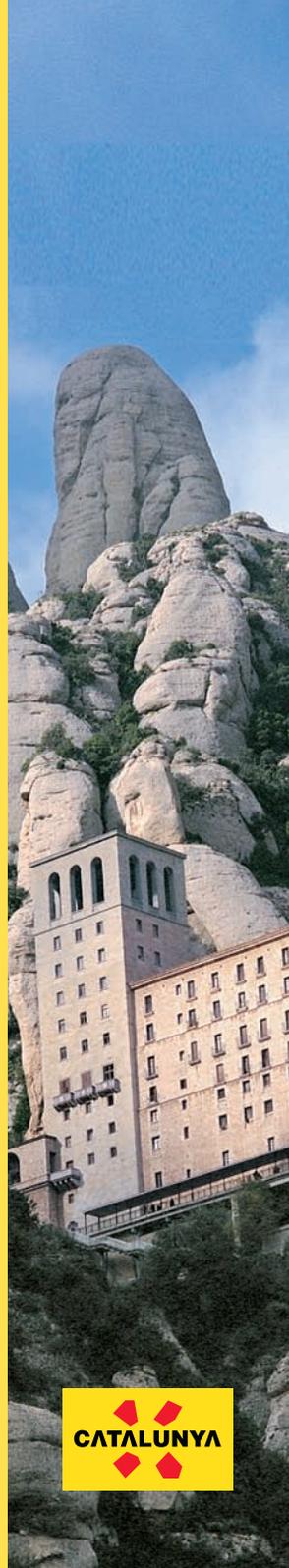


Catalunya Central

Catalonia



Catalonia

Central Catalonia

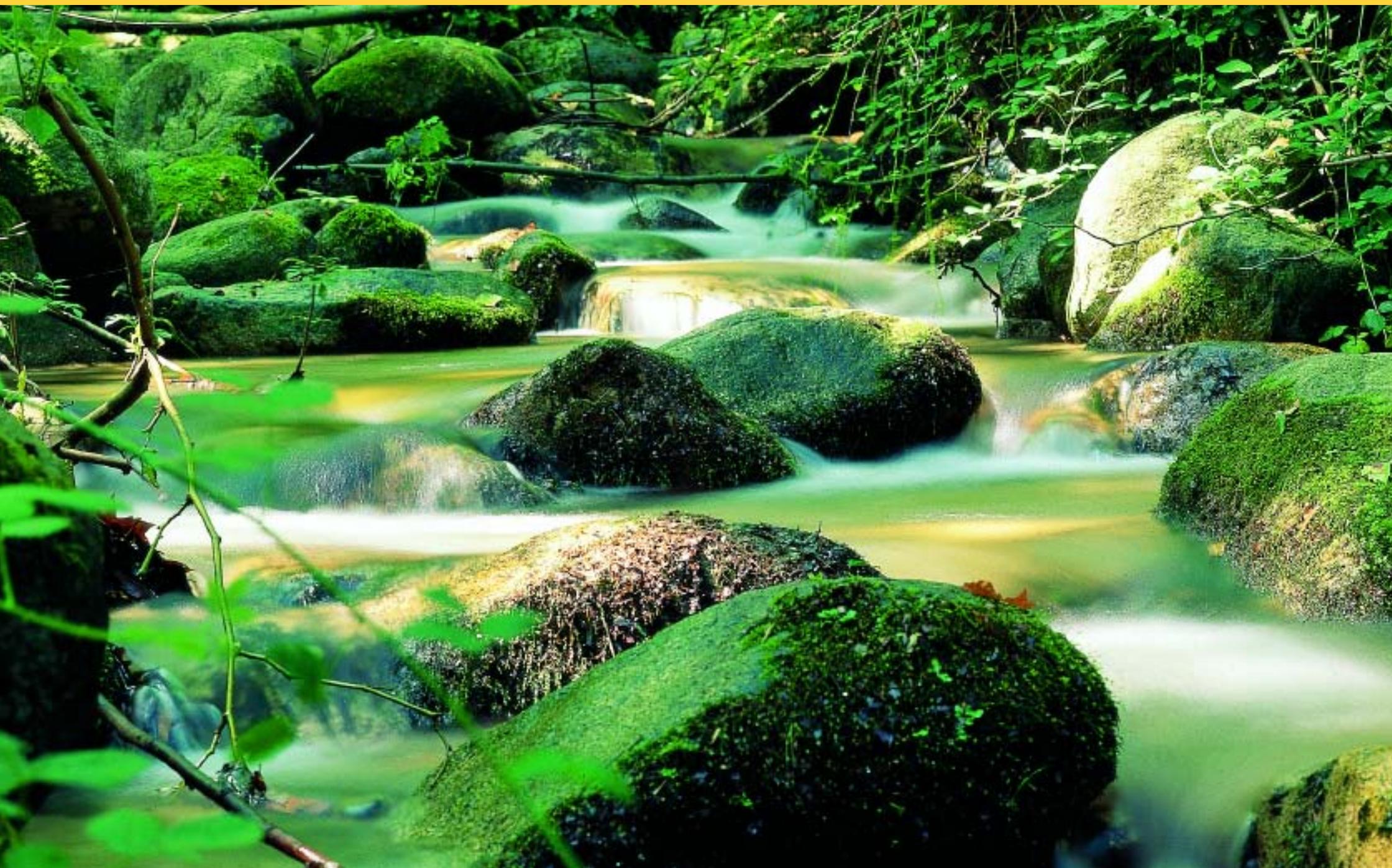
Anoia

Bages

Osona

Vallès Occidental

Vallès Oriental



Introduction

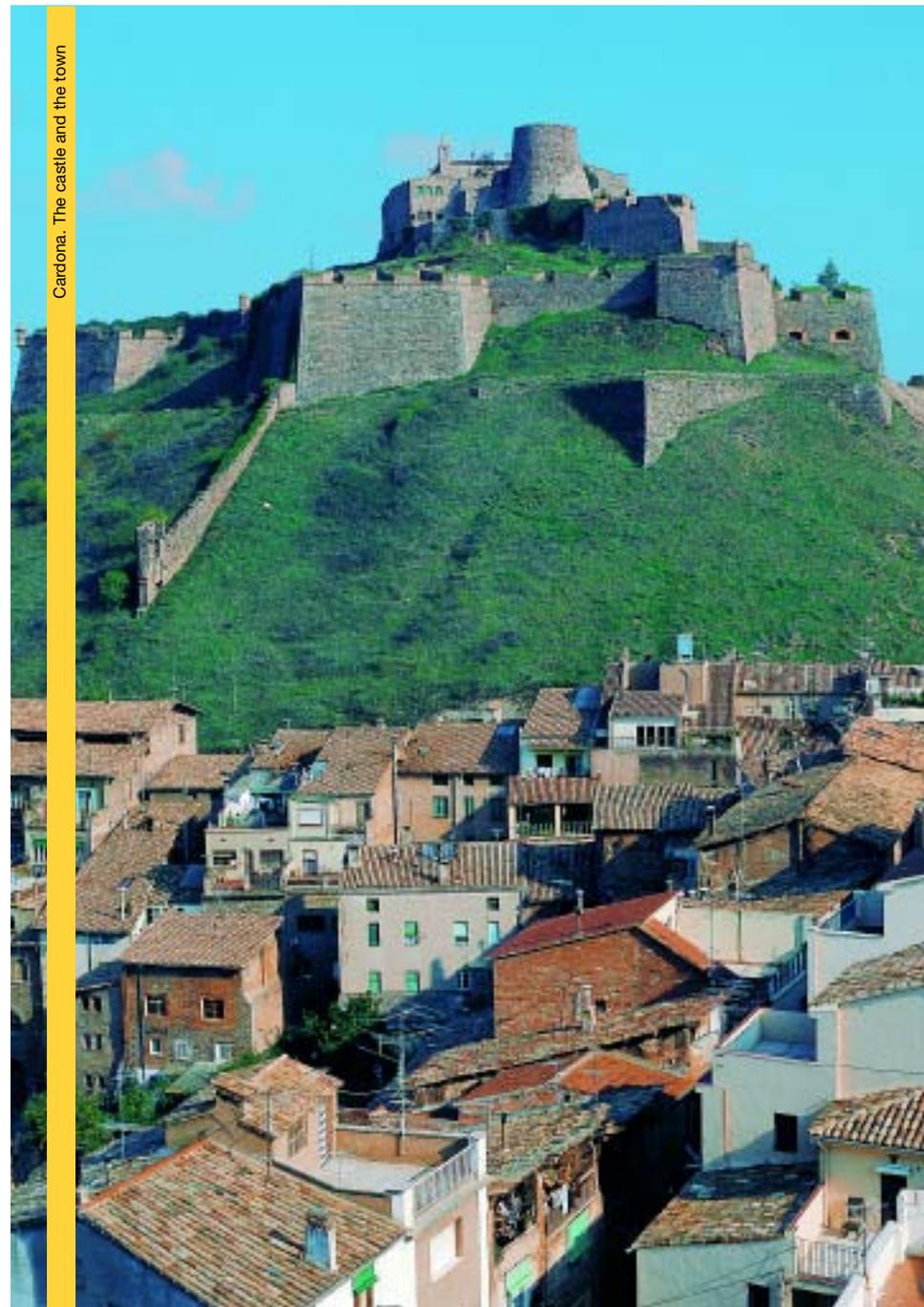
In the Heart of Catalonia. Central Catalonia is a tourist region encompassing five *comarques*: Anoia, Bages, Osona, Vallès Oriental and Vallès Occidental. The Precoastal Range runs along it like a backbone: it begins in the Ancosa hills, rises abruptly from the plain at Montserrat, and forms a continuous line from the ranges of Obac and Sant Llorenç del Munt to the Gallifa and Bertí escarpments before reaching its highest point in the Montseny massif. On either side lies flatter land: the Òdena basin, the plains of Bages and Vic to the north, and the precoastal depression of Vallès in the south. Other highlands, including the Pinós and Castellallat ranges, the plateaus of Moianès and Lluçanès, and the Collsacabra hills, form the northern boundaries of Central Catalonia.

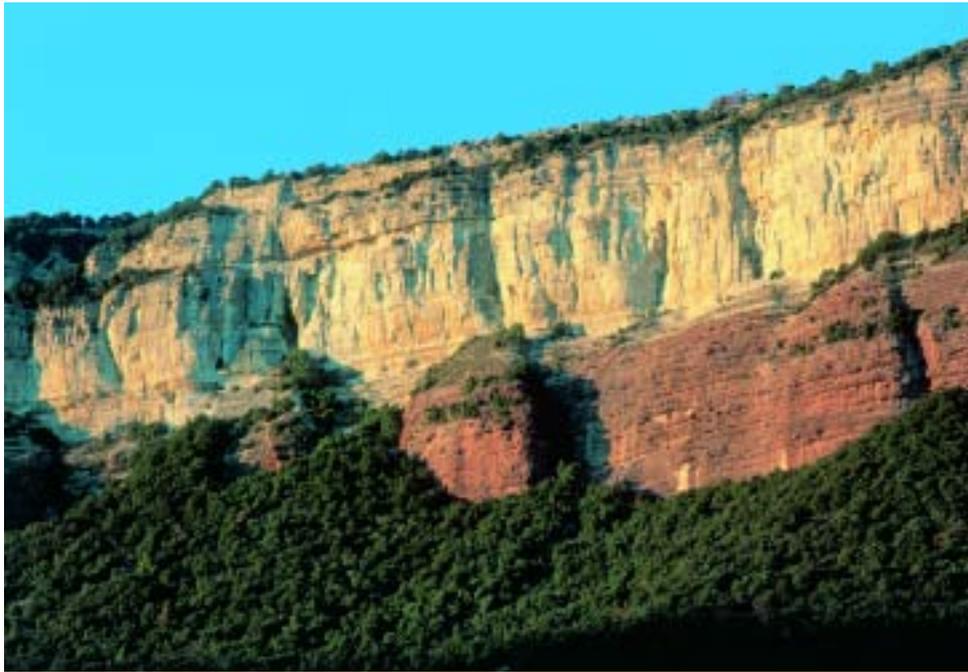
The chief cities of the west of the region are Igualada and Manresa and the latter makes no secret of its aspiration to be the capital of the entire heartland. The focal point of the eastern part – watered by the Ter – is the city of Vic, which rises in the midst of the mountain-rimmed plain that bears its name. The cities of Vallès – Terrassa, Sabadell and Granollers – stand on the very edge of the Barcelona metropolitan area. Aside from its major towns, Central Catalonia also has several sub-

regions, each with a personality of its own: Moianès, lying round its chief town, Moià; Lluçanès, slightly farther north, with Prats de Lluçanès as its focal point; and finally Alta Segarra, in northern Anoia, with Calaf as its capital. Together these regions and cities form a rich and diverse mosaic.

The present structure of Central Catalonia is a direct legacy from medieval times. In the early Middle Ages, people lived in constant fear of Moorish raids. But when finally the insecurity was over, many farmers and tradesmen who had fled to the Pyrenean foothills moved down into Central Catalonia. The Catalan counts and the most powerful religious institutions, such as the diocese of Vic and the monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès, offered them farmland to encourage them to resettle the area and built many new parish churches, monasteries and fortresses. Our present-day cities and towns grew up around these buildings. The ancient structure is still plainly visible in the wooded highlands with their hamlets and scattered farmhouses, in the layout of the old quarters of major cities, and in the rich and plentiful architectural heritage.

