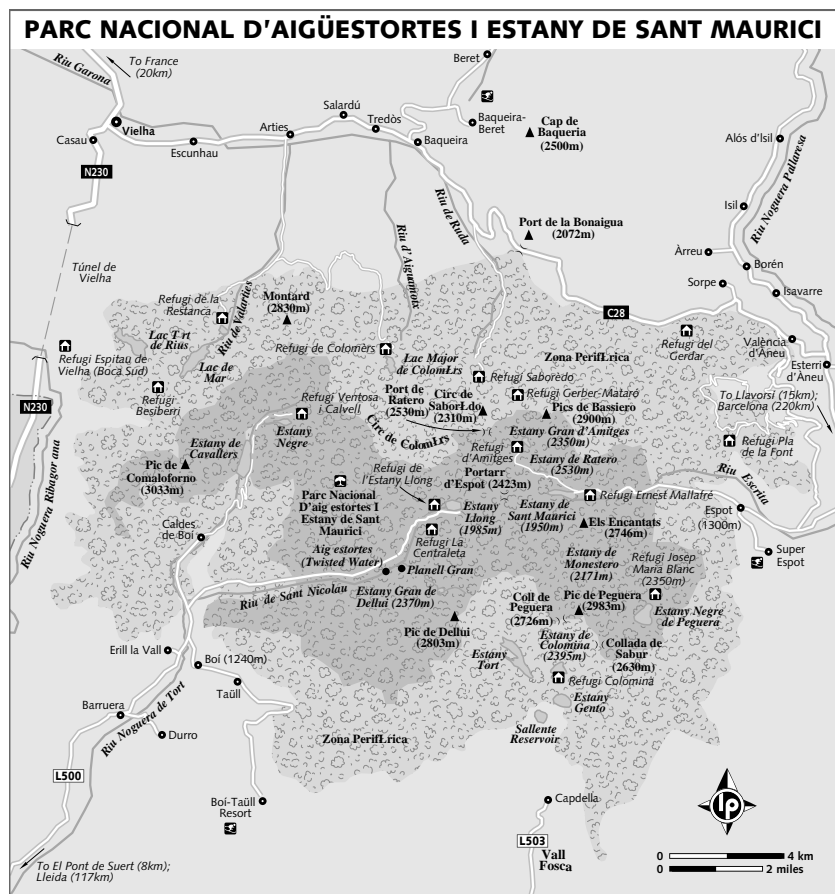
### Information

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

In Espot, there are **national park information offices** (☎ 973 62 40 36; h 9am–1pm & 3.30–6.45pm daily Jun–Sep, 9am–2pm & 3.30–5.45pm Mon–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun Oct–May) and **Boí** (☎ 973 69 61 89; h same as Espot office). The **tourist office** (☎ 973 69 40 00; h 9am–2pm & 5–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) in Barruera, on the L500, 10km north from the N230, is a good source of information on the area around the west side of the park. A sub-branch is open at Taüll in Easter and June to September (same opening times). Offices south of the park are located in **El Pont de Suert** (☎ 973 69 06 40) and **La Poblada de Segur** (☎ 973 68 02 57).

#### PARK RULES

Private vehicles cannot enter the park. Wild camping is not allowed, nor are swimming or other 'aquatic activities' in the lakes and rivers. Hunting, fishing, mushroom-picking and just about every other kind of potentially harmful activity are banned.



## Romanesque Churches

The Vall de Boí ([www.vallboi.com](http://www.vallboi.com)), southwest of the park, is dotted with some of Catalonia's loveliest little Romanesque churches, which together were declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 2000. Two of the finest are at Taüll, 3km east of Boí. Sant Climent de Taüll, at the entrance to the village, with its slender six-storey bell tower, is a gem, not only for its elegant, simple lines but also for the art that once graced its interior until the works were transferred to museums in the 20th century. The central apse contains a copy of a famous 1123 mural that now resides in Barcelona's Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (see p299). At the church's centre is a *Pantocrator* (Christ figure), whose rich Mozarabic-influenced col-

ours, and expressive but superhuman features, have become a virtual emblem of Catalan Romanesque art. Other art from this church has found its way to museums as far away as Boston in the USA!

Santa Maria de Taüll (admission free; h 10am-7pm), up in the old village centre and possessing a five-storey tower, is also well represented in the Barcelona museum but lacks the *in situ* copies that add to the interest of Sant Climent.

Other worthwhile Romanesque churches in the area are at Boí (Sant Joan), Barruera (Sant Feliu), Durro (Nativitat) and Erill la Vall (Santa Eulàlia). The latter has a slender six-storey tower to rival Sant Climent's and slopes upwards to the altar. Next door is the Centre

d'Interpretació del Romànic (☎ 973 69 67 15; Carrer del Bataló 5; h 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), which has a small Romanesque art collection, and it's also where you can organise guided tours of the churches.

You can visit all the churches (with the exception of Santa Maria de Taüll) from 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 7pm daily (admission €1.20 each or €5 for all six churches).

## Walking

The park is crisscrossed by plenty of paths, ranging from well marked to unmarked, enabling you to pick suitable routes.

## EAST-WEST TRAVERSE

You can walk right across the park in one day. The full Espot-to-Boí (or vice versa) walk is about 25km and takes nine hours, but you can shorten this by using Jeep-taxis to/from Estany de Sant Maurici or Aigüestortes (3km downstream from Estany Llong) or both. Espot (1300m) to Estany de Sant Maurici (1950m) is 8km (two hours). A path then climbs to the Portarró d'Espot pass (2423m), where there are fine views over both of the park's main valleys. From the pass you descend to Estany Llong and Aigüestortes (1820m; about 3½ hours from Estany de Sant Maurici). Then you have around 3.5km to the park entrance, 4km to the L500 and 2.5km south to Boí (1260m) – a total of about three hours.

## SHORTER WALKS

Numerous good walks of three to five hours' return will take you up into spectacular side valleys from Estany de Sant Maurici or Aigüestortes.

From the eastern end of Estany de Sant Maurici, one path heads south 2.5km up the Monastero valley to Estany de Monastero (2171m), passing Els Encantats on the left. Another goes 3km northwest up by Estany de Ratero to Estany Gran d'Amitges (2350m). From Planell Gran (1850m), 1km up the Sant Nicolau valley from Aigüestortes, a path climbs 2.5km southeast to Estany Gran de Dellui (2370m). You can descend to Estany Llong (3km); it takes about four hours from Aigüestortes to Estany Llong.

## Skiing

The Boí-Taüll ski resort (☎ 902 40 66 40; [www.boitaullresort.com](http://www.boitaullresort.com); day lift pass €30) is one of Catalonia's more promising areas, with 46 pistes (most fairly easy) covering 42km. You can also ski

around Espot (☎ 973 62 40 58; [www.esportesqui.net](http://www.esportesqui.net); day lift pass €28), which gives you a further 31 pistes over 32km.

## Sleeping CAMPING

There are four similarly priced camping grounds in and around Espot. **Camping Vorapark** (☎ 973 62 41 08; [www.voraparc.com](http://www.voraparc.com); Prat del Vedat; sites per 2-person tent & car €19; h Apr-Sep; p s ) is about the best in Espot, about 1.5km out of town towards the park entrance. It has a pleasant swimming pool, as well as a pool hall, bar and mini-market.

## MOUNTAIN REFUGIS

Six *refugis* in the park and nine more inside the *zona perifèrica* provide accommodation for walkers. They tend to be staffed from early or mid-June to September, and for some weeks in the first half of the year for skiers. At other times several of them leave a section open where you can stay overnight; if you are unsure, call ahead or ask at the park information offices. Most charge €12.50 per person to stay overnight. The refuges in the park are listed here. Those outside are marked on the map.

**Refugi d'Amitges** (☎ 973 25 01 09; [www.amitges.com](http://www.amitges.com)) At Estany Gran d'Amitges (2380m), in the north of the park, it's run by the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya (CEC). Meals and showers are available.

**Refugi La Centraleta** Basic digs with bunks, mattresses and blankets, 15 minutes south of Refugi de l'Estany Llong.

**Refugi Ernest Mallafré** (☎ 973 25 01 18) It's near the eastern end of Estany de Sant Maurici (1950m) and run by the FEEC. It has meals but no showers.

**Refugi de l'Estany Llong** (reservations ☎ 629-374652, 973 29 95 45) It's near Estany Llong (1985m) and run by the national park; there's a kitchen and showers.

**Refugi Josep Maria Blanc** (☎ 973 25 01 08; [www.jmblanc.com](http://www.jmblanc.com)) It's near Estany Tort (2350m) and run by the CEC; meals available when staffed.

**Refugi Ventosa i Calvell** (☎ 973 29 70 90; [www.refugiventosa.com](http://www.refugiventosa.com)) The CEC runs this *refugi* in the northwest of the park (2220m); it has a kitchen and showers.

## HOSTALES & HOTELS

The villages of Espot, Boí and Taüll have a range of accommodation options (including several mid-range hotels in Espot). There are

*hostales* and *casas de pagès* in Barruera, El Pont de Suert, Capdella and La Torre de Capdella.

### Esport

**Residència Felip** (☎ 973 62 40 93; s/d €15/30, Jul-Aug €25/40) A friendly, family-run place in the heart of the village, this spot has clean rooms, and rates include breakfast. It is one of three country homestays here.

