



Barcelona & BEYOND

Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, is an obvious first stop on a Spanish sojourn. But beyond beautiful beaches (frequented by even more beautiful Barcelonians) and the extraordinary architecture of Antoni Gaudí, lie countless other Catalan highlights pleading to be discovered in this in this Mediterranean region.

Costa Brava leads the way, with its sun-kissed coastline broadcasting a highlights reel of Catalonia's charm. Over 214 kilometres, travellers will be spoilt with open oceans, luxury resorts, and quaint fishing villages, culminating with Costa Brava's capital, Girona city.

From the sea to the summits, The Pyrenees mountains cater to travellers who wish to experience the highlights of Catalonia more literally. The pinnacle of the Pyrenees can be found in the snow-capped peaks of Val d'Aran, which hides its rich Catalan heritage behind a tantalising terrain catering to skiers, hikers, bikers and adventurers of all kinds.

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BARCELONA CITY

Hospital de Sant Pau

i ABOUT

The largest city of Catalonia will tick all the must-sees on your quintessential Europe itinerary. Even the ones you didn't know you had! Barcelona's architecture is striking, even surreal at points. The city's artists all appear to have inherited a magical ability to create - engineering historic churches and grand parks, as well as humble spray-can street paintings with ease. With 10,000 restaurants and 23 with Michelin Stars, Barcelona's gastronomy is among the best in the world. Travellers on a limited schedule are sure to struggle splitting their time between "Barna's" beautiful beaches, bars and boutiques on a daily basis. And the challenge of returning to life - minus mesmerising sunrises and sangria-filled nights in sidewalk cafes - will linger long after one's trip to the Cultural Capital of Europe ends.

KEY FACTS

- Population:** 1.6 million
- Best time of year to visit:** May to September bring the warmest weather, but are accompanied by the biggest crowds. Consider April and October - it's still pleasant and prices are below peak.
- Ideal destination for:** City slickers, foodies, shoppers, beach lovers
- For festival-lovers:** Festes de Gràcia (August). This festival is one of Barcelona's biggest block parties and sees locals decorate their streets with crazy, colourful creations made of recycled material. Onlookers can get involved by joining a parade, watching one of the dance performances or even participating in a treasure hunt.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

- Best of Gaudí**
Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí's most impressive work can be found in the colourful gardens of Park Güell, the murals of Casa Batlló and the newly opened Casa Vicens, his first work.
- Hospital de Sant Pau**
This former public hospital is an iconic landmark in Barcelona, earning UNESCO World Heritage Status. Explore the history of medicine in Barcelona and admire the incredible architecture.
- Gothic Quarter**
Barcelona's barrios (neighbourhoods) buzz with the confidence of a city that entices 32 million tourists each year, so check one out and get lost among the locals. The winding streets and narrow lanes of the Old Gothic Quarter are among the most scenic.
- Barceloneta Beach**
The strip of sand along Barceloneta Beach may not be the prettiest, but the people that parade it certainly are. Drop past Barcelona-city's closest beach for a quick daytime dip, then stay for drinks at one of the hip hotels, such as the W, that line the shore.
- Montjuïc Hill**
Montjuïc Hill offers spectacular views back over the city and Barcelona Harbour. Take a scenic ride up and enjoy the spectacular views from the peak, and spend some time exploring Montjuïc Castle.
- Palo Alto Market**
The abandoned factory turned "concept space" that is Palo Alto Market is the perfect place to grab a drink while checking out some of the city's best pop up stores and food trucks.

DID YOU KNOW?

Barcelona had no beaches prior to hosting the 1992 Olympic Games. Since then, seven have been built along the city's 4.5 kilometre coastline. Testament to their beach development, Barcelona was also voted the "Best Beach City" by National Geographic.



The River Onyar

i ABOUT

The city of Girona may be small in size but it packs a lot of punch within its 39.1 km² borders. A short distance from the bustle of Barcelona, it's an ideal location to get your fix of history, architecture and world-class Catalan cuisine. Travellers will also be pleasantly surprised by the alternative activities on offer in this ancient walled city - everything from aqua trekking to the opportunity to visit a real Spanish Civil War air raid shelter. While Girona can be comfortably explored in a day, it's best appreciated slowly - waking with the rising Costa Brava sun, wandering through the narrow laneways of its quaint cobbled streets and winding up with a sunset bite at one of the town's many popular tapas bars.