Cardona. The castle and the town





↑ Collsacabra

Parc Natural de Sant Llorenç del Munt i l'Obac ↓



↑ La Tossa de Montbui

Igualada, seen from La Tossa de Montbui ↓



Granollers. Porticoed square



Parc Natural del Montseny



Montserrat: a Liturgy in Stone

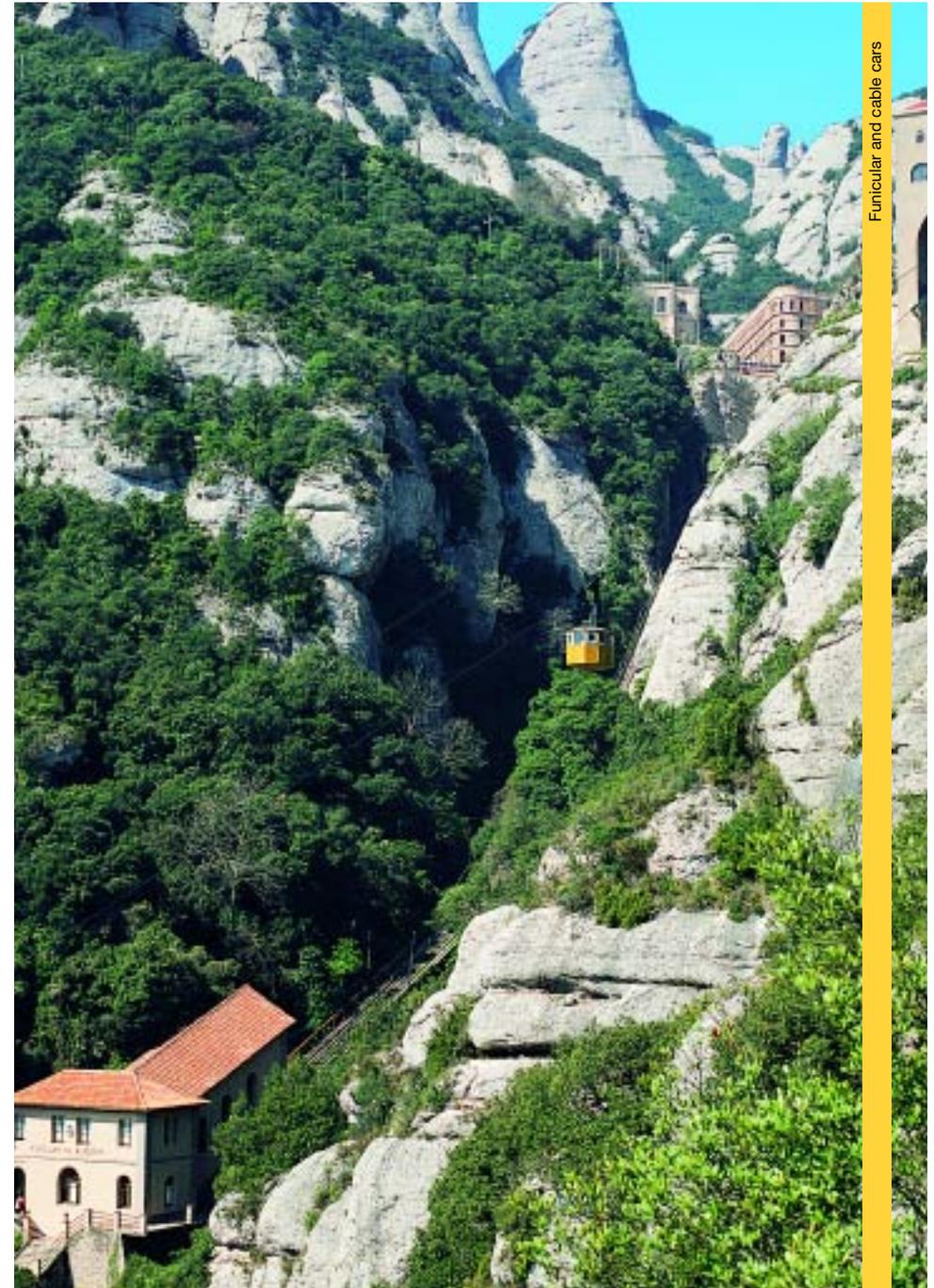
The popular imagination has seen Montserrat as a huge church organ, an enormous ship, or a magic world of rocky islands rising out of woodland. Its characteristic jagged silhouette, rising in splendid solitude and instantly identifiable from much of the country, make it a mountain like no other: a vast natural altar of stone needles and deep gullies, a paradise for hikers and climbers, but also a haven for pilgrims who come in search of its spirit. "Carved out by tiny angels with golden saws..." ("*Amb serra d'or, els angelets serraren...*"): this apt description comes from the hymn that epitomizes the sacred mountain: *El Virolai*. Schiller and Goethe are just two of the travellers and writers from all over the world who have described Montserrat at different periods. Wagner set his *Parsifal* there. And tradition has given every rock pinnacle a name of its own: the Mummy, the Elephant, the Cylinder, the Skull, the Magic Friars, the Pregnant Woman, the Scissors, the Parrot, the Nun, the Radish, and so on.

Mechanical Devices. One can drive up to this world of fantasy by taking the road from Monistrol to the monastery. But the trip is even more exciting if we take the cog railway, which makes the 500-metre ascent up a vertiginous track that clings to the rock

and affords stunning views. The Montserrat cable cars are also very popular. The yellow tubs are hauled along steel cables from the foot of the mountain to the monastery and for decades the tiny dots, dangling over the void against the immense rock face, have been a characteristic sight – indeed a veritable symbol – of Montserrat.

Montserrat Curd Cheese. For many years a daily market of local produce has been held at the entrance to the monastery. A prime speciality is *mató*, a curd cheese made mostly in the village of Marganell, which nestles at the foot of the mountain. Honey, cheesecake, fig loaf and other products made by traditional methods are also on sale, while above the market towers the neo-Romanesque apse of the monastery of Santa Maria.

Ora et labora. The monastery of Montserrat originated in a tiny chapel – Santa Maria – which is documented as early as 888. The chapel is gone, but vestiges of the 12th-century Romanesque church that replaced it still remain. The present basilica was built in Renaissance style in the 16th-century. Today, as in centuries gone by, the eight monastery bells – one of which weighs 7 500 kilos – peal out for matins from

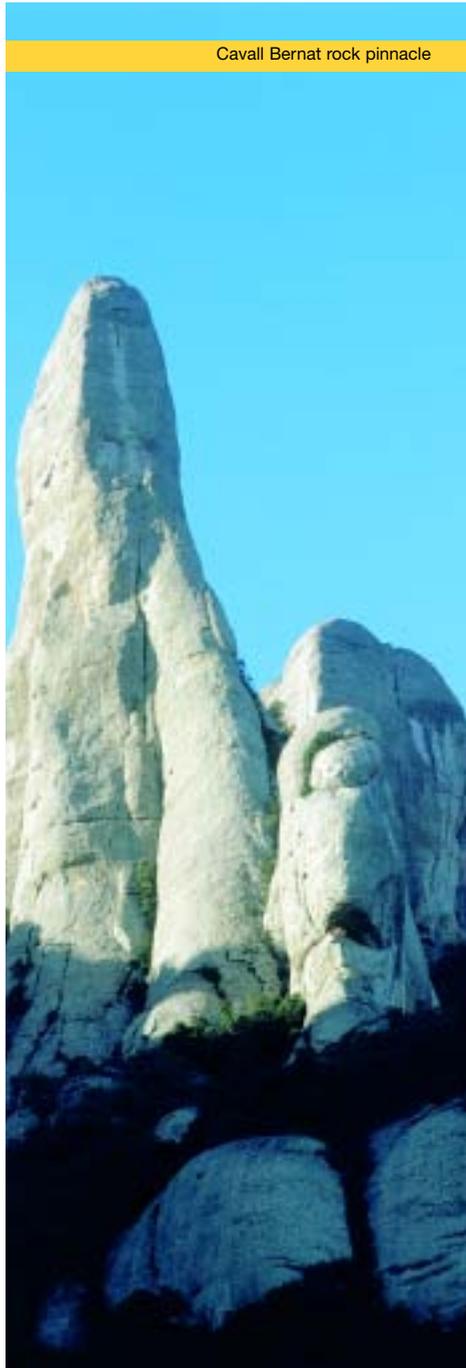


Funicular and cable cars

the Gothic belfry at six in the morning. This is the Benedictine monks' way of waking up the sacred mountain. They sit in the church, in wooden choir stalls polished by centuries of wear, to recite psalms which are the distillation of centuries of religious tradition. Then they once more take up the strands of life in one of Roman Catholicism's most famous places of pilgrimage. Every day of the year, the bells mark the pace of their lives, and so it has gone on since the 11th-century, when Abbot Oliba founded the monastery. Thanks to the community's continuous presence, devotion to Our Lady of Montserrat, the patroness of Catalonia, is still very much alive, but the monks also run an important publishing house – the oldest in Europe, with 500 years of history – and one of the most ancient and highly reputed choir schools in the Old World. Some fifty boys, aged between ten and fourteen, live alongside the monks, receiving the musical education which guarantees the choir's high standards. It is well worth going into the church to hear the Montserrat boys' choir singing the *Salve Regina* and the Montserrat anthem, *El Virolai*, composed on a poem by Jacint Verdaguer.

The Basilica of Santa Maria. To reach the basilica we cross a square – Plaça de Santa Maria – which commands a fine view of a group of rock pinnacles known as Santa Magdalena. One is the popular Phrygian Bonnet and we can often glimpse the tiny figures of climbers clambering up to the top. Alongside the monastery's imposing façade are the remains of the 15th-century Gothic cloister. At the foot of the façade is the entrance to the atrium, a space midway between the outer squares, teeming with visitors, and the inner tranquillity of the monastery. The doorway of the earlier Romanesque church is still visible inside the atrium, and there are Renaissance tombs carved in Naples, and sculptures by Rafael Solanich, Josep Clarà and Frederic Marès. From the inner courtyard, which has paving inspired by that of the *Campidoglio* in Rome, the entire façade of the basilica, built in 1900-1901 over an earlier Baroque façade, can be seen. On it are sculptures of Jesus and the twelve apostles, a large rose window, and a hundred-year-old clock. The present

Cavall Bernat rock pinnacle



Our Lady of Montserrat, the "Little Dark Lady"



16th-century basilica has a nave, twelve side chapels – six on either side –, and a Renaissance-style ground plan. High above the main altar stands the polychrome wooden statue of the Madonna, which was carved in the 12th or 13th-century. She is nicknamed La Moreneta (the little dark lady) because of her dark face and hands. She receives hundreds of visitors a day: some come out of religious devotion, others are tourists and sightseers. On their way up to her niche, they pass through several rooms that were refurbished in 1944 by various Catalan artists. The Madonna's silver throne was made from the proceeds of a collection organized in 1947.

Montserrat, a Place of Culture. The Museu de Montserrat has an impressive archeological section devoted to the Biblical East. Most of the exhibits were acquired by one of the monks on his travels through the Middle East. The other star attraction is the collection of modern paintings and sculptures, which includes pictures by El Greco, Caravaggio, Berruguete, Picasso, Dalí, Tàpies, Le Corbusier, Fortuny, Vayreda, Casas, Mir, Nonell, Rusiñol and many others. Other sections are devoted to earlier paintings, liturgical gold and silverware, and the iconography of the Madonna of Montserrat over the ages. The monastery library is an impressive documentation and study centre which attests to the intellectual and cultural activity of the Benedictine monks. It contains 270,000 volumes, including approximately 400 incunabula (some printed in the monastery itself) and over 2,000 manuscripts. Among them is the remarkable *Llibre Vermell*, an encyclopaedic manuscript dating from the 14-16th centuries. Over the years Montserrat has been, not merely a religious and cultural icon, but a major patriotic rallying point and has endorsed the cause of movements in defence of Catalan identity.

Short Outings from the Monastery. To get an overall view of the monastery, most people take a short walk from Plaça de l'Abat Oliba along the stone path up the mountain to the lookout point of Sant Miquel, surmounted by a great cross, which overlooks the chasm and offers a wide panorama. A funicular departs from the beginning of the path and descends

to another path, on a slightly lower level, leading to the Santa Cova. It was in this cave, according to tradition, that the statue of the Madonna was discovered. All along the path stand the fifteen sculptures of the Monumental Rosary, some of which are by Puig i Cadafalch, Gaudí and Josep Llimona.

The Natural Park. The mountain of Montserrat was declared a Natural Park in 1987. It is a fascinating place to explore, a unique environment and distinctive landscape in which over 1 000 plant species have been inventoried, a third of all those that grow in Catalonia. Many generations of hikers and climbers have perfected their skills on Montserrat. Countless hidden tracks and paths wind in and out of the rock faces and pinnacles, making it possible to explore the range in all directions. The mountain rises sheer

from the valley and its slopes are steep. A good map should be carried at all times. There are hundreds of climbing routes of all levels of difficulty. Montserrat is a whole world just waiting to be discovered.