### Taüll

Three kilometres uphill from Boí, Taüll is by far the most picturesque place to stay on the west side of the park. It has nine *casas de pagès* and over a dozen hotels and *pensiones*, either in the village itself or in the surrounding area.

**Pensión Santa Maria** (☎ 973 69 61 70; www.taull.com; Plaça Cap del Riu 3; d up to €105) Through a shady entrance a grand stone archway leads into the quiet courtyard of this rambling country haven, with rose-draped balcony. The rooms are tastefully furnished and the building, all stonework, timber and slate roof, oozes timeless character. For €7 the staff will pack you a picnic lunch.

### Eating

Note that throughout the area many places close mid-week and in the off-season. Most of the towns have one or two fairly basic restaurants.

**Restaurant Juquim** (☎ 973 62 40 09; meals €20) This restaurant on the main square has a varied menu concentrating largely on hearty country fare, with generous winter servings of *olla pallaresa* (steaming hotpot) or *civet de senglar* (wild boar stew).

**Hotel Roya** (☎ 973 62 40 40; meals €25-30) Also in Esport, the century-old Hotel Roya offers a similar range of food in a slightly more up-market setting, with a dining room inside and sunny separate dining area opposite the hotel entrance. Try the *truita de riu del país* (local river trout).

In Taüll, where there are a handful of eateries, you could try **Sant Climent** (☎ 973 69 60 52; meals €15-20; ̢ daily Dec-Easter & Jul-Sep) for a piping-hot onion soup and other simply home-cooked fare.

### Getting There & Away

#### BUS

Daily buses from Barcelona, Lleida and La Pobla de Segur to Esterrí d'Aneu (and in summer to the Val d'Aran) will stop at the Esport

turning on the C13. From there you have an 8km uphill walk (or hitch) to Esport.

Alsina Graells buses from Barcelona to La Pobla de Segur (€22.15, three to 4½ hours) run up to three times a day all year. From July to mid-September, a connecting bus runs daily from La Pobla de Segur to El Pont de Suert and from there to Barruera and the Boí turn-off (el Cruce de Boí) on the L500 (1km short of Boí).

### Getting Around

Once you're close to the park, the easiest way of getting inside it is by Jeep-taxi from Esport or Boí. There's a more or less continuous shuttle service between Esport and Estany de Sant Maurici, and between Boí and Aigüestortes, saving you, respectively, 8km and 10km. The one-way fare for either trip is €4.40 per person and the services run from outside the park information offices in Esport and Boí (from July to September 8am to 7pm, other months 9am to 6pm).

### VAL D'ARAN

pop 9200

This lush green valley, Catalonia's northernmost outpost, is surrounded by spectacular 2000m-plus mountains. Its only natural opening is northwards to France, to which it gives its river, the Riu Garona (Garonne), flowing down to Bordeaux. Thanks in part to its geography, Aran's native language is not Catalan but Aranese (*aranés*), which is a dialect of Occitan or the *langue d'oc*, the old Romance language of southern France.

Despite this northward orientation, Aran has been tied politically to Catalonia since 1175, when Alfonso II took it under his protection to forestall the designs of rival counts on both sides of the Pyrenees. A major hiccup came with the Napoleonic occupation from 1810 to 1815.

For all its intriguing past, the Val d'Aran is in danger of being overrun by tourism, which, since the 1964 opening of the Baqueira-Beret ski resort, has replaced farming and herding as the economic mainstay. That said, many villages retain an old-fashioned core and, from Aran's pretty side valleys, walkers can go over the mountains in any direction, notably southwards to the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici.

The Val d'Aran is some 35km long and is considered to have three parts: Naut Aran

(Upper Aran), the eastern part, aligned east-west; Mijaran (Middle Aran) around Vielha; and Baish Aran (Lower Aran), where the Garona flows northeast to France.

### Vielha

pop 5020

Vielha is Aran's junction town, and the Aranese spelling of its name is more common than the Catalan and Castilian version, Viella.

### INFORMATION

**Hospital** (☎ 973 64 00 04; Carrer deth Espitau)

**Mossos d'Esquadra** (Catalan regional police; ☎ 973 25 72 85) Just north of the centre along the N230 to France.

**Tourist office** (☎ 973 64 01 10; www.aran.org; Carrer de Sarriulera 10; ̢ 9am-9pm)

### SIGHTS

The small old quarter is around Plaça dera Gleisa and across the little Riu Nere, just west of the square. The **Gleisa de Sant Miquèu** (Plaça dera Gleisa) is a church that displays a mix of 12th- to 18th-century styles, with a 13th-century main portal. It contains some notable medieval artwork, especially the 12th-century *Crist de Mijaran*, an almost life-sized wooden bust that is thought to have been part of a *Descent from the Cross* group. The **Musèu dera Val d'Aran** (☎ 973 64 18 15; Carrer Major 11; admission €2; ̢ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) tells the tale of Aran's history up to the present.

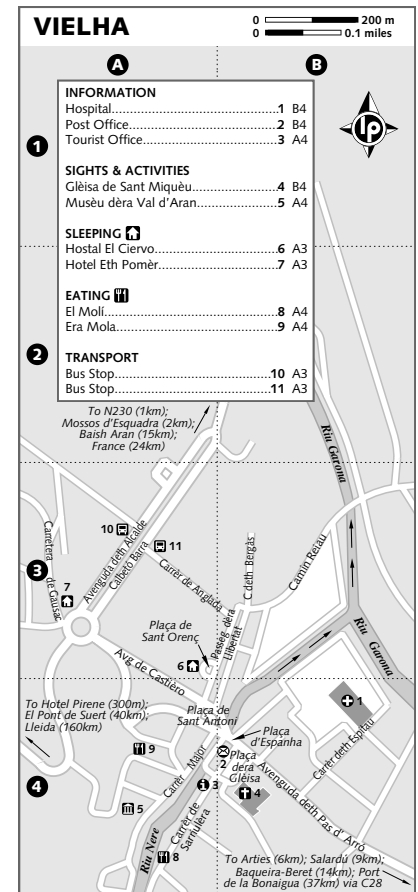
### SLEEPING

About a third of the Val d'Aran's hotels are in the capital. For some of the cheaper places, head down Passeig dera Llibertat, north off Avenguda de Castièro. High season for most is Christmas to New Year, Easter and a handful of other peak holiday periods: high summer (July to August) and much of the ski season (January to February). At other times, prices can be as much as halve.

**Hostal El Ciervo** (☎ 973 64 01 65; Plaça de Sant Orenç 3; s/d €50/78) Some of the better rooms in this perfectly adequate, 18-room, old-style hotel overlooking a central square have the singular benefit of power showers.

**Hotel Pirene** (☎ 973 64 00 75 or 902 16 02 42; www.hotelpirene.com; Carretera del Tünel s/n; s/d €58/96; ̢ ) Perched on a rise just above the centre of Vielha, this modern hotel offers fairly straightforward rooms with valley views.

**Hotel Eth Pomèr** (☎ 973 64 28 88; www.hotelpomer.com; Carretera de Gausac 4; s/d €73/96; ̢ a i ) In



central Vielha, this hotel is ideal for skiers. Rooms are bright with parquet floors, high ceilings, attractive wood furnishings and modern marble bathrooms.

### EATING

Quality dining is quite hard to come by in Vielha, but you will find no shortage of places serving average meals – many will dish up the local speciality, *olla aranesa* (a hearty hotpot).

**El Molí** (☎ 973 64 17 18; Carrer de Sarriulera 26; meals €30) On the banks of Riu Nere, this eatery specialises in grilled meaty dishes and *llesques*, toasty bread with toppings like *ceps*, *jabugo i formatge tòs* (mushrooms, top quality ham and melted cheese; €15).



**Era Mòla** (☎ 973 64 24 19; Carrer de Marrèc 8; meals €30-35; 1 Thu-Tue mid-Jul-Sep & Dec-Apr) Easily the best restaurant in town, located in a low-slung house in the heart of the old town. Expect carefully prepared local and more international cuisine. The desserts, with a French leaning, rate a special mention.

## Arties

pop 370

Six kilometres east of Vielha, this village on the southern side of the highway sits astride the confluence of the Garona and Valarties rivers. Among its cheerful stone houses is the Romanesque **Gleisa de Santa Maria**, with its three-storey belfry and triple apse.

Just nearby in a charming house atop the Valarties stream is **Hotel Residencia Besiberri** (☎ 973 64 08 29; Carrer de la Font 3; s/d €75/96; 1 Dec-Apr & Jul-Sep). This rustic place could almost be at home somewhere in Austria, with stone and timber trims. The staff can arrange for a babysitter when you're out wandering or skiing.

Another reason for coming to Arties is to eat at **Casa Irene** (☎ 973 64 43 64; Carrer Major 20; meals €40-55; 1 Wed-Sun, dinner only Tue, closed Oct & May). The food at Casa Irene is sublime, featuring a tempting mix of sturdy local dishes and international flair.

## Salardú

pop 1200

Three kilometres east of Arties, Salardú's nucleus of old houses and narrow streets has largely resisted the temptation to sprawl. In May, June, October or November, however, you will find only a few hotels open. In the apse of the village's 12th- and 13th-century **Sant Andreu** church, you can admire the 13th-century **Crist de Salardú** crucifixion carving.

The town is a handy base for the Baqueira-Beret ski resort, located 4km from here.

**Alberg Era Garona** (☎ 973 64 52 71; Carretera de Vielha s/n; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €19/23) is a large youth hostel built in local stone and slate. It has rooms of up to four beds, each with a bathroom.