KEY FACTS

- Distance from Barcelona:** Approximately 1 hour 20 minutes driving time north or 38 minutes on a high speed AVE train.
- How to get there:** All trains are direct, departing from Barcelona's Sants or El Clot Aragó train stations. Sagales buses service Barcelona to Girona, and drivers should follow the AP-7 toll road north from Barcelona to Girona.
- Best time of year to visit:** July is the hottest month in Girona, but the busiest time for tourism is actually May due to the Temps de Flors festival.
- Ideal destination for:** History buffs, slow travellers, adventurers, romantics
- For festival-lovers:** Temps de Flors Flower Festival (11-19 May). Hundreds of green-thumbed artists unite to transform the city's landmarks with flower installations.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

- The Jewish Museum**
Girona is packed with museums. Everything from the City History Museum to another dedicated solely to cinema. If you only have time for one, weave through the stone stairs of the 12th-century Jewish Quarter (in Forca Vella fortress) and visit the Jewish Museum.
- River Onyar**
Step away from the monuments of the old town (such as Girona Cathedral and Placa de la Independencia Square) and walk along one of Girona's many bridges for a postcard pretty view of the iconic citrus-colored houses lining the edge of the River Onyar.
- El Cellar de Can Roca Restaurant**
Top-notch restaurants are plentiful, but one of Girona's perennial favourites is El Cellar. Opened by in 1986 by the Roca brothers, Joan, Josep and Jordi, the Catalan cuisine of this glass-walled restaurant has twice seen it rank the No.1 restaurant in the world.
- Game of Thrones Tour**
With Girona one of the major filming locations in season 6 of the popular fantasy TV series, sites visited will include major city landmarks such as the Cathedral steps, Convent of Sant Domenech, Monastery of Sant Pere de Galligants and the Arab Baths.
- Cycle the city**
Girona is best explored by bike. As well as an annual festival drawing bicyclists from around the world, the city features excellent cycling routes, hotels catering to cyclists and even cyclist-themed cafes, including La Fabrica café
- Mercat de la Volta**
Artisan food and local crafts abound in Girona's many markets, but one of the best is The Mercat de la Volta. Also known as Art 0km - owing to the truly local nature of the products sold - it's the perfect place to stock up on souvenirs (even if only for yourself).

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of the bridges leading to the River Onyar, such as the arch stone bridge of Pont de Pedra and the Pont de les Peixateries, were designed by Gustave Eiffel, the civil engineer of Eiffel Tower fame.



PYRENEES

Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park

i ABOUT

Rural and deeply traditional, the wild landscapes and raw beauty of this majestic mountain range feel a world away from the hustle and bustle, whilst still being easily accessible from most of the major cities. The plunging valleys, snow-capped peaks and vast mountainous terrain provide a year-round playground for keen skiers, hikers, bikers and climbers, whilst the rich Catalan heritage hidden amongst the picturesque scenery leaves plenty to be discovered for those with a curious spirit. Dotted with thousand-year-old monasteries featuring some of Spain's most outstanding Romanesque architecture, charming medieval alpine towns and villages, and countless natural wonders, the activities and experiences that await in the Pyrenees are infinite!

KEY FACTS

Distance from Barcelona: The Catalan Pyrenees are approximately a 1 hour to 3 hour drive from Barcelona, depending on where you are headed.

How to get there: Drivers should follow the A-2 north from Barcelona via N-260 and C-13. During winter, the Skibus ALP 2500 will take skiers to La Molina and Masella.

Best time of year to visit: June to July is the busy season, with September a good alternative when temperatures are still warm. December to April is the best time for skiing.

Ideal destination for: Outdoor enthusiasts, skiers, culture and history buffs and keen hikers.

For festival-lovers: Lluèrnia Festival of Light, Olot, runs annually in November.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

Explore Besalú

One of Spain's best-preserved medieval towns, you'll want to spend a full day exploring the historic, and walkable, Besalú. Bursting with heritage sites including Besalú Bridge, Casa Cornellà, monastery Sant Pere and Sant Vicenç church, it's a must for culture buffs!

Aigüestortes National Park

Spain is home to 14 National Parks, but Aigüestortes is the only one located in Catalonia. Its dramatic landscape of 200 lakes, lush valleys and soaring Pyrenees peaks will truly make you feel like these summits are "touching the stars".

Skiing

Usually associated with sangria and siestas, the Pyrenees put snow sports on the Spanish map. Several resorts line the slopes, including Vall de Núria, popular with locals and a great place to experience skiing in the Pyrenees.