The Surrounding Area. There are plenty of places to visit in the vicinity of the legendary mountain. Nestling below its loftiest pinnacles, for instance, beside the road to Can Maçana, is a Romanesque church dedicated to Saint Cecilia. Or one can explore the Coves de Salnitre (saltpetre caves) near Collbató. The tour, which lasts an hour, takes in half a kilometre of chambers and galleries with names like the Cathedral Room, the cave of El Mansuet, the Butterfly Gallery, the Devil's Well, the Monks' Cloister, the Niche, the Devil's Wings, the Bishop and the Confessional.



↑ Museum. *La Madeleine*, by Ramon Casas

Library ↓





Basilica and boys' choir



From Sant Joan to Sant Jeroni [ON FOOT]

Itinerary: take the Camí Nou de Sant Jeroni, which runs along the main ridge and climbs up to the chapel of Sant Jeroni. From here the path rises more steeply till it reaches the highest peak on Montserrat: Sant Jeroni.

Level of difficulty: easy, elevation difference 270 m.
3.5 km, 1 h.

Access: take the Sant Joan funicular from the Montserrat Abbey and get off at the station at the top.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Montserrat Abbey

Tel. (+34) 938 777 701
www.abadiamontserrat.net
www.montserratvisita.com

Montserrat Rack Railway

Tel. (+34) 902 312 020 (from Spain only)
www.cremallerademontserrat.com

Montserrat Funicular

Tel. (+34) 932 377 156
www.aeridemontserrat.com

Saltpetre Caves, Collbató

Tel. (+34) 937 779 076
www.collbató.cat

Montserrat Mountain Nature Reserve

Tel. (+34) 932 956 810
www.muntanyamontserrat.cat

Collbató and Monistrol de Montserrat Tourist Information Offices (see page 97)

Manresa, Profile of a Historic City

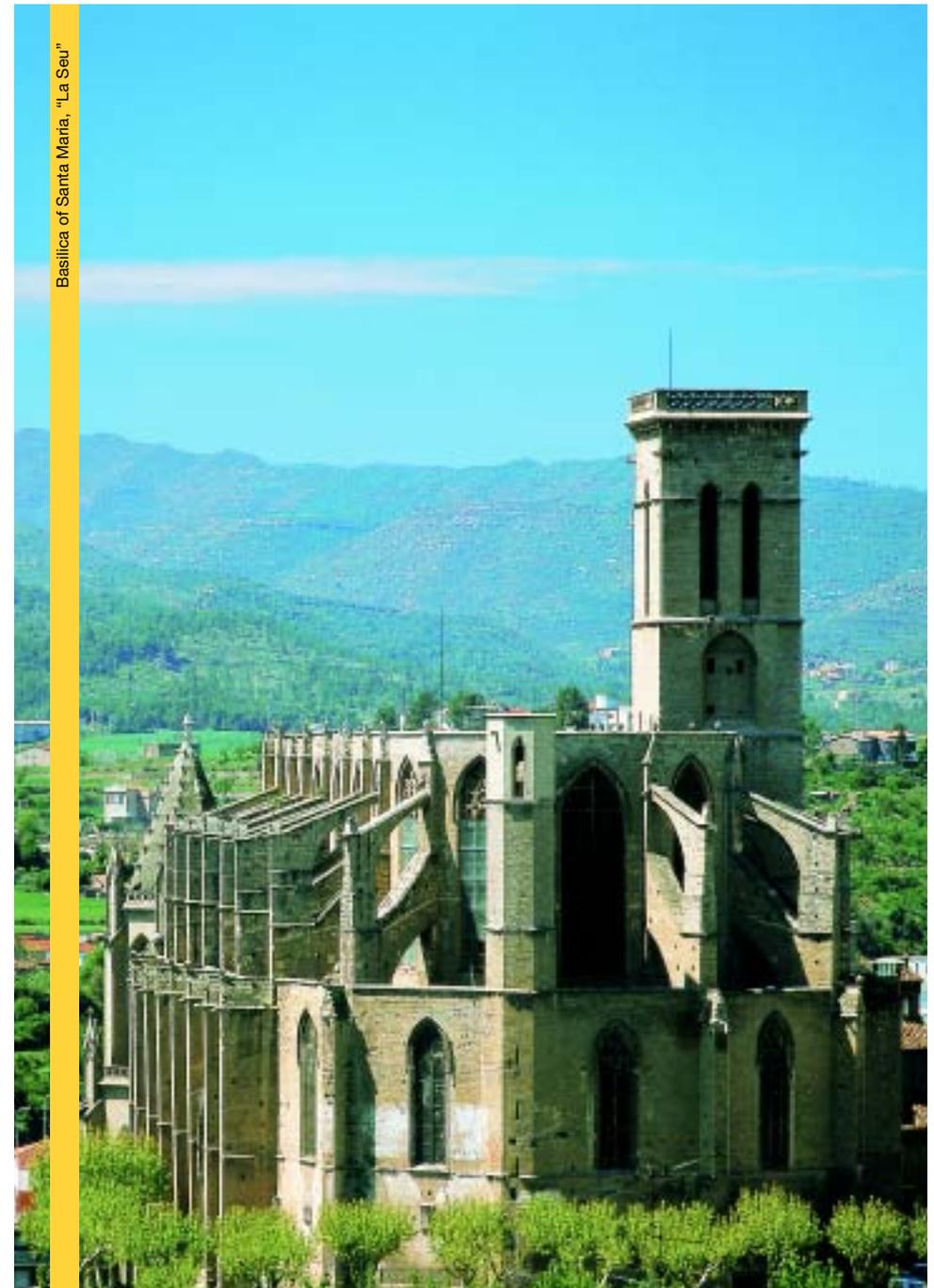
Manresa is one of Catalonia's oldest cities. In Roman times it was called *Civitas Minorisa* and it has succeeded, through sheer determination, in spreading its influence over an area that extends well beyond the *comarca* of Bages. Its geographical location – close to the heart of Catalonia and at the hub of a complex communications network – has made it a hive of social, cultural and commercial activity. Its thriving cultural life and the historic buildings which unite to make up its characteristic profile, provide ample evidence of this.

This profile is one of the foremost assets of the chief town of Bages. It comprises three historic buildings: the medieval bridge – Pont Vell – which spans the river Cardener, the cave of Saint Ignatius (Cova de Sant Ignasi), perched on the side of Cardener hill, and the group of Gothic buildings, including the church of La Seu, which were built on higher ground. This is the first view travellers get of the city as they approach it from the south – a fascinating cameo of striking proportions.

The Old Bridge. Built in the 12th and 13th centuries on the remains of a Roman bridge, the Pont Vell is one of Manresa's emblematic constructions. Its eight

arches rise to a height of 25 metres above the river, creating the traditional medieval hump-backed silhouette. The local people call it the old bridge because another bridge over the Cardener – the Pont Nou, or “new bridge”, considered one of Catalonia's best preserved medieval bridges – was built further upstream in the 14th-century.

The Collegiate Church and Basilica of Santa Maria. Usually referred to as “La Seu” (“the cathedral”), this 14-15th-century church is Manresa's most important historic building. It was built in Gothic style on the scale of a cathedral (hence its nickname) and its nave ranks among the broadest in Europe. The commission was given to the same master builder who drew up the plans for Santa Maria del Mar in Barcelona. The exterior looks austere but the characteristic rib cage of buttresses is quite spectacular. Inside are some magnificent medieval altarpieces. The finest, *El Sant Esperit*, painted by Pere Serra in 1394, is considered one of the best examples of Catalan Gothic painting. Many interesting Gothic stone sculptures are also to be seen. However, to discover the deepest secrets of La Seu, visitors must go down into the crypt, which contains the relics of three saints and interesting works of Baroque art,



Basilica of Santa Maria, “La Seu”



The Old Bridge

and visit the remains of the earlier Romanesque church, located below the present one.

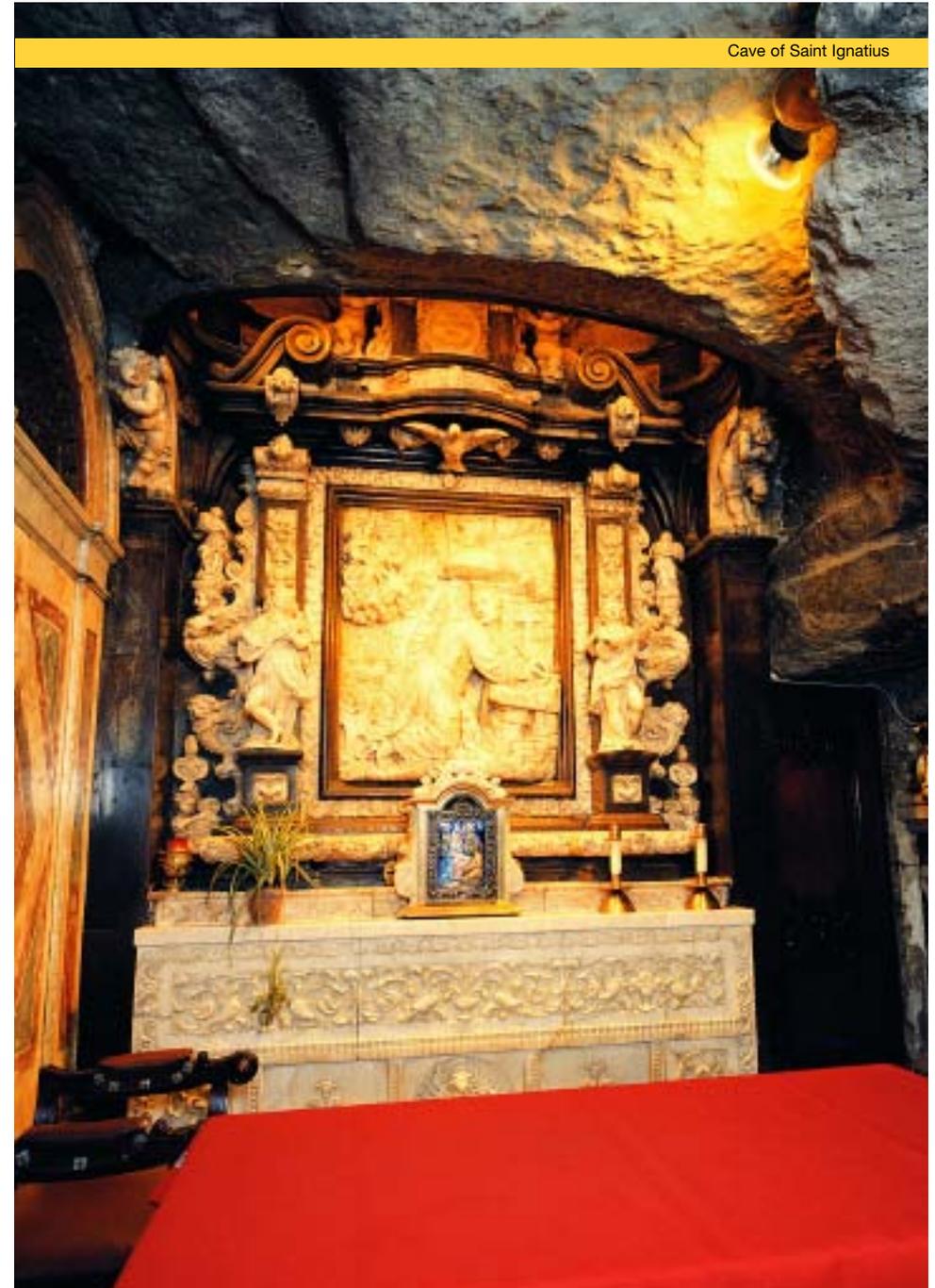
The Cave of Saint Ignatius. Manresa's most original feature is unquestionably the **Cova de Sant Ignasi**, overlooking the terraces above the river Cardener. Tradition has it that Saint Ignatius of Loyola – the founder of the Company of Jesus – spent ten months meditating there in 1522 in the course of his own personal pilgrimage and wrote his famous *Spiritual Exercises* there. In the 18th-century one of the most important Jesuit sanctuaries in Spain was built right over the cave. It contains some of the most interesting works of Baroque art in Catalonia. The interplay between the sober, compact folds of the rock and the majestic Baroque filigrees creates a very special atmosphere which evokes various facets of the saint.

The Old City. Manresa is more than just a profile. The Ciutat Vella – as the citizens of Manresa call the historic centre – stands on the upper level and includes some particularly atmospheric spots. It is a wonderful place in which to saunter at random, from one picturesque sight to the next: the gate on Carrer

de Sobreroca, the stretches of the old walls that have survived the passing centuries, the winding streets and narrow lanes with steps, such as Carrer del Balç, threading its way through the porticoes of the houses, or Baixada dels Jueus, once one of the main streets in the Jewish quarter.

The Main Square. Every day is market day on the **Plaça Major**. Country women come to sell their garden produce and it is obvious that this is the heart of Manresa, the spot around which the old walled city, with its maze of streets and its ancient shops, took shape. It is a good spot from which to explore the old city too. Overlooking the square itself is the Ajuntament (or Casa de la Ciutat), the attractively porticoed 18th-century city hall bearing the municipal coat of arms. A statue of King Peter III stands in the inner courtyard. Close by is the courthouse (Palau de Justícia), a 17th-century Baroque building with a Renaissance-style façade. Inside is a Gothic hall which is thought to have been part of an earlier city hall.