**Hotel deth Pais** (☎ 973 64 58 36; Carrer de Santa Paula s/n; s/d €72/89; 1 ) is in the middle of the original village; it's a pleasant slate-roofed hotel with straightforward rooms.

## Baqueira-Beret

Baqueira (Vaquèira in Aranes), 3km east of Salardú, and Beret, 8km north of Baqueira,

form Catalonia's premier ski resort (☎ 973 63 90 10; www.baquiera.es; day lift pass €39), favoured by the Spanish royal family, no less! Its good lift system gives access to 72 varied pistes totalling 104km (larger than any other Spanish resort), amid fine scenery at between 1500m and 2510m.

There's nowhere cheap to stay in Baqueira, and nowhere at all at Beret. Many skiers stay down the valley in Salardú, Arties or Vielha. If you want to rent an apartment, call the central booking number ☎ 973 63 90 27.

## North of Vielha

The hills on either side of the highway up to the French frontier hide some exquisite countryside with fine walking trails and an assortment of curious villages.

### ARRÒS, VILA & OTHER VILLAGES

Turn off the highway at Eth Pònt d'Arròs and climb a few kilometres into Arròs via Vila. This sleepy village makes a better choice of place to stay than the valley towns. Try **Casa Mariu** (☎ 973 64 03 41; Cap dera Vila 13; d €32). This charming village house, all stone and dark wood shutters, is typical of the Val d'Aran. Other villages dot the area too.

### PLAN DERA ARTIGA DE LIN

Branch west, off the main highway at Es Bòrdes, a typical Aranes village, and keep following the road as it twists its way up into heavily wooded countryside. The drive alone is a real delight: follow the course of the Joèu stream, as you gain altitude, to reach the high mountain pastures of the Plan dera Artiga de Lin plain. Walking trails lead off into the tall forbidding mountains of the Aragonese Pyrenees, capped by the Pic d'Aneto (see p430).

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**El Raconet** (☎ 973 64 17 30; Carrer de Cre-stalhera 3, Arròs; meals €20-25; 1 Mon-Fri mid-Jul-Sep, plus Sat & Sun ski season; otherwise weekends only) Regulars keep coming back to this cosy stonewalled house converted into a charming country restaurant. The setting alone makes it worthwhile. Solid country cooking is on offer and the cooks have a special penchant for *bacalao* (dried and salted cod).

## Getting There & Around

### BUS

Two Alsina Graells buses run daily between Barcelona and Vielha (€27.60, 5½ hours) via Lleida and El Pont de Suert. Lleida to Vielha (€10.89) takes three hours. From June to October, a daily Alsina Graells bus connects Barcelona and Vielha (€32.90, 7½ hours) via La Pobla de Segur, Llavorsí, the Espot turning on the C13, Port de la Bonaigua and Salardú.

A local bus service runs from four (at weekends) to nine times daily along the valley from Baqueira to Les or Pontaut (for Eth Pont de Rei) via Vielha and the intervening villages. Several others run from Vielha either to Baqueira or to Les/Pontaut. The trip from one end of the valley to the other takes up to an hour. A single ticket for any destination is €0.80 (or €7.20 for a book of 10 tickets).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The N230 Hwy from Lleida and El Pont de Suert reaches Aran through the 5.25km Túnel de Vielha, then heads north from Vielha to the French border at Eth Pont de Rei.

From the Vall de la Noguera Pallaresa, the C28 crosses the Port de la Bonaigua pass (2072m) – which is sometimes closed in winter – into Naut Aran, meeting the N230 Hwy at Vielha.

## CENTRAL CATALONIA

Away from the beaches and mountains that captivate the bulk of roamers in Catalonia is a host of little-visited gems splashed across the Catalan hinterland. About halfway between Barcelona and the Pyrenees lies the graceful town of Vic, with its grand Plaça Major. Northwest of the capital, you can strike out for Manresa (just beyond Montserrat), Cardona (with its windy castle complex) and Solsona, en route to Lleida. An alternative route to Lleida takes you further south through the Conca de Barberà, littered with majestic medieval monasteries.

### VIC

pop 37,825

Vic, with its attractive historic centre and some fine restaurants, dominates the flatlands of La Plana de Vic to the south of the Pyrenees, and was one of Catalonia's leading religious centres. The power of the bishops of Vic stretched far

and wide and explains the surprising number of churches crammed into the old town.

## Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 93 886 20 91; www.victurisme.com; Carrer de la Ciutat 4; 1 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun)

## Sights

**Plaça Major**, the largest of Catalonia's central squares, is lined with medieval, baroque and Modernista mansions. It's still the site of regular markets, hence its other name, Plaça del Mercadal.

The **Catedral de Sant Pere** (admission €2; 1 10am-1pm & 4-7pm) is a neoclassical Goliath of gloomy taste, and flanked by a Romanesque bell tower. Inside, the dark, square-based pillars are lightened somewhat by murals by Josep Maria Sert (he had to do them twice because the first set was destroyed by fire in 1936). It is worth the admission fee to enter the Romanesque crypt, see the treasury rooms and wander into the stone lace-work splendour of the Gothic cloister. Entry is from the left side of the altar.

Across Carrer de Cloquer, the **Museu Episcopal** (☎ 93 886 93 60; Plaça del Bisbe Oliba 3; adult/child, student & senior €4/2; 1 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar) holds a marvellous collection of Romanesque and Gothic art, among other things. In Catalonia it is second only to the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya collection (p299) in Barcelona. The Romanesque collection includes the vivid *Davallament*, a scene depicting the taking down of Christ from the cross. The Gothic collection contains works by such key figures as Lluís Borrassà and Jaume Huguet.

## Sleeping & Eating

Vic is an easy day trip from Barcelona. The city is known for its disproportionate density of high-quality restaurants, and it's close enough to Barcelona for people from the big city to have an agreeable gourmet getaway.

**Hostal Osona** (☎ 93 883 28 45; Carrer de Remei 3; d €28) If you do need digs, this basic *hostal* has rooms with basin and shared showers in the hall. Otherwise there are three mid-level hotels.

**La Taula** (☎ 93 886 32 29; Plaça de Don Miquel de Clariana 4; meals €20-25; 1 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat all year, lunch only Sun Oct-May) In a town that bristles with eateries, this is a bright star of traditional cooking, with fair prices and no pretensions. The *entrecot a la tòfona* (with truffles) is delicious.

## Getting There & Away

Regular *rodalies* (line C3) run from Barcelona (€3.80, up to 1½ hours).

## AROUND VIC

### Rupit

pop 240

An enchanting excursion northeast of Vic takes you 31km along the C153 to Rupit, a splendid old village set amid rugged grazing country – the flat-top mountains around here come as quite a surprise. You cross a suspension footbridge made in the 1940s to reach the village, which is full of quaint 17th-century houses, a baroque church and tucked-away squares. Especially enticing is Carrer del Fossar, which climbs the spine of the hill, along which part of the village is spread-eagled. Rupit is a good base for rambles in the area.

Getting here without your own vehicle is problematic. *Sagalés* (☎ 93 889 25 77) buses leave Carrer de Casp 30 in Barcelona at 6pm Monday to Friday and at 11.20am on Saturday. Change buses in Vic. The trip (€9.50) takes about two hours from Barcelona.

## MANRESA

pop 64,000

A big commercial centre in the Catalan heartland, Manresa was the scene of the first assembly of the nationalist *Unió Catalanista* (1897), which published the *Bases de Manresa*, a political manifesto for an autonomous Catalan state.

Not a great deal of the old town remains but you can't miss the great hulk that is the *Basilica de Santa Maria*, atop the Puig Cardener hill in the town centre. Its Gothic nave is second in size only to that of the cathedral in Girona. The unique Romanesque *Pont Vell*, whose eight arcs span the rather less-impressive Riu Cardener, was rebuilt after destruction in the civil war.

*Rodalies* from Barcelona (€3.80, 1¼ hours) via Terrassa run here regularly.

## CARDONA

pop 5230

Long before arrival, you spy in the distance the outline of the impregnable 18th-century fortress high above Cardona, which itself lies next to the Muntanya de Sal (Salt Mountain). Until 1990 the salt mines were an important source of income.

The castle (follow the signs uphill to the *parador*) was built over an older predecessor. The single most remarkable element of the buildings is the lofty and spare Romanesque *Església de Sant Vicenç* (☎ 93 868 41 69; adult/child €2.40/1.80; ↷ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). To get in, stop at the guardian's office on the right as you enter the castle (and now hotel) courtyard. The bare stone walls were once covered in bright frescoes, some of which can be contemplated in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (p299) in Barcelona.

A couple of modest  *pensiones*  offer relatively cheap digs for an overnight stay. Otherwise, the place to be is the magnificent *Parador Ducs de Cardona* (☎ 93 869 12 75; cardona@parador.es; s/d €129/170), where you can feel like the king of the castle for a night or two.

Cardona is served by the Alsina Graells Barcelona–Manresa–Solsona bus route. Up to four run daily from Barcelona (€10.90, 1¾ hours) and nine from Manresa (€3.70, 40 minutes). Up to four buses proceed to Solsona (€1.85, 25 minutes).

## SOLSONA

pop 8570

They call the people of Solsona *matarucs* (donkey killers), which seems an odd tag until you hear what the townsfolk's favourite festive activity used to be.