Hiking

Spring transforms the Pyrenees into a trekker's paradise, and come spring hikers of all fitness levels are drawn to the many routes that run through the ranges. These include a basic 35km walk from Portbou to coastal Cadaqués, or Senda Pirenaica, for experts.

Water Sports

Summer in the Pyrenees is all about water sports. Try rafting and kayaking in Noguera Pallaresa river, canoeing on Noguera Ribagorçana, canyoning along the Garonne or even bungee jumping in Llavorsi, for the daring.

Cultural Attractions

The Pyrenees have retained many elements of traditional Catalan culture. Experience it yourself by marvelling at the region's famous human towers, take in a local festival, or explore one of the many local markets across the region.

DID YOU KNOW?

Stretching for more than 450 kilometres, the Pyrenees form a natural border between France and Spain. However lying between the two countries is the tiny independent principality of Andorra.



COSTA BRAVA

Calella de Palafrugell

i ABOUT

Costa Brava translates as the 'rugged coast' or 'wild coast', a wonderfully accurate description of the 214-kilometre stretch of coastline that runs north from Blanes to the French border. This scenic region is home to some of Spain's best beaches, with both popular large-scale resorts and quaint fishing villages appealing to visitors of all types. A journey up the Costa Brava will reveal unspoiled beaches, hidden coves, small villages and medieval towns. Fans of Salvador Dalí flock to the region to get a glimpse into his life and work, with major attractions dedicated to his life in Figueres, Port Lligat and Púbol. With easy access by car and rail from Barcelona, no trip to Catalonia is complete without spending some time exploring the staggeringly beautiful Costa Brava.

KEY FACTS

Distance from Barcelona: Costa Brava stretches from Blanes, 60 kilometres northeast of Barcelona, to the French border. Drive time from Barcelona to the town of Figueres in the north is under 2 hours.

How to get there: Head north on the AP7 toll road, with signposted roads connecting the beaches and towns. Trains from Barcelona's Sants Station also run north through Girona and Figueres, or up the coast via Blanes.

Best time of year to visit: Visit in May, June or September to beat the crowds.

Ideal destination for: Beach-lovers, families and fans of Salvador Dalí

For festival lovers: Castell de Peralada International Music Festival, annually in July-August.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

Begur

This stylish coastal town is just under an hours' drive from Girona, and is a favourite beach getaway for Barcelonians. Sit on the beach, explore the narrow streets in the town, or the medieval castle that sits up on the hill for the best views of the area.

Sant Sebastià Lighthouse

Located in Llafranc, just south of Begur, this lighthouse provides uninterrupted views out over the sea, and can be combined with a walk along the coastline exploring the coves in the area. Finish with a drink and a meal at El Far Restaurant.

Figueres

Inland on the northern end of Costa Brava, this town is most famous as the birthplace of Salvador Dalí. The most popular attraction in the town is the Dalí Theatre-Museum, and the dining, shopping and historic castles are also a must-see.

The Dalí Triangle

Salvador Dalí fans can explore his life and work through three distinct locations - the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres, The Salvador Dalí House-Museum in Port Lligat which houses his workshop, and the Gala Dalí Castle House-Museum in Púbol, where his wife resided.

Beaches

Costa Brava is famous for its beautiful beaches. Try the tranquil El Golfet, family-friendly Platja de Pals or Aiguablava, or the hidden gems of Platja Fonda or Cala Pedrosa. Whether it's to swim, sunbake or snorkel, there's a perfect beach along Costa Brava.

Cap de Creus Natural Park

A stunning example of the rugged beauty of Costa Brava, this Natural Park in the north is a great place for a walk - follow the path from Cadaqués out to the lighthouse, before walking down to the Cova de s'Infern and it's natural swimming pool.

DID YOU KNOW?

Salvador Dalí was born in Figueres, and lived much of his life in Costa Brava, building his home in Port Lligat and buying a castle for his wife Gala in Pubol. One of Dalí's most ambitious projects was the creation of his Theatre and Museum in Figueres, created to bring more people to his small hometown. Today, Dalí fans can visit all three of these sites and explore the landscapes across Costa Brava that heavily influenced his work.

VAL D'ARAN

i ABOUT

Located near the French border in the Catalan Pyrenees, Val d'Aran is a winter playground. Encompassing the Aran valley and its 33 villages, the main draw of the region is the Baqueira Beret, the largest ski resort in Spain. While Spain is not known for its skiing, this hidden gem on the north side of the Pyrenees might be one of the best kept secrets in Catalonia.