Squares, mansions and chapels. Visitors should take a stroll to Plaça de l'Om, savouring the quaint



Cave of Saint Ignatius

Museu Comarcal. Green ceramic plate



Former "Casino"

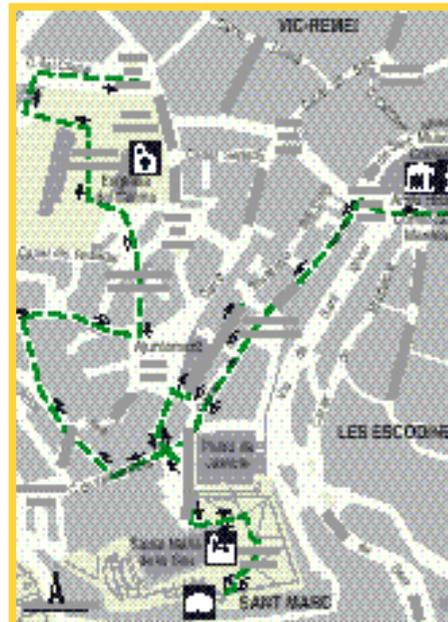


Museu Comarcal. *Rosary Altarpiece* by Joan Grau

details left by the passing centuries. In the shadow of a huge tree, the sculpture of a woman sits and watches life go by. An 18th-century Baroque mansion – Ca l'Oller – also stands here. Beyond it is the former hospital of Santa Lúcia, inside which is the neo-Gothic chapel of El Rapte, built in memory of the days Saint Ignatius spent here in a trance. The event is illustrated by the recumbent statue of the saint. In one of the most picturesque spots in the old quarter is the chapel of Sant Ignasi Malalt, where the pilgrim stayed on the two occasions when he fell ill during his stay in Manresa. The church of the Cistercian priory of Sant Pau, the delightful Gothic cloister of the Capuchin nuns (15th-century) and the Renaissance church of Sant Francesc are just a few of the other historic buildings that are well worth a visit.

The Wavy Lines of Modernism. At the beginning of the last century, the local middle class, the owners of the factories that lined the banks of the Llobregat and Cardener rivers, gave enthusiastic support to

the Modernist movement – Catalan Art Nouveau – with its outburst of sensual, coloured shapes. They commissioned buildings festooned with sculptures, stained glass, mouldings and wrought iron. One good example is the Casino, built in 1906 as a recreation centre for the wealthy, which now houses the regional library (Biblioteca Comarcal). Others are Torre Lluvià (1905), one of the finest works of the architect Ignasi Oms, a native of Manresa, or Casa Torrents (La Buressa), in the style of a neo-Gothic mansion. Cal Jorba, one of Catalonia's few Art Déco buildings, is also of great interest. Built in three phases in the course of the 20th-century, it blends functionality with monumentality and characteristic Art Déco ornamentation. Several of these buildings stand close to one another on Passeig de Pere III, the local people's favourite promenade. It is the perfect place for a leisurely stroll beneath the plane trees, or for sitting on a café terrace to watch the life of the city go by, enjoying a jazz concert on a summer night, or tasting the famous *bacallà a la manresana* (salt cod, Manresa-style).



Medieval Manresa
[ON FOOT]

Itinerary: Museu Comarcal – Pl. St. Ignasi – C. Sta. Llúcia – C. Balç – Baixada de la Seu – basilica of Sta. Maria de la Seu – Parc de la Seu (lookout points) – return to Baixada de la Seu and then follow C. Vallfonollosa – C. Na Bastardes – C. St. Pere – C. St. Miquel – Pl. Major – Baixada del Carme to the church of El Carme – Pl. Milcentenari – Mercat Puigmercadal or Muralla del Carme, to Pl. Infants.

Level of difficulty: city tour.

Access: Manresa tourist office and Museu Comarcal.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Manresa Town Hall
www.ajmanresa.cat

Bages County Council
Tel. (+34) 936 930 350
www.ccbages.cat

Manresa Local Museum
Geology, palaeontology, archaeology, ceramics, art and history of the town.
Via St. Ignasi, 40
Tel. (+34) 938 741 155
www.museudemanresa.cat

Manresa Tourism Office
(see page 97)

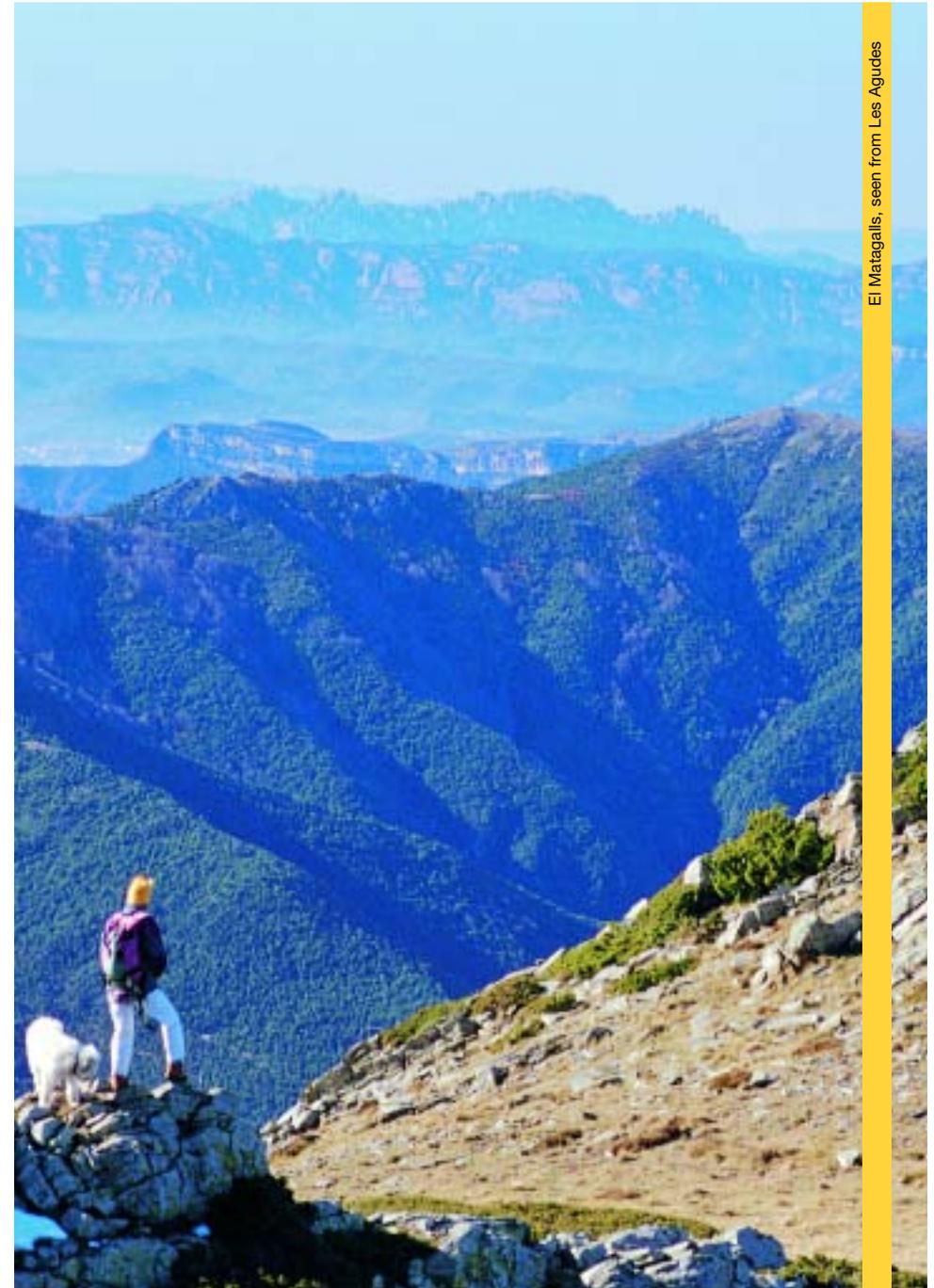
Montseny, a Nature Reserve

Generations of Catalans have been enthusiastic walkers. The first to take up the sport gained experience on the massif of Montseny which they later put to good use in exploring the Pyrenees. Nowadays Montseny, which includes the highest summits in the Precoastal Range, is Central Catalonia's "green lung". Its loftiest point, El Turó de l'Home (1,712 metres), is often snow-covered in winter. But the walkers' favourite destinations are undoubtedly Les Agudes (1,706 metres) and El Matagalls (1,694 metres), the two emblematic summits rising on either side of the Sant Marçal pass. Another outstanding attraction of this massif, which was made part of the worldwide network of biosphere reserves by UNESCO in 1978 and was declared a Natural Park in 1987, is El Pla de la Calma, a plateau located at close to 1,300 m.

A Unique Environment. Its altitude, steep slopes and proximity to the Mediterranean have endowed Montseny with remarkable biodiversity. Here it is possible to do something that is unthinkable on most mountains: traverse nearly all the different strata of western European vegetation in a short lapse of time. The climb begins in typically Mediterranean woods (holm oaks, cork oaks and

pinces), continues through moist medium-altitude mountain vegetation (montane holm oaks and deciduous oaks), then mid-European environments (beeches and firs) and finally the sub-Alpine vegetation on the ridges and summits. This makes Montseny a very special massif. Nearly two thousand plant species have been catalogued, including some that are endemic to Montseny. Rainfall is especially abundant and many springs – nearly six hundred have been counted – feed the small torrents and streams that rush down the mountainside. The higher reaches command splendid views over Central Catalonia. To the east of the huge mountain itself, not very far away, a gleaming line indicates the position of the sea.

El Pla de la Calma. This plateau is the oldest part of the entire massif. This accounts for its gentler contours: time has worn away its more rugged features, giving it its present "calm" appearance. In reality, the name has nothing to do with this supposed tranquillity: it comes from the vulgar Latin *calmis*, meaning an uncultivated plain. To get there, most people take the road to Coll Formic. From there a broad track, accommodating both walkers and cyclists, runs along the ridge as far as



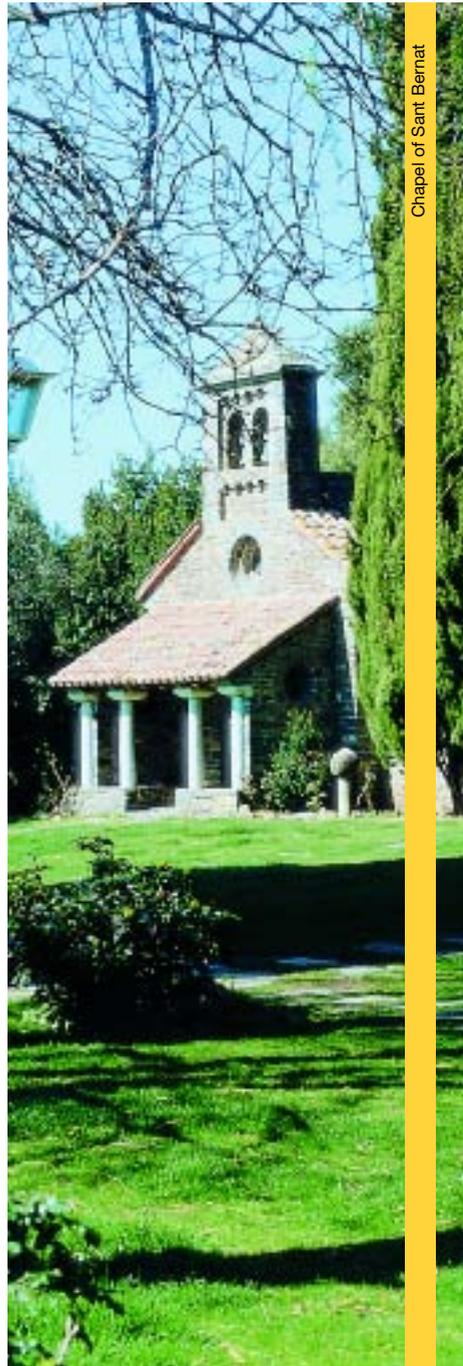
El Matagalls, seen from Les Agudes

Tagamanent hill, on the top of which are the remains of the Romanesque church of Santa Maria. The flashes marking the GR-5 footpath cross the plateau's unusual landscape of moor and scrub before finally turning eastwards and winding down to La Castanya and Montseny village.

El Matagalls. This is only the third highest summit in Montseny but undoubtedly the most emblematic and the one that affords the most sweeping panoramas. The usual departure points for the ascent are Coll Formic, to the west, or Coll de Sant Marçal, to the east. The path from Coll Formic climbs steadily through land devoid of vegetation, commanding views over the Vic plain. Because it is the shortest route to the best outlook point on Montseny, it is used by many people. The ascent from Sant Marçal, on the other hand, is arguably more difficult, but it runs through beech groves most of the way and this makes up for the effort of climbing the first steep slopes. Towards the top, the trees disappear and the panorama opens up on all sides as one approaches the familiar cross rising on the summit.

El Turó de l'Home and Les Agudes. The highest summit in the entire Montseny massif – El Turó de l'Home – can be reached by car and many people drive there just to walk to Les Agudes along the long crest linking the two peaks. But a more interesting option is to do the ascent to El Turó de l'Home the old-fashioned way: from the very bottom. Walkers usually set out from Passavets spring, near Santa Fe, and proceed upwards through the Montseny fir forest – the most southerly in Europe – which the local people call the Aveteda. Though there is often a crowd at the summit, where a weather station is located, making the ascent under one's own steam is immensely rewarding. Many walkers like to continue along the ridge as far as Les Agudes to enjoy the genuine mountain-top atmosphere.