Every February the high point of Solsona's carnival fun was the hoisting of a donkey, by the neck, up the town bell tower (Torre de les Hores). The donkey, literally scared to death, not unreasonably, would shit and piss on its way up, much to the delight of the drink-addled crowd below. To be hit by a glob of either substance was, they say, a sign of good fortune for the coming year. Animal rights people put an end to this bizarre form of entertainment and the donkey nowadays is a water-spraying fake.

The *Catedral de Santa Maria* on Plaça de la Catedral (admission free; ↷ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm) boasts Romanesque apses, a Gothic nave and a pretty cloister. Behind the cathedral is the *Palau Episcopal* (☎ 973 48 21 01; Plaça del Palau; adult/senior & child €3/2; ↷ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep). Built in the 18th century, this neoclassical building houses a considerable collection of medieval art gathered from churches in the surrounding district.

**Hotel Solsona Centre** (☎ 973 48 43 40 www.hotel-solsonacentre.com; Carrer de Àngel Guimerà 3; s/d €36/45; p a i w) This is a plain Jane of a place, but clean, secure and central, and rather modestly priced.

Two to four Alsina Graells buses run daily from Barcelona (€12.80, two hours) via Manresa (€5.60, 65 minutes) and Cardona to Solsona.

## CONCA DE BARBERÀ

This hilly, green, wine-making district comes as a refreshing surprise in the otherwise drab flatlands of southwest Catalonia and makes an alternative route from Barcelona (or Tarragona) to Lleida and beyond. Vineyards and woods succeed one another across rolling green hills, studded by occasional medieval villages and monasteries.

### Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet

The jewel in the crown is doubtless this imposing fortified monastery (☎ 977 87 12 47; adult/student €4.20/2.40; ↷ 10am-12.45pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun & holidays mid-Mar–mid-Oct, 10am-

12.45pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Sun & holidays mid-Oct–mid-Mar), founded by Cistercian monks from southern France in 1151.

The walls of this abbey devoted to Santa Maria (a Unesco World Heritage site), were a defensive measure and also symbolised the monks' isolation from the vanities of the outside world. A grand portal gives access to a long uneven square, the Plaça Major, flanked by several dependencies including the small Romanesque *Capella de Santa Caterina*. The nearby *Porta Daurada* is so called because its bronze panels were overlaid with gold to suitably impress the visiting emperor Felipe II in 1564.

Once inside the *Porta Reial* (Royal Gate), flanked by hefty octagonal towers, you will be led through a worn Romanesque entrance to the grand cloister, of Romanesque origins but largely Gothic in style. With its peaceful fountain and pavilion, the two-level cloister is a marvellous haven. You will be led from the cloister to the head of the church, itself a typically tall and austere Cistercian Gothic creation, to witness the sculptural glory in alabaster that is the *retablo* and Panteón de los

## CATALAN TIPPLES

Avid tippers will have come across a playful, relatively inexpensive bubbly called Freixenet. One of Spain's flagship exporters of *cava*, Freixenet is based at the heart of Catalonia's Penedès wine region, which alone produces the bulk of all Spain's sparkling white wines (see the Barcelona chapter, p338).

But Freixenet and bubbly are only the tip of the Catalan wineberg. Catalonia hosts 11 DO (*denominación de origen*) wine-producing zones and a remarkable variety of tipples. Although perhaps less well-known than wines from the Rioja area, Catalan wines are full of pleasant surprises. The heavy, tannin-loaded, deep-coloured reds of El Priorat have gained the much-desired DOC (*denominación de origen calificada*) status long held by Rioja wines alone. To further investigate El Priorat's wines, and wines from the adjacent Montsant DO region, head for the tourist office in **Falset** (☎ 977 83 10 23; www.priorat.org; Carrer de Sant Marcel 2; ↷ 9am-3pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) for information on local wine cellars. Falset, the capital of the Priorat area, offers some fine restaurant options too.

Catalonia's other DO wines come from points all over the region, spread as far apart as the Empordà area around Figueres in the north, and the Terra Alta zone around Gandesa in the southwest. The Penedès region pumps out almost two million hectolitres a year and thus doubles the combined output of the remaining DO regions.

Most of the grapes grown in Catalonia are native to Spain and include the White Macabeo, Garnacha and Xarel·lo (for white wines), and the Black Garnacha, Monastrell and Ull de Llebre (Hare's Eye) red varieties. Foreign varieties (such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir) are also widespread.

Freixenet, Codorniu and Torres are the big names in the Penedès region, but there is plenty to discover beyond that region. Raimat, in the Costers del Segre DO area in Lleida province, produces some fine reds and a couple of notable whites. Good fortified wines come from around Tarragona; some pleasing fresh wines are also produced in the Empordà area in the north by, for example, Cellers Santamaria and Cooperativa de Mollet de Perelada.

Reyes (Kings' Pantheon). The raised alabaster coffins, restored by Frederic Mares (see p287), contain such greats as Jaume I (the conqueror of Mallorca and Valencia) and Pere III.

Of six **Vibasa buses** (☎ 902 101363; www.vibasa.es) from Tarragona to Montblanc, L'Espuga de Francolí (50 minutes) and on to Lleida on weekdays, three stop at the monastery (55 minutes, two make all stops on weekends). Regular trains from Barcelona (Ca4 regional line) stop at Montblanc and L'Espuga de Francolí (€7.55) – the monastery is a 40-minute walk from the latter.

### Around Reial Monestir de Santa Maria de Poblet

It is worth spending time exploring the vicinity. L'Espuga de Francolí, 2.5km away from the monastery along a pleasant tree-lined country road that makes walking tempting, is a bright town with several small hotels.

More interesting still is Montblanc, 8km away. Surrounded by medieval battlements, this one-time royal residence is jammed with highlights, including a Gothic royal mansion and churches, as well as some vestiges of its Romanesque origins. The winding cross-country drive to Prades leads through lovely country.

If monasteries are of interest, **Monestir de Santes Creus** (☎ 977 63 83 29; Plaça de Jaume el Just s/n; adult/child €3.60/2.40, plus Poblet & Vallbona monasteries €7, free Tue; 10am–1.30pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–mid-Sep, 10am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm Tue–Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jan, 10am–1.30pm & 3–6pm Tue–Sun mid-Jan–mid-Mar), about 28km east of Montblanc, and **Vallbona de les Monges** (☎ 973 33 02 66; adult/child €2.50/2, plus Santes Creus & Poblet monasteries €7; 10.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–6.45pm Tue–Sat, noon–1.30pm & 4.30–6.45pm Sun & holidays Mar–Oct, 10.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–6pm Tue–Sat, noon–1.30pm & 4.30–6pm Sun & holidays Nov–Feb), to the north, are well worth searching out.

## LLEIDA

pop 124,710

Much of western Catalonia is flat and drab, but if you're not in a hurry Lleida (Castilian: Lérida) is a likable place with a long and varied history. It's also the starting point of several routes towards the Pyrenees.

### Information

Centre d'Informació i Reserves (☎ 902 25 00 50; http://turisme.paeria.es; Carrer Major 31bis; 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun) Turisme de Lleida provides information about the city.

**Oficina Turisme de la Generalitat** (☎ 973 24 88 40; Plaça de Ramon Berenguer IV; 10am–2pm & 3.30–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) For tips on the rest of Lleida province.

**Policia Nacional** (Carrer de Sant Martí 62)

**Post office** (Rambla de Ferran 16; 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–2pm Sat)

### La Seu Vella

Lleida's 'old cathedral', **La Seu Vella** (☎ 973 23 06 53; admission €2.40; 10am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Oct–May, 10am–1.30pm & 4–7.30pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Jun–Sep) towers above everything else in position and grandeur. It stands within a *recinte* (compound) of defensive walls erected between the 12th and 19th centuries.

The main entrance to the *recinte* (admission free; 8am–9pm) is from Carrer de Monterey on its western side, but during the cathedral's opening hours you can use the extraordinarily ugly ascensor (lift; admission €0.40; 10am–1.30pm & 4–8pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–1.30pm & 3–5.30pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1.30pm Sun Oct–May) from above Plaça de Sant Joan.

The cathedral was built in sandy-coloured stone in the 13th to 15th centuries on the site of a former mosque (Lleida was under Muslim control from AD 719 to 1149). It's a masterpiece of the Transitional style, although it only recently recovered from 241 years' use as a barracks, which began as Felipe V's punishment for the city's opposition in the War of the Spanish Succession.