Skiers will love the expansive terrain, including excellent off-piste skiing, and non-skiers will equally enjoy the village, with plenty of shopping, bars, restaurants and entertainment.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

Baqueira Beret Ski Resort

The largest ski resort in Spain includes 104 trails, 29 ski lifts catering to all abilities, and extends to 2,510 metres elevation.

Nearby Villages

Explore the medieval hillside villages nearby, including Vielha, Arties and Salardú, filled with history and beautiful architecture.

Thermal Baths

After a day on the slopes, a soak in a natural thermal bath will help with muscle soreness - our pick is the thermal baths in Arties.

Dog-sledding and snowmobiling

Explore the area on board a traditional dog sled or a more modern snowmobile - the rush of flying through the snow is incredible.

Heli-skiing

For the advanced skier, there are several tour companies offering the rush of heli-skiing in the backcountry - with no lift queues!

Arán Valley

LAND OF THE EBRO

i ABOUT

The territory referred to in Catalan as "Terres de l'Ebre" marks a region in south Catalonia located 190 kilometres away from Barcelona. The landscape of "The Lands of Ebro" is all encompassing, owing to the location of two of its counties (Montsià, Baix Ebre) on the coast that form the Ebro River Delta and the remainder (Terra Alta and Ribera d'Ebre) inland.

While UNESCO's declaration of Terres de l'Ebre as a Natural Biosphere Reserve makes it the ideal destination for eco-tourists, its range of available activities (cultural, natural, gastronomic) make it perfect for travellers of any type too.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

Via Verda

See the best of the region on the Via Verda, a path that crosses the territory from north to south and can be explored on foot, bike or horseback.

Active Tourism

The natural landscape of the region provides an ideal backdrop for adventurous travellers. Try hiking, horsebacking, climbing, kayaking and cycling.

Cultural Activities

The history of the region has left behind a rich legacy featuring prehistoric paintings, castles, museums, churches, palaces and modernist constructions.

Gastronomy and Wine

Ebro Delta rice is famous in Catalonia, and an abundance of fresh seafood all combine to create some of Catalonia's best cuisine.

Bird Watching

Birds of a feather... flock to the Ebro River Delta. From flamingos to the Delta Birding Festival, Ebro has earned its wings among bird watchers.

Ebro River



ACCOMMODATION

Lloret de Mar



Terra Dominicata

★★★★★ Carretera, T-702, Km 13, 43379 Escaladei, Tarragona, Spain



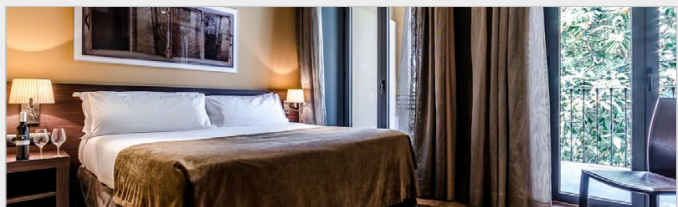
Castell Cituat

★★★★★ Ctra. N 260 - Km 229, 25700 Pyrenees - Catalan, Spain



Hotel Claris

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Hotel Nord 1901 Superior

★★★★★ 7-9 Carrer Nord, 17001 Girona, Spain



La Plaça Madremanya

★★★★★ Sant Esteve, 17, 17462 Girona, Spain



Hotel Rigat Park & Spa

★★★★★ Avenida America 1, 17310 Lloret de Mar, Spain

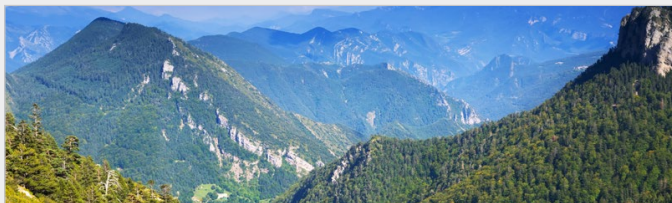


ACTIVITIES

Fortress Vila Vella



Small-Group Barcelona Tapas Tour with a Local



Pyrenees Mountains Small Group Day Trip from Barcelona



Via Ferrata Climbing Experience



Private Tour: Inside Girona's region Pals & Peratallada



Costa Brava and Medieval Villages from Girona



Costa Brava Coast Path Hiking & Tossa de Mar