Footpaths for All the Family. There are many relatively easy signposted footpaths on Montseny. Information can be obtained from the Centre



Chapel of Sant Bernat



Viladrau

d'informació Can Casades at Santa Fe del Montseny. Two itineraries suitable for all ages are the Empedrat de Morou circuit, which leaves from Santa Fe itself, and that of El Sot de l'Infern, round Fontmartina. Two interesting audiovisuals are screened at the information centre: *Les quatre estacions al Montseny* (The Four Seasons on Montseny) and *L'home i el Montseny* (Man and Montseny). To plan the route there are specialized publications containing maps and descriptions of numerous routes. Several long-distance footpaths (GRs) cross the massif in all directions – GR-2, GR-5, and its variant GR-5.2 – as does the Green Meridian, which is designed for walkers, riders and cyclists.

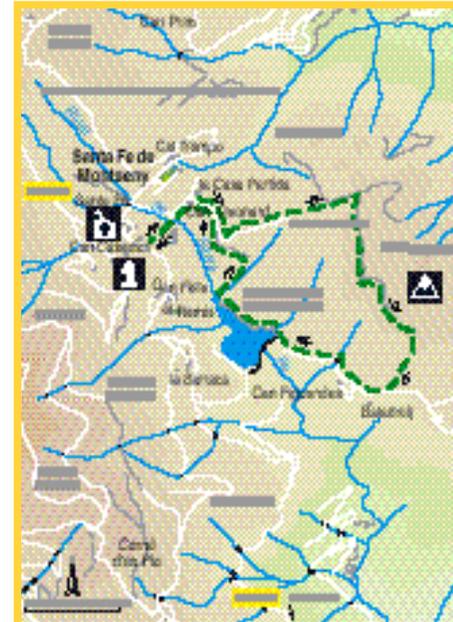
Driving round Montseny. One of the best options for exploring Montseny by car is to set out from Sant Celoni along the road that climbs up the

Santa Fe valley. A turning half-way along leads to the highest summit, El Turó de l'Home, which can be reached by car. But if we stay on the main road, we continue to climb steadily and ultimately reach the thick beech woods of the Santa Fe valley. The branches meet over our heads and the scenery looks entirely different according to the season: in autumn the colours range from ochre to red; in winter the branches are bare; and in spring, the beech trees turn a luminous green as their leaves burst open. There are several places to eat at Santa Fe del Montseny, and a hotel a hundred years old in Historicist style. The road winds up to Coll de Sant Marçal, strategically located between the two main mountains in the massif. The Romanesque chapel of Sant Marçal stands very close to the road and beside it is the old presbytery, which has been converted into a luxury restaurant. Beyond the col the road descends the



steep northern slope to the town of Viladrau, the site of numerous residential properties and luxurious summer homes in a variety of styles. The quaint old quarter is also well worth exploring. Alternatively, one can set out to drive round Montseny from Osona by taking the road to Coll

Formic via Seva and El Brull. Beyond the col it runs downhill to Montseny village, in the heart of the massif. From here one can reach Fontmartina, a camping area, and the departure point for various routes leading to the highest summits.



Around Santa Fe del Montseny [ON FOOT]

Itinerary: signposted circuit. From Can Casades the path descends and then turns left; it crosses the Santa Fe stream and continues to Casa Partida, where it turns right and goes on to Pla de Mulladius (or Pla de Ginebrons); it changes direction and goes down to the Empedrat de Morou (panorama). It reaches the Santa Fe reservoir via Can Baladrell and returns to Can Casades.

Level of difficulty: easy. 5 km, 1h 40 min.

Access: AP-7 motorway or train to Sant Celoni, then BV-5114 road to Santa Fe.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Montseny Nature Reserve Office
Masia Mariona (Mosqueroles)
Fogars de Montclús
Tel. (+34) 938 475 102
www.diba.cat/parcsn

Can Casades Information Centre
Santa Fe del Montseny
Tel. (+34) 938 475 113

Rectoria del Brull Information Centre
Tel. (+34) 938 840 692

Masia Bellver Information Point
Parc Etnològic de Tagamanent
Tel. (+34) 937 445 082
www.lacalma.net

Sant Esteve de Palautordera Information Centre
Tel. (+34) 938 482 008

Fogars de Montclús Information Centre
Tel. (+34) 938 475 290

Montseny Village Information Centre
Tel. (+34) 938 473 137

Centre d'informació i Museu Etnològic del Montseny La Gabella
Arbúcies
Tel. (+34) 972 860 908

European Cultural Centre for Nature Viladrau
Tel. (+34) 938 848 035
www.ccenviladrau.org

Seva Tourist Information Office and Consorci de Turisme Portes del Montseny (see page 97)
www.portesdelmontseny.com

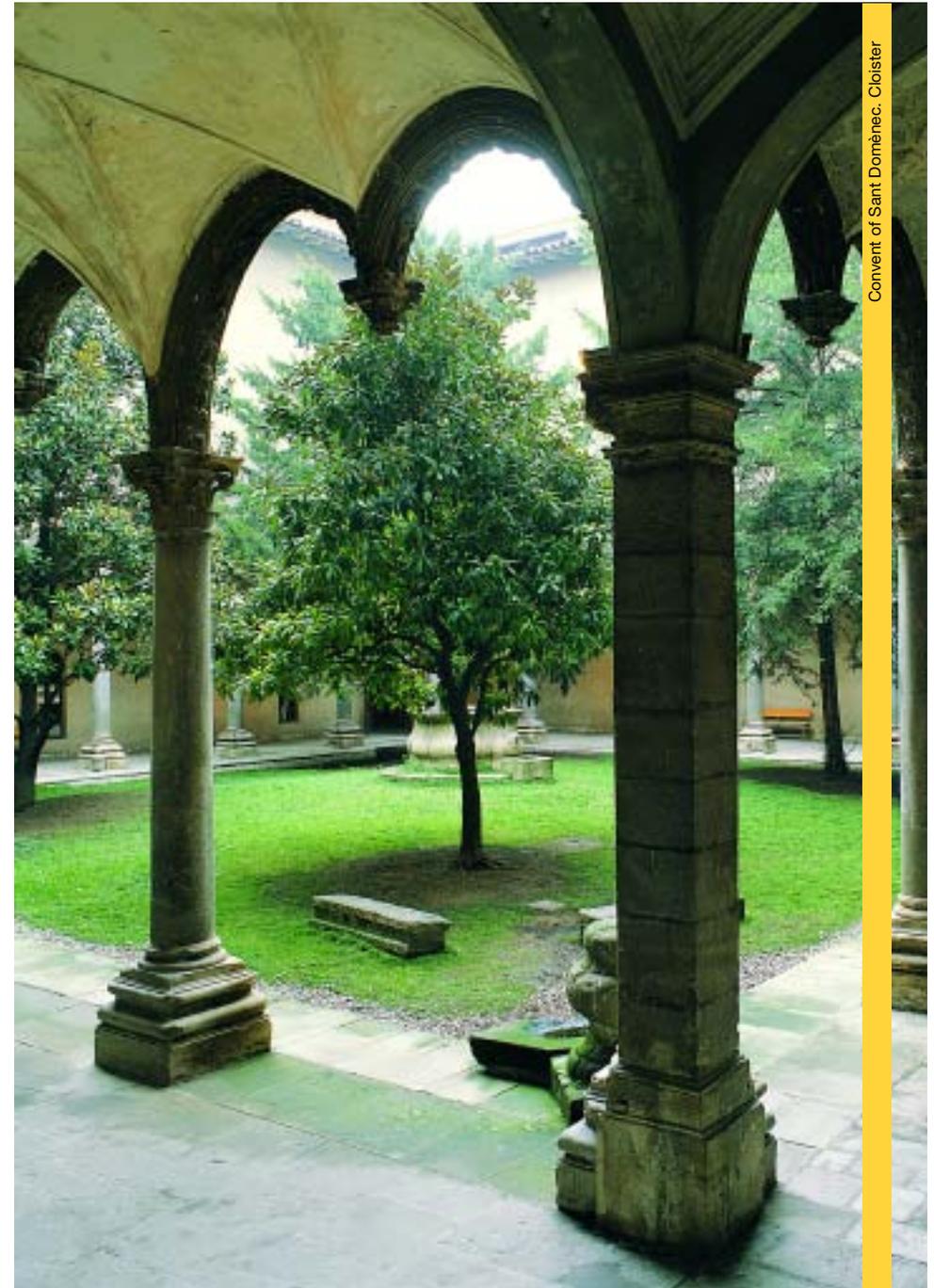
Vic, the Market town on the Plain

Vic lies at the heart of the plain that bears its name. It is a city in which past meets present – a rich architectural heritage and the ebullient atmosphere of a university with three thousand students. To enjoy it, visitors should take a leisurely, but observant, stroll through its picturesque streets.

The Main Square. The spacious, well proportioned **Plaça Major** – or Mercadal – is the city's nerve centre and one of Catalonia's most famous squares. It also provides the most colourful evidence of Vic's vocation as a market town: the bustling market that takes place there every Saturday. Once a year there is a special market – Mercat del Ram – which overflows the square and invades much of the rest of the city. Many restaurants and leisure facilities are located around the square. In winter, as evening falls, the outlines of the Plaça Major are often blurred by a wisp of fog and the playful beams of the street lights swathe the city in velvet, creating vistas that have shaped the personality of its inhabitants. Several emblematic buildings stand round the porticoed Plaça Major: Casa Comella, in Modernist style, with handsome sgraffiti on the façade; Casa Costa and Casa Cortina, also from the Art Nouveau period; Casa Tolosa,

built in the Baroque era; Casa Moixó, with Baroque and Renaissance features; and Casa Beuló, a blend of Gothic and Baroque. The rest of the city fans out from the Plaça Major, which makes an ideal starting point for a tour.

The Old Quarter. Most of Vic's priceless architectural heritage is to be found on the streets and squares of its interesting old quarter. The contrasting features and styles of the buildings, both civil and ecclesiastical, instantly transport the imagination to times long past. The city hall (**Casa de la Ciutat**) originated in a Gothic building built in 1388. Inside are an interesting Baroque-style council chamber, a portrait gallery devoted to local celebrities and the municipal archive. In **Casa Cortada**, a 17-18th-century mansion in Baroque style, one can visit some intriguing rooms decorated with scenes from Fénelon's *Télémaque* and the life of Saint Maurice, and a salon painted with Chinese motifs. The ground floor houses the tourist office. A star attraction on any tour of the old quarter is the **church of Sant Just**, built in Gothic times with a 16th-century nave and apse, which was once part of a Jesuit college. From 1770 to 1947 the building housed Vic's famous seminary,



Convent of Sant Domènec. Cloister



Museu Episcopal.
Antependium from Lluçà
monastery

where many distinguished personalities, including Jaume Balmes, Saint Anthony Claret and Jacint Verdaguer, were educated. Paintings done by Josep Maria Sert in preparation for murals in the cathedral are on show in the **chapel of La Pietat**. Characteristic buildings in the city centre are the **hospital of La Santa Creu**, founded by Ramon de Terrades in 1348 and enlarged in the 16th-century, and the Baroque-style church and **convent of Sant Domènec**, designed by various master builders from the Morató family, which has an unusual and very graceful cloister. The remains of the founder of the Claretian order are preserved in the **church of Sant Antoni Maria Claret**, while the **convent of La Mercè** houses a museum dedicated to him – Museu Claretia – in which personal objects and mementoes are on show. The

Albergueria is an unusual building from the Romanesque period where, in medieval times, pilgrims and anyone who stopped in Vic on their travels through Europe was given hospitality. Nowadays it is an exhibition centre and an important cultural centre run by the diocese. The **church of Els Dolors**, which dates from the Baroque period, is the headquarters of a confraternity, the Congregació dels Dolors, which holds a traditional procession (Processó dels Armats) through the old city centre each year on Palm Sunday.

Vic Cathedral. The cathedral, dedicated to Saint Peter, is a blend of styles ranging from Romanesque to Neoclassical. The prime Romanesque features are the crypt, the slender, elegant belfry – re-

miniscent of Pyrenean churches – and the remains of the lower tier of the cloister, over which the Gothic cloister was built in the 14th-century. Also from the Gothic period is the handsome alabaster reredos from the old high altar, carved by Pere Oller in the 15th-century. In the chapel dedicated to Saint Bernat Calbó, there is a spectacular Baroque silver urn containing the remains of the bishop and saint. Monumental wall paintings by Josep Maria Sert (20th-century) adorn the interior of the cathedral and play a fundamental role in defining the architectural space. In them Sert successfully revived the sumptuousness of great Baroque paintings.