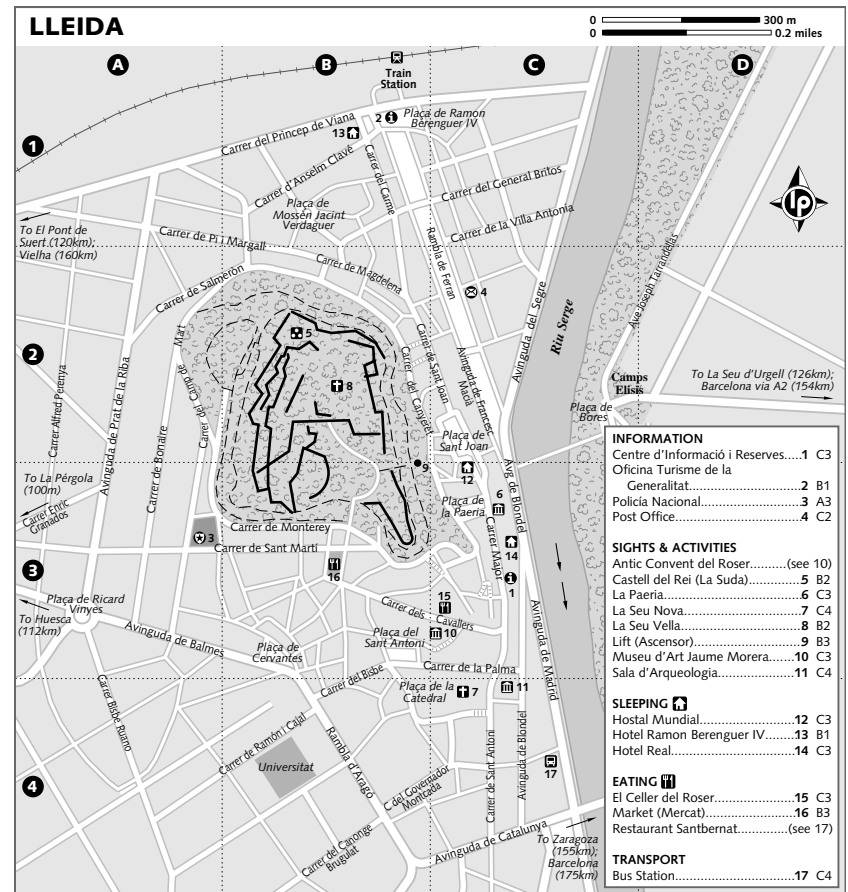
A 70m octagonal bell tower rises at the southwest end of the cloister, whose windows are laced with exceptional Gothic tracery. The spacious if austere interior, used as stables and dormitories during the military occupation, has a veritable forest of slender columns with carved capitals.

Above the cathedral are remains of the Islamic fortress and residence of the Muslim governors, known as the Castell del Rei or La Suda.

### Carrer Major & Around

A 13th-century Gothic mansion La Paeria has housed the city government almost since its inception. The 18th-century neoclassical La Seu Nova on Plaça de la Catedral was built when La Seu Vella was turned into a barracks.

Opposite is the Hospital de Santa Maria, with a Gothic courtyard. It now houses the



INFORMATION	
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**Sala d'Arqueologia** (☎ 973 27 15 00; Plaça de la Catedral; admission free; 10am–2pm & 6–9pm Tue–Fri, 11am–2pm & 7–9pm Sat, 11am–2pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–2pm & 5.30–8.30pm Tue–Fri, noon–2pm & 5.30–8.30pm Sat, noon–2pm Sun Oct–May), which includes Iberian and Roman finds from the Lleida region.

Carrer dels Cavallers and Carrer de la Palma climb from Carrer Major up through the old part of town. The Antic Convent del Roser, featuring an unusual three-storey cloister, houses the **Museu d'Art Jaume Morera** (☎ 973 70 04 19; Carrer dels Cavallers 15; admission free; 11am–2pm & 5–8pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun) and its collection of work by Lleida-associated artists. The museum is due to be moved to another location, but so far funding has yet to be stumped up.

### Sleeping

**Hostal Mundial** (☎ 973 24 27 00; Plaça de Sant Joan 4; s/d €20/40; p ) Singles are smallish but have full bathrooms, which is not bad for a central little *hostal*/like this one. Doubles are roomier and all are clean and neat.

**Hotel Ramon Berenguer IV** (☎ 973 23 73 45; Plaça de Ramon Berenguer IV 2; s/d €35/44; p a ) These somewhat dog-eared digs are quite all right and handy for the train station. Rooms are all decent if unexciting. Those on the higher floors enjoy a bit of a view.

**Hotel Real** (☎ 973 23 94 05; www.hotelrealleida.com; Avinguda de Blondel 22; s/d €67/86; p a i w) A modern midrise place with a pleasant garden, Hotel Real is aimed at business visitors and offers various classes of room. All are bright and clean,

and the better ones have generous balconies. A couple of rooms have wheelchair access.

## Eating

Lleida is Catalonia's snail-eating capital. So many *cargols* are swallowed during the annual **Aplec del Cargol** (Snail Festival), held on a Sunday in early May, that some have to be imported.

**Restaurant Santbernart** (☎ 973 27 10 31; Carrer de Saracibar; meals €20-30; 11 lunch & dinner Thu-Sun, lunch Mon) You would hardly expect to find a hearty eatery like this up on the 1st floor of the rather dour bus station. The star attractions are char-grilled meat dishes.

**La Pergola** (☎ 973 23 82 37; Passeig de Ronda 123; meals €40-50; 11 Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, Thu-Tue Oct-May) The chefs in this shady house (one of several on this strip – a surprise given the surrounding horrible highrises) take the business of cooking seriously. This is one of the few spots in Lleida for fine seafood, along with such classics as entrecot in Cabrales cheese.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

For general bus-timetable information, call ☎ 973 26 85 00. Daily services by **Alsina Graells** (☎ 973 27 14 70) include up to 13 buses (three on Sunday) to Barcelona (€16.70, 2¼ to 2¾ hours); two to El Pont de Suert and Vielha (€10.89, 2¾ hours); one (except Sunday) to La Pobla de Segur, Sort, Llavorsí and Esterrí d'Aneu (€16.50, three hours); and two to La Seu d'Urgell (€14.50, 2½ hours).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The quickest routes to Barcelona, Tarragona and Zaragoza are by the AP2, but you can avoid tolls by taking the A2 to Zaragoza or Barcelona or the N240 Hwy to Tarragona. The main northward roads are the C14 to La Seu d'Urgell, the N230 to Vielha and the N240 to Barbastro and Huesca (in Aragón).

### TRAIN

Lleida is on the Barcelona–Zaragoza–Madrid line. Up to 23 trains daily run to/from Barcelona, taking two to three hours (you may find faster times still if the high-speed AVE stretch from Lleida to Tarragona opens as planned by the end of 2006). Second-class fares range from €8.90 to €20.30. A similar number of trains head to Zaragoza (€9.90 to €19.80, up to two hours), including high-speed

ones, taking just under one hour. About 10 high-speed trains head to Madrid (€55, 2¾ hours).

## MONTSEC

This hilly range 65km north of Lleida is the main stage for hang-gliders and ultra-lights in Catalonia. It is also a popular area for walking, caving and climbing.

The focal point is **Ager**, a village in the valley of the same name. If coming via Balaguer, you'll see it to the northeast as you reach the top of Coll d'Ager (912m). The village is draped like a mantle over a hill, protruding from the top of which is the intriguing ruin of the **Església de Sant Pere**.

Montsec has a half-dozen take-off points, including one at the Sant Alís peak (1678m), the highest in the range. **Volager** (☎ 973 32 02 30; www.volager.com; Camí de Castellnou s/n), based in Bellpuig, offers hang-gliding courses here and provides all the equipment. You can go hang-gliding with the school for a day (€80), while a full six-day course comes to €400.

A choice location for walkers and climbers is the stunning **Congost de Mont-Rebei**, a narrow gorge of 80m-high rock walls at the western end of the Montsec range. The Riu Noguera Ribagorçana flows into the gorge from the north, along the border with Aragón. Caves along the foot of the gorge, and around the dam to the south, attract speleologists.

You can stay at one of a handful of *casas de pagès* or a *hostal*. About the only way to get into and around the area is with your own wheels.

## COSTA DAURADA

South of Sitges (p334) stretches the Costa Daurada (Golden Coast), a series of mostly quiet resorts with unending broad beaches along a mainly flat coast, capped by the delta of the mighty Riu Ebre (Ebro), which protrudes 20km out into the Mediterranean. Along the way is the old Roman capital of Tarragona, and the modern extravaganza of Port Aventura – Catalonia's answer to EuroDisney.

## VILANOVA I LA GELTRÚ

pop 61,430

Six minutes west of Sitges by train, Vilanova is home to the culinary delicacy of *xató* (an almond-and-hazelnut sauce used on

various dishes, particularly seafood), the much sought-after actor Sergi López, and a trio of broad beaches. Much of the sprawling town itself is, however, of little interest.

## Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 93 815 45 17; www.vilanovaturisme.net; Passeig del Carme s/n; 11 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 10am-1pm & 4.30-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, 10am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Nov-Mar).

## Sights

A few blocks inland from the beaches is Vilanova's main attraction, the **Museu del Ferrocarril** (Railway Museum; ☎ 93 815 84 91; Plaça d'Eduard Maristany; adult/student & child €4.50/3.50; 11 10.30am-2.30pm Tue-Fri & Sun, 10.30am-2.30pm & 4-6.30pm Sat Sep-Jul, 11am-2pm & 5-8pm daily Aug), located in the 19th-century installations for the maintenance of steam trains, next to the train station. The collection of steam locomotives attracts kids of all ages.

## Festivals

Vilanova i la Geltrú stages a riotous *carnaval* (carnival) in February that lasts for 13 days. One of the highpoints is the **Batalla dels Caramels** (Battle of the Sweeties), when townsfolk in costume launch more than 100,000 kilograms of sweets at one another!

## Sleeping & Eating

It's easy enough to pop down to Vilanova for the day from Barcelona or Sitges but there is one serious reason for hanging out a little longer...

**Hotel Cesar** (☎ 93 815 11 25; www.hotelcesar.net; Carrer d'Isaac Peral 4-8; r €90-160; a i s ) The town's top hotel is set in a leafy, tranquil part of town just back from the waterfront. It offers a series of double rooms and suites in a variety of categories. The best rooms have their own computers with broadband Internet access. Saunter to the sauna, or opt for a massage. Or you can just chill in the garden after a day at the nearby beach. The hotel is also home to La Fitorra (meals €30; Tuesday to Saturday, lunch only on Sunday), one of the senior denizens of local cooking.

## Getting There & Away

The town is just down the *rodalies* (line C2) from Sitges. From Barcelona the fare will set you back €2.40.

## ALTAFULLA

pop 1675

Once a Roman holiday resort for the affluent citizens of Tarragona, this town about 10km east of Tarragona was converted into a fortified settlement in the wake of the Muslim invasion. The original medieval core of Altafulla is small but charming, all cream and whitewashed walls with rose-coloured stone portals and windows. Capping it is a 13th-century castle.

Altafulla's broad beach (about 2km away on the other side of the freeway) is backed by a row of cheerful single-storey houses known as the **Botigues de Mar** (Sea Shops). Until well into the 19th century they served as warehouses but have since been converted into houses – many available for holiday let.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Alberg Casa Gran** (☎ 977 65 07 79; Plaça 12; dm student & under 26yr/26yr & over €18/21) In the old part of town, this is one of the region's more enchantingly placed youth hostels. Occupying a fine old mansion with a terrace, it even incorporates a tower belonging to the old town walls.

**Faristol** (☎ 977 65 00 77; Carrer de Sant Martí 5, Altafulla; meals €30; 11 lunch & dinner Jun-Sep, dinner Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun Oct-May) Housed in an 18th-century mansion built by *indians* (locals who had made their fortune in the Americas) in the old town, the restaurant offers traditional Catalan cooking with an emphasis on seafood. There are also some surprises thrown in, such as tandoori. Upstairs are five pretty rooms (singles/doubles €50/70).

## Getting There & Away

A host of local trains run to Altafulla from Tarragona (€1.30 to €1.50, 10 minutes).

## TARRAGONA

pop 128,150

Tarragona was first occupied by the Romans, who called it Tarraco, in 218 BC. In 27 BC Augustus made it the capital of his new Tarraconensis province (roughly all modern Spain) and stayed until 25 BC, directing campaigns in Cantabria and Asturias. Tarragona was abandoned when the Muslims arrived in AD 714, but reborn as the seat of a Christian archbishopric in 1089. Today its rich Roman remains and fine medieval cathedral make it an absorbing place.





## Orientation

The main street is Rambla Nova, which runs roughly northwest from a cliff-top overlooking the Mediterranean. A couple of blocks to the east, and parallel, is Rambla Vella, which marks the beginning of the old town and, incidentally, follows the line of the Via Augusta, the Roman road from Rome to Cádiz.

The train station is about 500m southwest of Rambla Nova, near the seafront, and the bus station is about 2km inland, just to the northwest, off Plaça Imperial de Tàrraco.

## Information

**Ciberespai** (% 977 24 57 64; Carrer d'Estanislau Figueres 58; per hr €1.80; 11am-11pm Sat & Sun)

**Guardia Urbana** (% 977 24 03 45; Carrer de Prat de Riba 37)

**Hospital Joan XXIII** (% 977 23 27 14; Passeig de Torroja 58)

**Information kiosks** (11am-2pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) These are scattered about town.

**Post office** (Plaça de Corsini; 11am-8.30am Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

**Regional tourist office** (% 977 23 34 15; Carrer de Fortuny 4; 11am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**Tourist office** (% 977 25 25 07 95; www.tarragonaturisme.es; Carrer Major 39; 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays Oct-Jun)

## Sights & Activities

Pick up the handy *Ruta Arqueològica Urbana* brochure from the main tourist office. It details more than 30 locations throughout the old town where Roman remains can be viewed, some of them in shops and restaurants. If they are not too busy with customers, shop owners are generally happy for individuals to drop by and take a look.

## CATEDRAL

Sitting grandly at the top of the old town, Tarragona's cathedral (% 977 23 86 85; Pla de la Seu; admission €2.40; 11am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat mid-Mar-May, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jun-mid-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct-mid-Nov, 10am-2pm Mon-Sat mid-Nov-mid-Mar) is a treasure house deserving 1½ hours or more of your time, if you're to do it justice. Built between 1171 and 1331 on the site of a Roman temple, it combines Romanesque and Gothic features, as typified by the main façade on Pla de la Seu. The entrance is by the cloister on the northwest flank of the building.

The cloister has Gothic vaulting and Romanesque carved capitals, one of which shows rats conducting what they imagine to be a cat's funeral... until the cat comes back to life! The rooms off the cloister house the Museu Diocesà, with an extensive collection extending from Roman hairpins to some lovely 12th- to 14th-century polychrome woodcarvings of a breastfeeding Virgin.

The interior of the cathedral, over 100m long, is Romanesque at the northeast end and Gothic at the southwest. The aisles are lined with 14th- to 19th-century chapels and hung with 16th- and 17th-century tapestries from Brussels. The arm of St Thecla, Tarragona's patron saint, is normally kept in the Capella de Santa Tecla on the southeastern side. The choir in the centre of the nave has 15th-century carved walnut stalls. The marble main altar was carved in the 13th century with scenes from the life of St Thecla.

## MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE TARRAGONA

This museum (www.museutgn.com; adult/student & senior per site €2/1, all sites €8/4; sites 11 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun & holidays Easter-Sep, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun & holidays Oct-Easter) comprises four separate Roman sites (which since 2000 together have constituted a Unesco World Heritage site) and a 14th-century noble mansion, which now serves as the Museu Casa Castellarnau (% 977 24 22 20; Carrer dels Cavallers 14).

Start with the Pretori i Circ Romans (% 977 24 19 52; Plaça del Rei), which includes part of the vaults of the Roman circus, where chariot races were held. The circus, 300m long, stretched from here to beyond Plaça de la Font to the west. Nearby Plaça del Fòrum was the location of the provincial forum and political heart of Tarraconensis province. Near the beach is the well-preserved Amfiteatre Romà (% 977 24 25 79), where gladiators battled each other, or wild animals, to the death. In its arena are the remains of 6th- and 12th-century churches built to commemorate the martyrdom of the Christian bishop Fructuosus and two deacons, who, they say, were burnt alive here in AD 259.

Southeast of Carrer de Lleida are remains of the Fòrum Romà, dominated by several imposing columns. The northwest half of this site was occupied by a judicial basilica (where legal disputes were settled), from which the rest of the forum stretched downhill to the southwest. Linked to the site by a footbridge is another excavated area with a stretch of

## FIRE-BREATHERS, GIANTS & HUMAN CASTLES

Catalans get up to unusual tricks at *fiesta* time. Fire and fireworks play a big part in many Spanish festivals, but Catalonia adds a special twist with the *correfoc* (fire-running), in which devil and dragon figures run through the streets spitting fireworks at the crowds. (Wear protective clothes if you intend to get close!)

*Correfocs* are often part of the *fiesta major*, a town or village's main annual festival, which usually take place in July or August. Part of the *fiesta major* fun are the *sardana* (Catalonia's national round-dance) and *gegants*, splendidly attired 5m-high giants that parade through the streets or dance in the squares. Giants tend to come in male-and-female pairs, such as a medieval king and queen. Almost every town and village has its own pair, or up to six pairs, of giants. They're accompanied by grotesque 'dwarfs' (known as *capgrossos*, or 'big heads').

On La Nit de Sant Joan (23 June), big bonfires burn at crossroads and town squares in a combined midsummer and St John's Eve celebration, and fireworks explode all night. The supreme fire festival is the Patum in Berga. An evening of dancing and firework-spitting angels, devils, mulelike monsters, dwarfs, giants and men covered in grass culminates in a mass frenzy of fire and smoke. The 'real' Patum happens on Corpus Christi (the Thursday following the eighth Sunday after Easter Sunday) although there are simplified versions over the next two or three days. Unesco declared the Patum a World Heritage item in 2005.

A more orderly celebration is the building of *castells* – human castles. Valls, Vilafranca del Penedès and Terrassa have three of the most famous teams of *castellers*. The golden age was the 1880s, when castells such as *tres de nou* ('three of nine', ie nine storeys of three people) were achieved.

There are various ways of constructing a *castell*: those built without a *pinya*, *folre* or *manilles* (extra rings of support for the first, second and third storeys) are tricky and termed *net* (clean). A completed *castell* is signalled by the child at the top (the *anxaneta*) raising their arm, a cue for tumultuous applause and cheering. A *castell* that manages to dismantle itself without collapsing is *descairegat*. Especially difficult is a *pilar*, a tower of one person per storey, which has a record of eight storeys.

Every two years a championship competition is held in Tarragona's bullring. The most successful club, the Castellers de Vilafranca, took their third successive title in 2006. The next one will be in October 2008. Otherwise, these and many other teams turn up at *festes* all over Catalonia.

Roman street. This forum was the hub of public and religious life for the Roman town. The discovery in 2006 of remains of the foundations of a temple to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (the major triumvirate of gods at the time of the Roman republic) suggests the forum was much bigger and more important than previously assumed.

The Passeig Arqueològic is a peaceful walk around part of the perimeter of the old town between two lines of city walls; the inner ones are mainly Roman, while the outer ones were put up by the British during the War of the Spanish Succession.