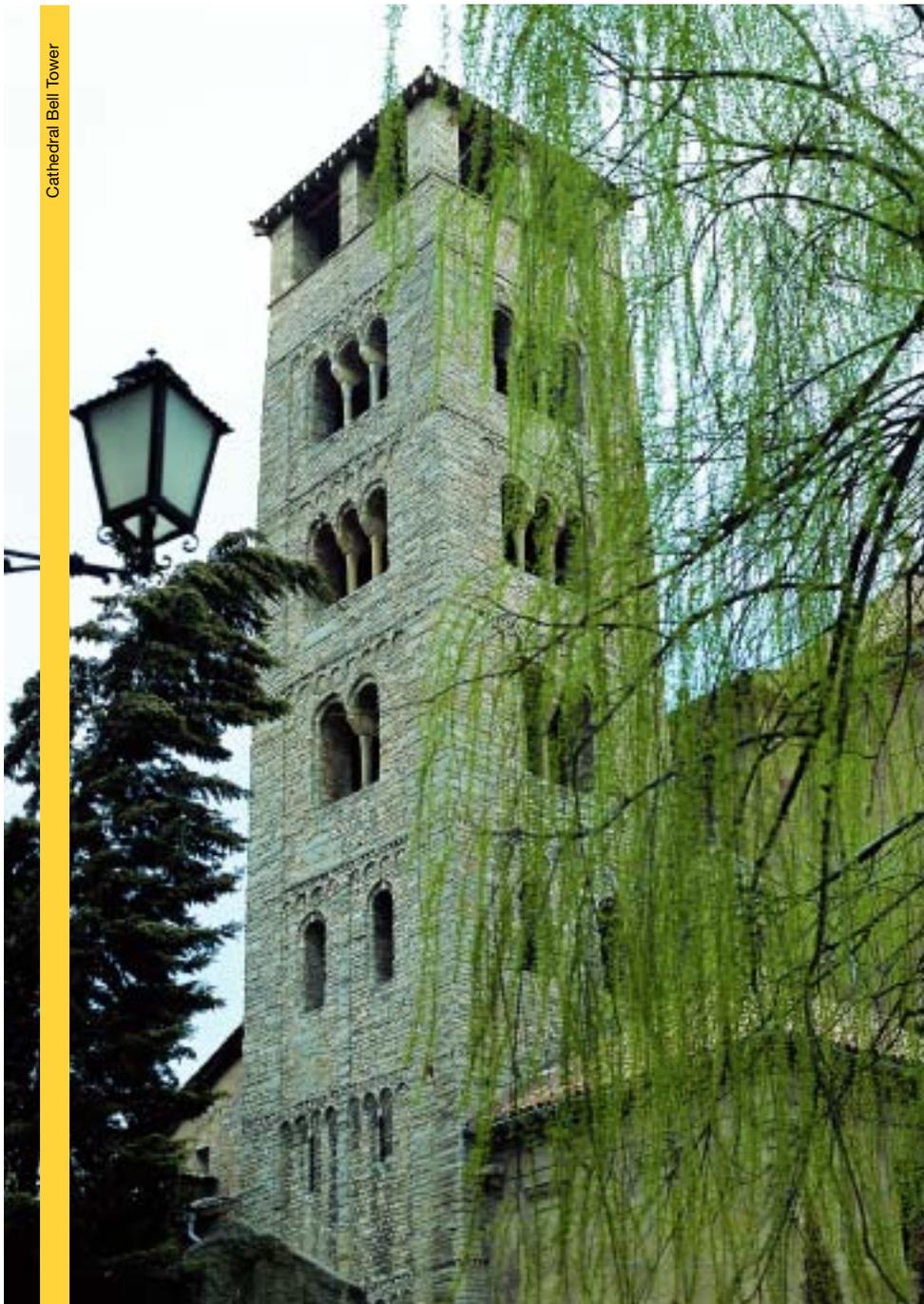
A Cathedral City. Vic is the capital of a diocese covering the greater part of Central Catalonia.

The main diocesan building, after the cathedral, is the bishop's palace (**Palau Episcopal**) next to it. Its origins date from the 12th-century and the Romanesque arches of the lower courtyard still stand. The portraits of all the bishops of Vic can be seen in the Sala de Sínodes. The gallery was added in 1915 by the Noucentist architect Josep Maria Pericas. A visit to the **Museu Episcopal de Vic** is a must. Inaugurated in the late 19th-century, it has recently moved to a brand new building. It is one of Catalonia's foremost museums, containing twenty thousand exhibits, most of them from different parts of the diocese itself. The impressive collections of medieval paintings and sculptures have won international acclaim. The archeological section, the large collection of Hispano-Arab fabrics, the gold and

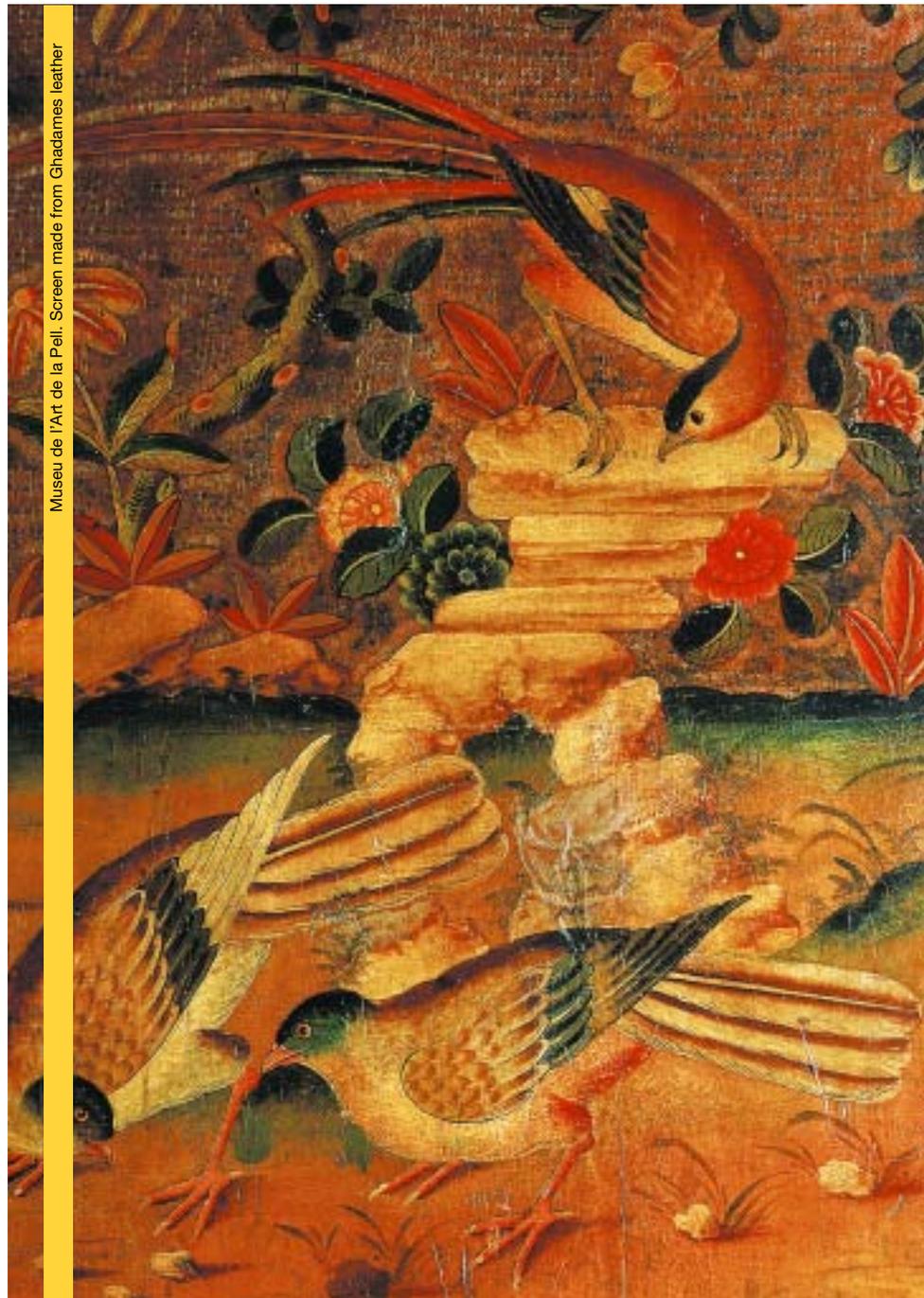


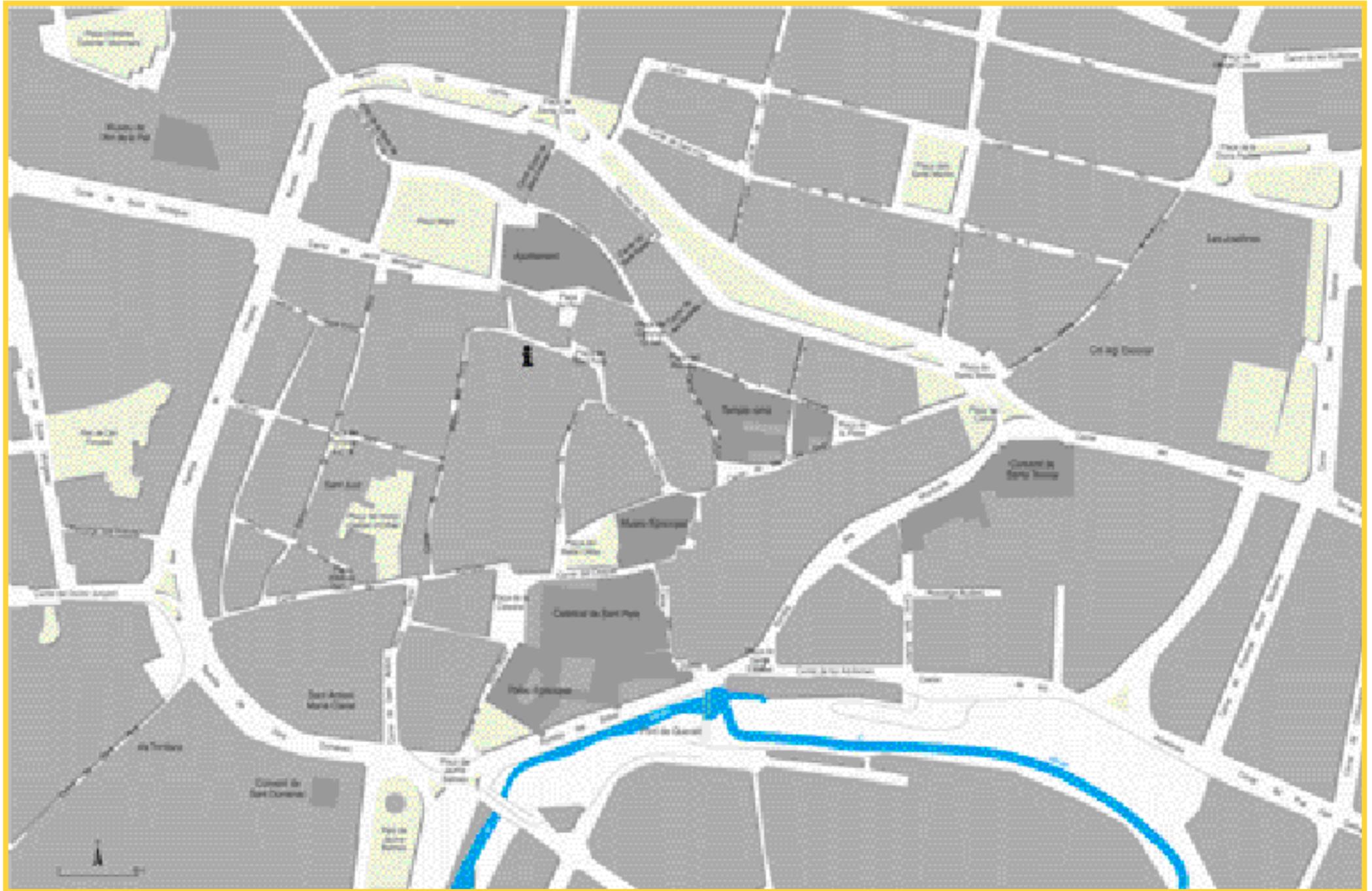
Cathedral. Murals by
Josep Maria Sert

Cathedral Bell Tower



Museu de l'Art de la Pell. Screen made from Ghadames leather





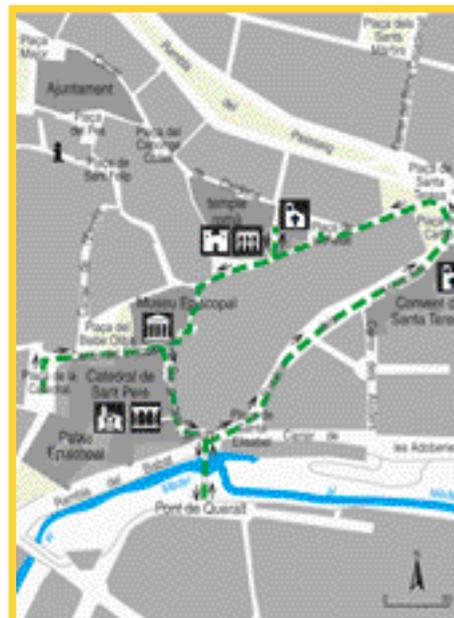
silverware, furniture, glass, ceramics, liturgical vestments, tapestries and wrought iron are also among the finest in the country.

Peter III's Walls. King Peter III built the fortifications which bear his name to defend Vic in the 14th-century. They encircled the entire old city, following the same layout as the previous 12th-century walls. There were forty towers and seven gates, the main gate being the Portal de Queralt. A long stretch of walls still stands today along Rambla dels Montcada.