## MUSEU NACIONAL ARQUEOLÒGIC DE TARRAGONA

This carefully presented museum (☎ 977 23 62 09; www.mnat.es; Plaça del Rei 5; adult/senior & under 18yr €2.40/free; 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun & holidays

Oct-May) gives further insight into Roman Tarraco, although most explanatory material is in Catalan or Castilian. Exhibits include part of the Roman city walls, frescoes, sculpture and pottery. A highlight is the large, almost complete *Mosaic de Peixos de la Pineda*, showing fish and sea creatures. In the section on everyday arts you can admire ancient fertility aids including an outsized stone penis, symbol of the god Priapus.

Admission entitles you to enter the museum at the Necropolis Paleocristians (☎ 977 21 11 75; Avinguda de Ramón i Cajal 80; adult/senior & under 18yr €2.40/free with Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona; 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Jun). This large Christian cemetery of late-Roman and Visigothic times is on Passeig de la Independència on the western edge of town and boasts some surprisingly elaborate tombs. Unfortunately only its small museum is open at present.

## MUSEU D'ART MODERN

This modest art gallery (☎ 977 23 50 32; Carrer de Santa Anna 8; admission free; 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays) is at its most interesting when temporary exhibitions take place.

## MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE LES ARMES ANTIGUES

If you're into old swords, lances and pistols, this museum (Carrer de la Nau 12; admission €3; 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is an interesting stop.

## MUSEU DEL PORT

Down by the waterfront, this curious museum (☎ 977 25 94 42; Refugi 2 Moll de la Cost; adult/student €1.80/1.20; 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays Jun-Sep; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun & holidays Oct-May) is housed in a dockside shed. There's not a lot to it; there are some displays tracing the history of the port from Roman times (in Catalan and Castilian only), a few model boats and one or two other seafaring items.

## PONT DEL DIABLE

The so-called Devil's Bridge is actually the *Aqueducte Romà* (admission free; 9am-dusk), yet another of the marvels the Romans left behind. It sits, somewhat incongruously, in the leafy rough just off the AP7 freeway, which leads into Tarragona (near where it intersects with the N240). It is a fine stretch of two-tiered aqueduct (217m long and 27m high), along which you can totter to the other side. Bus 5 to Sant Salvador from Plaça Imperial de Tarraco, running every 10 to 20 minutes, will take you to the vicinity, or park in one of the lay-bys marked on either side of the AP7, just outside the freeway toll gates.

## BEACHES

The town beach, *Platja del Miracle*, is reasonably clean but can get terribly crowded. *Platja Arribassada*, 1km northeast across the headland, is longer, and *Platja Llarga*, beginning 2km further out, stretches for about 3km. Buses 1 and 9 from the Balcó stop on Via Augusta go to both (€1.05). You can get the same buses from along Rambla Vella and Rambla Nova.

## Sleeping

**Camping Las Palmeras** (☎ 977 20 80 81; www.laspalm.eras.com; sites per 2-person tent & car €37; p s ) This cheerful camping ground lies at the far end of *Platja Llarga* (3km northeast of Tarragona

and is one of the better of eight camping grounds scattered behind the beaches north-east of the city. A big pool stretches out amid leafy parkland just back from the beach. The camping ground enjoys a 1.5km stretch of seaside frontage and untouched coastal woodland nearby.

**Hostal La Noria** (☎ 977 23 87 17; Plaça de la Font 53; s/d €21/34) For a bargain basement position right on the old town's main square, you can't do much better than these corner digs. Rooms are simple enough but have their own attached clean bathroom, and those with a balcony assure you a window on old Tarragona's street life.

**Hotel Plaça de la Font** (☎ 977 24 61 34; www.hotel.pdelafont.com; Plaça de la Font 26; s/d €40/58; a ) A notch up and also on the town square is this crisp *pensión* with its own restaurant. Rooms, although a trifle cramped, have a pleasing modern look, with soft colours, sturdy beds and, in the case of half the rooms, little balconies with views over the square.

**Hotel Lauria** (☎ 977 23 67 12; www.hlauria.es; Rambla Nova 20; s/d €40/58; a s ) With its dignified façade along the city's grandest boulevard, the hotel has a whiff of another era. The rooms are a little on the functional side, but the best have parquet floors, leather-backed furniture and the occasional nice touch such as fresh flowers.

## Eating

**Bar Toful** (☎ 977 21 42 16; Arc de Sant Bernat 4; meals €15-20; 8am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat) Since the 1940s this knockabout bar has been a mecca for locals in search of good ol' tapas over a beer or two. During the day people drop by for a tippie, and on weekend evenings others crowd in for a steak in mushroom sauce, or fish – a cheap, cheerful and good-value dinner. The midday *menú del dia* (€8.75) is also good value, with a generous gazpacho and choice of meat and fish mains.

**Quim Quima** (☎ 977 25 21 21; Carrer de les Coques 1bis; meals €35, *menú del dia* €14.90; 10am-11pm Tue-Sat) This renovated medieval mansion makes a marvellous setting for a meal. Huddle up to bare stone wall or opt for the shady little courtyard. The playful menu is wide-ranging, including sausage and cheese crepes, lasagna, various types of meat fondue, including one in which you cook the meat in boiling white wine.

The quintessential Tarragona seafood experience can best be had in Serrallo, the town's fishing port. About a dozen bars and restaurants

here sell the day's catch, and on summer weekends in particular the place is packed. Most of the restaurants close their kitchens fairly early, by 10.30pm.

**L'Ancora** (Carrer de Trafalgar 25; meals €25-30; 1pm-1am) and its sister establishment **El Varadero** (Carrer de Trafalgar 13) brim with mouthwatering seafood. Go for a selection of dishes, which might include *tigres* (stuffed, breaded and fried mussels), *ostrón* (fat oyster) and *cigalas a la plancha* (grilled crayfish). Whatever you choose, it'll be good. You can sit inside (head upstairs) or, in the summer, take up a seat at one of the outdoor tables. Hour-long queues at midnight on summer weekends are not unheard-of.

### Drinking & Entertainment

The main concentration of nightlife is the bars and clubs along the waterfront near the Port Esportiu (marina), and in some of the streets in front of the train station, such as along Carrer de la Pau del Protectorat.

**Pub Sis** (☎ 977 23 80 14; Carrer de Barcelona 6; 7-8pm-3am) For a dose of '80s music, this is a good-natured place to stop by for a drink and loud conversation. At nearby **Cova del Jazz** (Carrer de Pau del Protectorat 5) you can encounter live music from 11pm.

**El Cau** (☎ 977 23 12 12; www.elcau.net; Carrer de Trinquet Vell; 7 daily) Set in one of the vaults of the Roman circus, this is the best place for dancing in central Tarragona. Various DJs and acts perform on most nights, ensuring that no two nights are the same. Check the website for which maestro is on that particular night.

### Getting There & Away

Lying on main routes south from Barcelona, Tarragona is well connected. The train is generally the much easier option.

#### BUS

Bus services run to Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Madrid, Alicante, Pamplona, the main Andalusian cities, Andorra and the north coast. As a rule though, you are better off with the train.

#### TRAIN

Up to 50 regional and long-distance trains per day run to/from Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia station via Sants. Fares in *turista* class range from €5.40 to €17.20, and the journey takes 52 minutes to 1½ hours.

Up to 15 trains a day run south to Valencia (€14.75 to €31.30, two to 3½ hours) and several proceed down the coast and into Andalucía. Up to 11 head northwest to Lleida (€5.40 to €15.10, up to one hour 40 minutes).

### PORT AVENTURA

One of Spain's most popular funfair-adventure parks (☎ 902 20 20 41 or ☎ 902 20 22 20; www.portaventura.es; mid-Sep-mid-Jun adult/senior & child 5-12yr €37/30, Jul & Aug €35/28, 2-day tickets €53.50/43; 7-10am-midnight Jul-Aug, 10am-8pm Easter-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Oct) lies 7km west of Tarragona. It makes an amusing day out, especially if you have children in tow. The park has plenty of spine-tingling rides and other attractions, such as the Temple del Foc (Temple of Fire) and Hurakan Condor (at 100m one of the highest amusement park rides in Europe), spread across themed areas ranging from the Wild West to Polynesia.

Opening days and hours from November to March vary greatly. The park usually opens on weekends and holidays but it is wise to check.

In addition to the main area, Port Aventura Park, the complex includes two hotels and **Caribe Aquatic Park** (adult/child & senior €19/15.50 mid-May-Sep, €9.50/8 remaining days when only the heated areas are open; 7-10am-7pm Jul-Aug, 10am-6pm mid-May-Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm late Mar-mid-May), a waterworld with all sorts of wet rides.

Trains run to Port Aventura's own station, about a 1km walk from the site, several times a day from Tarragona (€1.20 to €1.50, 10 to 15 minutes) and Barcelona (from €5.20 to €5.95, around 1½ hours). By road, take exit 35 from the AP7, or the N340 from Tarragona.

### REUS & AROUND

pop 99,500

Reus was, for much of the second half of the 19th century, the second most important city in Catalonia and a major export centre of textiles and brandy. Birthplace of Gaudí, it boasts a series of Modernista mansions. The **tourist office** (☎ 902 36 02 00; turismo.reus.net; Carrer de Sant Joan s/n; 7-9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) can provide a map guiding you to 30-odd Modernista mansions around the town centre. The tourist office organises guided visits (sometimes in English and French) to some of the most interesting of these houses, for which you need to book in advance. Regular trains connect Reus with Tarragona (€1.30 to €1.50, 15 to 20 minutes).