The Roman Temple. Though the temple dates from the early 2nd century, it remained hidden for hundreds of years inside the fortified castle built by the Montcada family at the end of the 11th-century. Its walls were part of the inner courtyard of the castle, which was later used as the chief magistrate's residence, the royal courts, the municipal granary, and finally a prison. The temple was re-discovered when the old building was demolished. Parts of the northern and western sides of the castle still stand, but the most emblematic feature is the set of Roman columns.



Museu Episcopal. *Judgement of the Individual Soul* by the "Soriguerola Master"



Historic buildings of Vic [ON FOOT]

Itinerary: cathedral of Sant Pere – Museu Episcopal – Queralt bridge, old Roman road – castle of the Montcada family and Roman temple – church of La Pietat – convent of Santa Teresa.

Level of difficulty: city tour.

Access: Pl. Catedral.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Vic Cathedral

Pl. Catedral, s/n - 08500 Vic
Tel. (+34) 938 864 449

Vic Episcopal Museum

Pl. Bisbe Oliba, 3 - 08500 Vic
Tel. (+34) 938 869 360
www.museuepiscopalvic.com

Leather Museum

C. Arquebisbe Alemany, 5 - 08500 Vic
Tel. (+34) 938 833 279
Decorative arts and applied arts in leather.

Claretian Museum

C. St. Antoni M. Claret, 8 - 08500 Vic
Tel. (+34) 938 850 242
Museum devoted to the life of Saint Anthony Mary Claret.

Balmes Museum

Pl. Don Miquel de Clariana, 3 - 08500 Vic
Tel. (+34) 938 892 444
Permanen exhibition on the philosopher Jaume Balmes, originally from Vic.

www.victurisme.cat

House and Museum of the Poet Jacint Verdaguer

C. Major, 7 - 08519 Folgueroles
Tel. (+34) 938 122 157
www.verdaguer.cat

Vic and Osona Tourist Information Offices

(see page 97)

Winding down: Caldes de Montbui and La Garriga

The spas of Central Catalonia offer an extensive range of services and treatments to cater for every need: improved health, rest, or sheer relaxation. The light, spacious hydro buildings are located in delightful settings and their sole purpose is to enhance their guests' well-being by means of health-giving, revitalizing techniques. More and more of them serve top-quality food. In short, they have everything it takes to bring us into harmony with our surroundings and help us put our time to better use.

The Summer Holiday Habit. The Greeks and Romans already appreciated the remedial properties of soothing thermal waters and knew that they only rose in certain places. Though some of the springs had been known for many centuries, it was not until the end of the 19th-century that Catalan spas really became popular. Then wealthy families started spending the summer in the small towns where these restorative waters were to be found. This was how the summer holiday habit grew. Caldes de Montbui and La Garriga are two cases in point. Prior to this they were mainly farming towns. Then mansions on a scale never seen before, incorporating the latest in Art Nouveau

architecture, began to be built there. Nowadays many people can afford to frequent spas and benefit from their salubrious, relaxing waters. Central Catalonia offers a wide selection of modern hydros, which have retained all the charm of yesterday.

Caldes de Montbui. In the second half of the 19th-century, Caldes was Catalonia's leading spa town in terms of the number and quality of its bathing establishments, which vied with the most distinguished European resorts. They offered courses of treatment, but also rest and recreation. A square in the centre of the old town – Plaça de la Font del Lleó – is named after the spring that rises from the subsoil at over seventy degrees centigrade. Right opposite is the town's most important legacy from the past: the baths, with their distinctive monumental arches, where the Romans used to take the waters.

Thermalia. This centre devoted to spa culture is also located on Plaça de la Font del Lleó. Thermalia serves as a museum – for the conservation and dissemination of the heritage of Caldes de Montbui –, an information centre, and a local

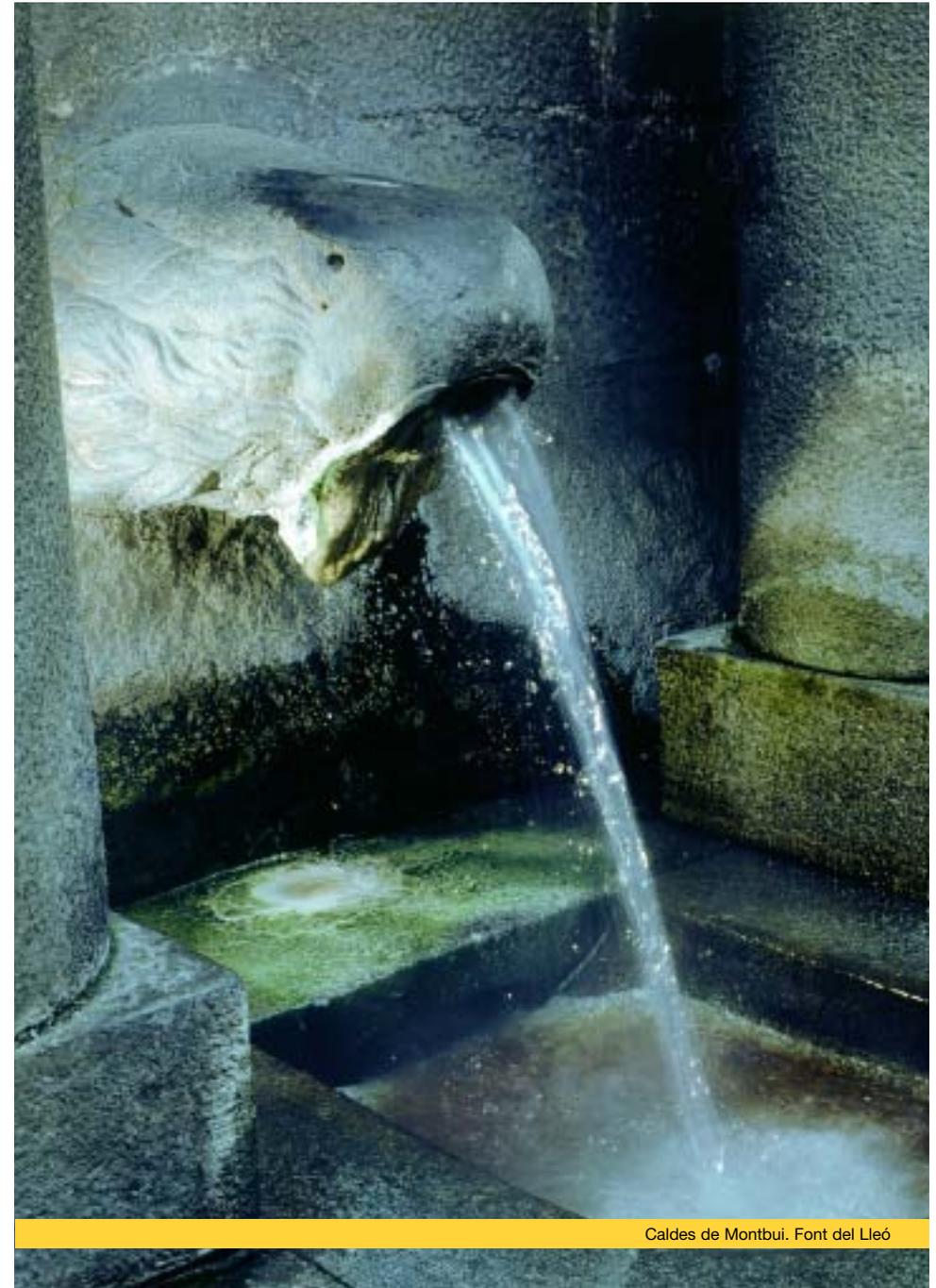


tourism development centre, all on the same premises. Of special interest are the rooms containing works by the great sculptor Manolo Hugué (1872-1945), who spent his last years in Caldes, and his close friend Picasso. A multimedia documentary entitled *Els Déus i l'aigua* (The Gods and Water) is also shown. A festival of fire and water called Escaldàrium is held in July. It is an allegory of the origins of Caldes and its waters and offers a good opportunity to get to know the town. Caldes has three spas which are open to the public. All have efficient, modern equipment but have preserved intact the details of their characteristic Art Nouveau decors.

La Garriga. The first known thermal establishment in La Garriga, which lies at the very foot of Montseny, was the Hospital de Banys, built in the

14th-century. A bath house, the Balneari Blancafort, opened its doors in 1840. It was rebuilt in 1876 and became the rendezvous of the intellectual elite of the period: Jacint Verdaguer, Santiago Rusiñol, Francesc Cambó, Josep Carner, Josep Maria de Sagarra, and others. The writer Eugeni d'Ors found inspiration in its gardens for his *Oceanografia del tedi* (1916). Manuel Blancafort, the son of the proprietors, was an eminent composer and a close friend of Frederic Mompou, who also came to stay there. In the 1920s and 30s, the Balneari Blancafort became the headquarters of a highly advanced school of Catalan musicians. In 1874 a second spa had been built. Both have their entrances on Carrer dels Banys, have been recently renovated, and continue to offer their services to the present day. It is well worth visiting them and following the cir-

La Garriga. Balneari Blancafort



Caldes de Montbui. Font del Lleó



Caldes de Montbui. Roman baths



Caldes de Montbui. Thermalia.
La Llovera by Manolo Hugué

cuit which takes us from the *templarium*, with its hot stone seats, to the sauna in the *caldarium*, the *frigidarium*, with its very cold water and river pebbles, and finally the *vaporarium*, which offers a vivifying steam bath.

A Showcase of Modernist architecture.

Mansions in Art Nouveau style are dotted all over La Garriga, notably on Carrer dels Banyes, El Passeig – a promenade lined with plane trees a hundred years old –, and around Plaça de les Oliveres. Strolling through the streets is like inspecting a great showcase full of Modernist-style houses and summer mansions, with fascinating shapes and ornamentation. They bear the imprint of front-ranking Modernist architects, such as Puig

i Cadafalch, Planes i Calvet, Sala i Cortès and Pla i Masgrau. But it was Manuel Joaquim Raspall who designed one of the most interesting sets of Modernist buildings to be found anywhere: four summer holiday mansions – La Bombonera (1911), Can Barbey (1910), Torre Iris (1911) and Can Barraquer (1912) – which occupy a single block known as the Illa Raspall. These houses and their ornamentation are a splendid and exhaustive treatise on early 20th-century Catalan Modernist architecture, including some of that movement's most characteristic techniques: *trencadís* (decorative fragments of pottery), combinations of stone and brickwork, wrought iron grilles, and so on. This whole architectural and artistic compendium is a perfect evocation of the atmosphere surrounding the nascent cult of thermal waters in Catalonia.



From Caldes de Montbui to Sant Miquel del Fai [BY CAR]

Itinerary: the route runs between the Bertí and Gallifa escarpments via Caldes de Montbui, continues along the C-59 road to the traditional summer holiday resort of Sant Feliu de Codines – Can Bosc de Rufets, Modernist-style building – and then follows the BV-1485 to Sant Miquel del Fai, a magnificent beauty spot with historic buildings.

Level of difficulty: a detailed road map is needed. 15 km.

Access: from Caldes de Montbui, on the C-1415b Granollers-Sentmenat road.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Thermalia, Museum and Tourist Information Office

Pl. Font del Lleó, 20
08140 Caldes de Montbui
Tel. (+34) 938 654 140
www.caldesdemontbui.cat

Delger Romantic Museum

C. Mn. Joaquim Delger, 12
08140 Caldes de Montbui
Tel. (+34) 938 654 140

La Garriga Town Hall

Pl. Església, 2
08530 La Garriga
Tel. (+34) 938 605 050
www.lagarriga.cat

Spas of Catalonia

Tel. (+34) 932 183 699
www.balneario.org

Sant Miquel del Fai Natural Area

Bigues i Riells
Tel. (+34) 938 658 008
www.santmiqueldefai.cat

Terrassa, the *Egara* of the Romans

Terrassa, like its neighbour, Sabadell, is one of Central Catalonia's largest cities and a driving force of Catalan industry. Its long manufacturing tradition was born in small family workshops and perpetuated by the great textile companies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Terrassa, or *Egara* as the Romans called it, has some interesting historic buildings as well. The hinterland plateau on which it lies has as its backcloth the reddish silhouette of Sant Llorenç del Munt – a favourite destination for rambling and climbing enthusiasts.

Egara. The ancient Iberians built the settlement of *Egara* around 300 BC. The name survived the Roman colonization and the town was given the status of *municipium* by the Emperor Vespasian. By the 5th-century a bishopric had been founded and it was around this core that Terrassa's most noteworthy group of historic buildings arose. Its main components are three Romanesque-Visigothic churches, which were declared a historic and artistic monument in 1931 and are known under the name of Conjunt Monumental de les Esglésies de Sant Pere. They stand on high ground, at the confluence of two streams, above Vallparadís park. The precinct can be reached by crossing the 17th-century bridge from

Plaça del Rector Homs. Within the precinct, the ancient walls of the churches create an atmosphere of quiet contemplation, far removed from the bustle of the city. Recent excavation work has led certain widely held archeological theories to be called into question and major restoration work is currently underway.