About 35km northwest of Reus, above the pretty mountain village of Siurana, stand the

remains of one of the last Muslim castles to fall to the reconquering Christians. To its west rise the rocky walls of the Serra de Montsant range, and the area attracts rock-climbers and walkers. In Siurana you could stay in **Can Roig** (☎ 977 82 14 50; Carrer Major 6; d €36), a charming, refurbished stone house in the middle of the village.

From Cornudella de Montsant, 9km from Siurana, a narrow and picturesque road (the TV7021) hugs the rugged southern face of the Montsant westwards to Escaladei, located in a valley below the mountain range, which produces some fine El Priorat reds. The evocative ruins of the **Cartoixa d'Escaladei** (☎ 977 82 70 06; adult/student & senior €2.40/1.80; 7-10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), a 12th-century monastery complex, are a 1km walk out of the village. Guided visits (usually in Catalan) are available on weekends (€4.50/3.90).

To the southeast, 4km west of the village of Riudecanyes, stands the **Castell-Monestir de Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou** (☎ 977 83 40 07; adult/student & senior €2.40/1.80; 7-10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). Dating from 1153, much of the castle-monastery complex is in ruins; parts have been rebuilt but hardly to exacting historical criteria. The most interesting elements are the church (from the 12th and 13th centuries), cloister and chapterhouse. You will be taken on a compulsory guided tour, probably in Catalan, of about half an hour.

There is no public transport to Siurana, Escaladei or Castell-Monestir de Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou.

### CAMBRILS

pop 26,210

A sprawling tourist town (more or less an extension of the high-density tourist ghetto of Salou), inspired by the place's long beaches,

has developed around the original old village and fishing port, 18km southwest of Tarragona. Although sun and sand are uppermost in many people's minds, the place rewards a bit of exploration, with several medieval towers, some Roman remains, the busy fishing port and, above all, something of a reputation as a culinary magnet.

For good seafood, try bustling **La Roca d'en Manel** (☎ 977 36 30 24; Passeig de Miramar 38; meals €25-30; 7 Tue-Sun), a few steps away from where the fishing boats tie up. Service can be abrupt, but the portions are tasty and generous. A step up in class is the nearby **Casa Gatell** (☎ 977 36 00 57; Passeig de Miramar 26; meals €45-55; 7 Tue-Sat, lunch only Sun), where you might succumb to the succulent *caldereta de bogavante* (lobster stew; €37).

Cambril is about 25 minutes from Tarragona by local train (€1.50 to €2.10).

### TORTOSA

pop 33,700

Home to Iberian tribes some 2000 years ago, Tortosa has seen them all come and go: Greeks, Romans, Visigoths and Muslims. The town was on the northern front line between Christian and Muslim Spain for four centuries.

As well as the **tourist office** (☎ 977 44 96 48; www.turismetortosa.com; Plaça del Carrilet 1; 7-10am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun), there is an information office with similar hours in the Jardins del Princep gardens.

The old town, concentrated at the western end of the city, north of the Ebro, is watched over by the imposing **Castell de la Suda**, where a small medieval Arab cemetery has been unearthed and in whose grounds there now stands a **fine parador** (☎ 977 44 44 50; s/d €116/154; pas). The **Gothic cathedral** (Seu; 7 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) dates back to 1347 and contains a pleasant cloister and some baroque additions. Other

#### TAKING THE BULLS BY THE HORNS

Many Catalans advertise their loathing of bullfighting (an attitude that clashes with Barcelona's long history in the spectacle) but some may not be aware that in the southern corner of their region, locals have indulged in their own summer torment of the animals. In Amposta and other towns, people celebrate *bous capllacats* and *bous embolats*, the former a kind of tug-of-war between a bull with ropes tied to its horns and townsfolk, the latter involving bulls running around with flaming torches attached to their horns. Denounced by animal rights groups, they are allowed by the Catalan government, which recognises the right to hold these *festas* because of their long history and the fact that the bulls are not killed. The heated debate shows no signs of abating in the immediate future.

attractions include the **Palau Episcopal** and the lovely **Jardins del Princep**, perfect for a stroll.

**Hostal Virginia** (☎ 977 44 41 86; www.hotelvirginia.net; Avinguda de la Generalitat 139; s/d €32/54; a i w) is a cheerful, central stop whose modern if somewhat antiseptic rooms boast good-sized beds and cool tile floors. There's a bar downstairs.

The train and bus stations are opposite each other on Ronda dels Docs. Trains to/from Barcelona, Lleida and Tarragona (€5.40, one hour 10 minutes) are more frequent than the buses. Two to four buses run into the Delta de l'Ebre area.

## EBRO DELTA

The delta of the Río Ebro (Catalan: Delta de l'Ebre), formed by silt brought down by the river, sticks out 20km into the Mediterranean near Catalonia's southern border. Dotted with reedy lagoons and fringed by dune-backed beaches, this flat and exposed wetland is northern Spain's most important water-bird habitat. The migration season (October and November) sees the bird population peak, with an average of 53,000 ducks and 15,000 coots, but they are also numerous in winter and spring; 10% of all water birds wintering on the Iberian Peninsula choose to park themselves here.

Nearly half the delta's 320 sq km are given over to rice-growing. Some 77 sq km, mostly along the coasts and around the lagoons, form the **Parc Natural Delta de l'Ebre**.

## Orientation

The delta is a seaward-pointing arrowhead of land with the Ebro flowing eastwards across it's middle. The town of Deltebre straggles about 5km along the northern bank of the river at the centre of the delta. Deltebre's western half is called Jesús i Maria and the eastern half La Cava. Facing Deltebre on the southern bank is Sant Jaume d'Enveja. Roads crisscross the delta to Deltebre and beyond from the towns of L'Ampolla, Amposta and Sant Carles de la Ràpita, all on the N340. Three ferries (*transbordadors*), running from early morning until nightfall, link Deltebre to Sant Jaume d'Enveja (two people and a car €2.50).

## Information

The **Centre d'Informació** (☎ 977 48 96 79; Carrer de Martí Buera 22, Deltebre; h 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) is combined with an **Ecomuseu** (admission €1.20; h same as Centre d'Informació), with

displays describing the delta environment and an aquarium-terrarium of delta species.

There's another **information office** (admission €1.50; h 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Apr) with a permanent exposition on the delta's lagoons at La Casa de Fusta, beside L'Encanyissada lagoon, 10km southwest of Deltebre. Other offices are in Sant Carles de la Ràpita, Amposta and L'Ampolla.

## Sights & Activities

A good way to explore the delta is by bicycle and you can rent one from several places in Deltebre. **Lloguer de Bicicletes Torné** (☎ 977 48 00 17; Avinguda Goles de l'Ebre 184; per day €10), in the heart of town, rents out bicycles year-round.

Early morning and evening are the best times for **bird-watching**, and good areas include L'Encanyissada and La Tancada lagoons and Punta de la Banya, all in the south of the delta. L'Encanyissada has two observation towers and La Tancada one (others are marked on a map you can pick up at the **Centred'Informació**). La Tancada and Punta de la Banya are generally the best places to see the **greater flamingos**, the delta's most spectacular birds. Almost 2000 of the birds nest here, and since 1992 the delta has been one of only five places in Europe where they reproduce. Punta de la Banya is joined to the delta by a 5km sand spit with the long, wide and sandy **Platja de l'Eucaliptus** at its northern end.

**Olmos** (☎ 977 48 05 48) is just one of a couple of companies that run daily tourist **boat trips** (1½ hours, €10 per person) from Deltebre to the mouths of the Ebro and Illa de Buda at the delta's tip. Boats go daily, but the frequency depends on the season (and whether or not there are enough takers).

## Sleeping

**Camping Eucaliptus** (☎ 977 47 90 46; sites per 2-person tent & car €19.75; h Apr-mid-Oct) This camping ground is in a small eucalyptus grove just back from Platja de l'Eucaliptus. It has its own restaurant, bar and minimarket. There are two more camping grounds at Riumar, 10km east of Deltebre.

**Delta Hotel** (☎ 977 48 00 46; www.dsi.es/delta-hotel; Avinguda del Canal, Camí de l'Illeta s/n; s/d €56/94; p a ) On the northern edge of Deltebre, by the road to Riumar, this delightful hotel has modern rooms, as well as a good restaurant. Lounge around in the leafy courtyard and gardens in

which some of what you eat in the restaurant is grown.

There are a few places to stay in Sant Carles de la Ràpita, a pleasant fishing town with a marina.

You'll find several eateries by Riumar and the mouth of the river. In La Cava, try **Nuri** (☎ 977 48 01 28; Carretera de les Goles; meals €25-30; h lunch daily), located by the mighty Ebro in a grand old ivy-covered house. Much of what you eat, ranging from frog's legs and eel to seafood-and-rice dishes, comes from the river or around about it. Ask about their boat res-

taurant, the **Santa Susana** (☎ 629-204117), tied up on the river a little further along.

## Getting There & Away

The delta is easiest to get to and around with your own wheels, but it is possible to reach Tortosa by bus or a train-bus combination.

**Autocars Hife** (☎ 902 11 98 14; www.hife.net) runs buses to Jesús i Maria and La Cava from Tortosa (€2.35, 50 minutes) up to four times daily (twice on Saturday, Sunday and holidays), and from Amposta (€1.20, 30 minutes) once daily.

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