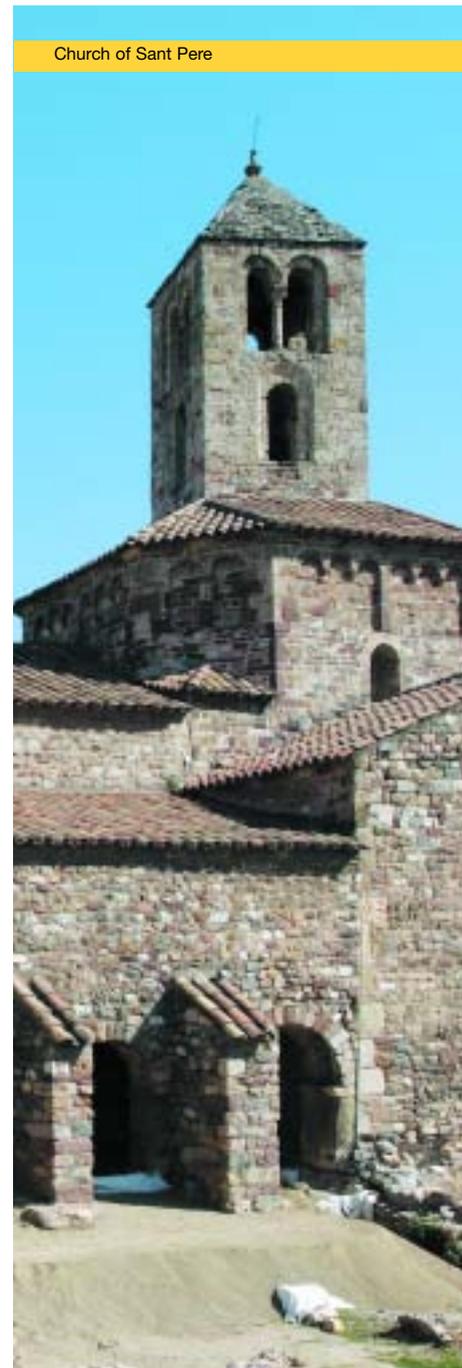
The Church of Santa Maria. This church, once Terrassa's cathedral, has an elegant façade and a small Romanesque belfry rising above a lantern. Inside it are some of the most ancient vestiges in the entire precinct, including the remains of the mosaic floor of the original 5th-century basilica and those of an early baptistery dating from the same period, immediately below the crossing. The present church, which has a ground plan shaped like a Latin cross, is Romanesque and dates from the 11th and 12th centuries. It has a very narrow, horseshoe-shaped 6th-century apse and a lantern over the crossing surmounted by a small bell tower. It serves as a museum for the entire precinct and contains certain noteworthy items, such as the wall paintings in the main apse and the 12th-century Romanesque paintings in another smaller apse.



Church of Santa Maria



Santa Maria. Altarpiece of Saint Abdon and Saint Sennen by Jaume Huguet (detail)



Church of Sant Pere

The Church of Sant Pere. The current parish church is a 12th-century Romanesque building which was erected on the foundations of a 6th-century building from which only the trefoil chevet and the high transept, with a chapel on either side, remain. There is also a pre-Romanesque polychrome mural reredos, which closes off the central recess of the apse. The other item of outstanding interest is the delicately painted Gothic altarpiece of *Sant Abdó i Sant Senén* by the distinguished artist Jaume Huguet.

The Church of Sant Miquel. This church stands between the other two and is the only one to have preserved the original 6th-century construction: a square central ground plan, with a Greek cross set inside it, and a cupola resting on an interesting set of eight columns, the shafts and capitals of which were taken from earlier buildings. The small apse is horseshoe-shaped on the inside and polygonal on the outside. The church was restored in the 20th-century by the architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch and was mistakenly thought to have been a baptistery. Recent archeological research has revealed that it was in fact a funerary church and graves have been found in the passageway round the present-day construction, which was the core of a larger structure. During the latest restoration, the elements added by Puig i Cadafalch were removed. Some original 6th-century paintings adorn the apse. Beneath is a small three-lobed crypt dedicated to Saint Celoni. The remains of the original tomb over which the building was erected have been discovered in the crypt.

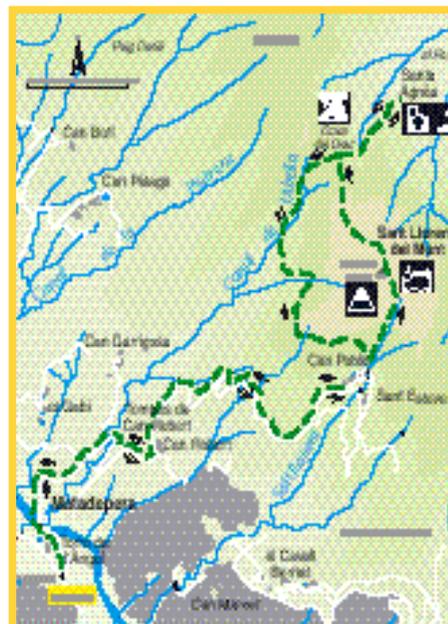
Vallparadís. Near the three churches rises the castle and charterhouse of Vallparadís (13th-14th centuries), a group of elegant fortified buildings, including walls, towers and a moat, which now houses the Museu de Terrassa. All that remained of the old 12th-century castle was converted into a charterhouse two hundred years later. The most interesting features are the former chapel of the charterhouse, which was founded in 1344, the cloister, the keeps, and parts of the old walls.

The Old City Centre. On a square near the city hall stands a round tower, Torre de Palau, which is the sole surviving remnant of Terrassa castle, demolished at the end of the 19th-century. The late Gothic-style basilica of El Sant Esperit (16th-17th-century), on Carrer Font Vella, contains a remarkable set of Renaissance sculptures known as El Crist Jacent (1544). Carrer Cremat, one of old Terrassa's typical narrow streets, which runs north from Plaça Vella, is now a pedestrian precinct and a popular shopping haunt. It comes out right in front of the city hall (Ajuntament), a neo-Gothic building designed by Lluís Muncunill. At the end of Raval de Montserrat stands the Mercat de la Independència, a market built in 1906 with some handsome ornamental wrought iron. From here one can turn up Rambla d'Ègara to one of Terrassa's truly unique buildings: the former factory of Aymerich Amat i Jover (1909). Also designed by Lluís Muncunill, it is a huge Modernist-style industrial building which now houses the **Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya (mNACTEC)**. Not far west of it is Muncunill's most emblematic building: **Masia Freixa** (1907), a handsome, daring construction in a style that has been classified as Expressionist Modernism. In it he used Gaudí-style elliptical arches to achieve an apparently impossible equilibrium and, at the same time, endow the building with its unique aesthetic.

Terrassa in the 19th-century. Industrialization brought sweeping changes to Terrassa. As factories multiplied and the population grew, large mansions and other imposing buildings, such as Can Mollor, Casa Mata, Can Cadafalc and the Reial Col·legi Terrassenc, sprang up. Many were in Modernist style (Magatzem Farnés for instance – 1907), but other styles are also present: Noucentist (Teatre Principal – 1911), Historicist (Institut Industrial – 1894), and neo-Gothic (Ajuntament and Escola Industrial). This mixture of styles can be observed by simply meandering through the city, or by taking one of the guided tours organized by the borough council.



Castle and charterhouse of Vallparadís



The monks' path (Camí dels Monjos) up to La Mola
[ON FOOT]

Itinerary: the signposted circuit starts at Can Pobla and runs along the ridge to the monastery of Sant Llorenç del Munt, on the summit; it continues along the path to El Montcau, descends to the chapel of Santa Agnès and returns to Can Pobla along the Abella gully.

Level of difficulty: easy, elevation difference 270 m.
5 km, 1h 50 min.

Access: from Matadepera via the BV-1221 Terrassa-Talamanca road; track to Can Robert and Can Pobla 7.2 km along this road, to the right.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Churches of Sant Pere Monument Site
Pl. Rector Homs, s/n - 08222 Terrassa
Tel. (+34) 937 833 702

Terrassa Museum
C. Gavatxons, 9 - 08221 Terrassa
Tel. (+34) 937 892 755 / 937 397 072
www.terrassa.cat/turisme

Sant Llorenç del Munt i l'Obac Nature Reserve
Matadepera
Tel. (+34) 938 318 350
www.diba.cat/parcsn
www.lamola.com

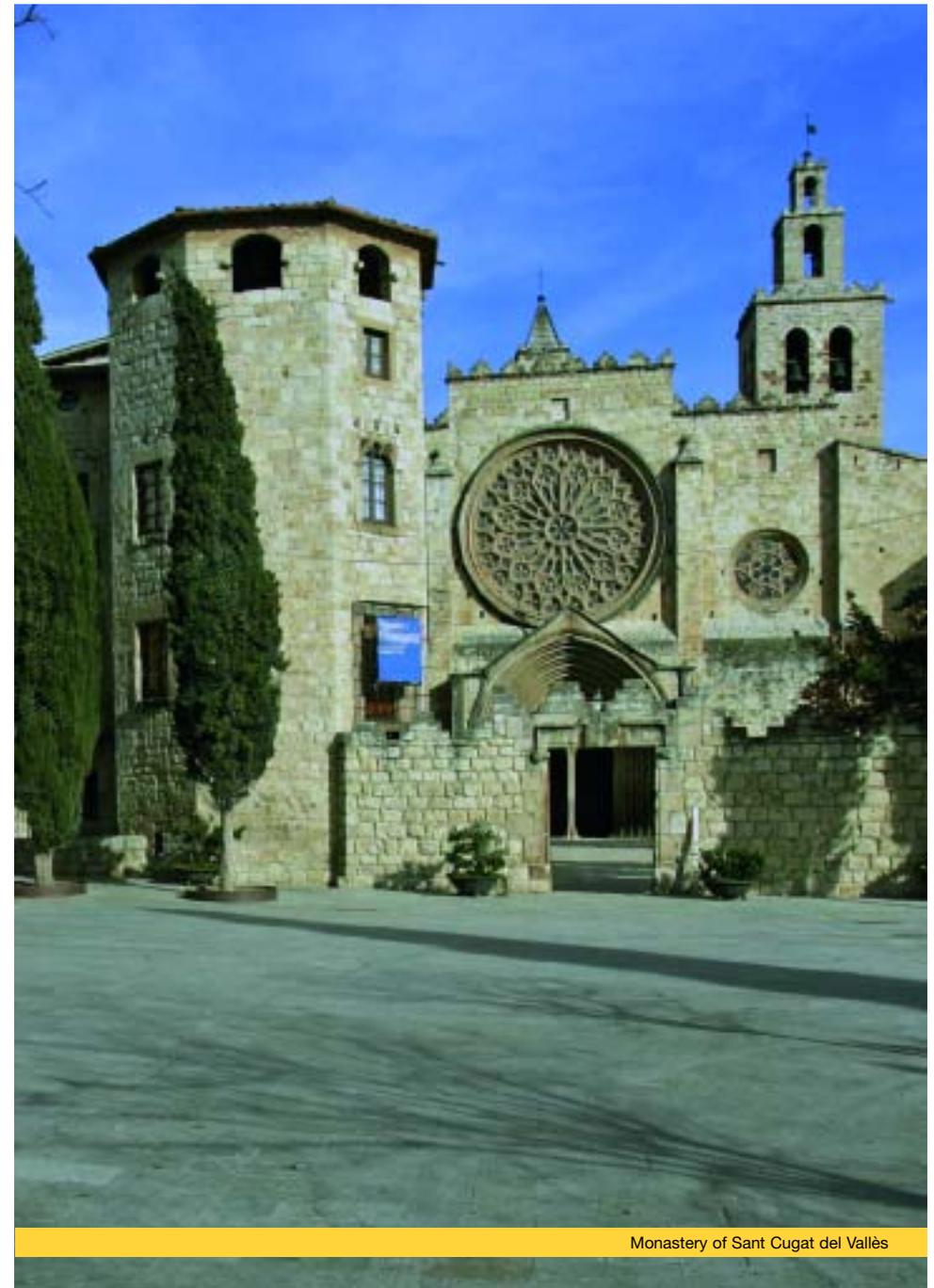
Terrassa Tourist Information Office
Guided routes
Raval Montserrat, 14 - 08221 Terrassa
Tel. (+34) 937 397 019
www.visitaterrassa.cat

Great Medieval Monasteries

In the turbulent early history of Central Catalonia, the monasteries played a vital part in creating territorial structures and stable settlements. Their architecture is solemn and majestic and usually follows the dictates of the rule of Saint Benedict: a large church in the centre and other buildings, containing dormitories, a refectory and a chapter house, arranged round a courtyard or cloister, where the atmosphere of prayer and meditation is still perceptible today. The monastery buildings that have survived to our own times are works of art in their own right and contain items of matchless artistic value that tell us much about the past.

Sant Cugat del Vallès. There are references in very ancient documents to a monastery dedicated to Saint Cugat which was destroyed by the Saracens. Later it became the most influential Benedictine monastery in the entire earldom of Barcelona. Sant Cugat played a key role in reconquering the area and extended its influence throughout the country by founding churches and acquiring land, revenues and other property. The present church, which has three aisles, was built in Romanesque style in the 12-13th centuries and completed in Gothic style. It has a remarkable

eight-sided cupola, on top of which stands one of the symbols of Sant Cugat del Vallès: an iron cock, like the one that crowed in 1350 to warn the people that the abbot had been murdered in the monastery. The very elegant belfry is also in Romanesque style (11th-century), while on the façade is a large Gothic rose window, eight meters in diameter. The cloister, built towards the close of the 12th-century, is one of the most attractive in Catalonia. It is almost square and contains a hundred and forty-four exceptionally fine and delicately carved capitals. Unusually, the name of the sculptor is known: he was Arnau Cadell and one of the stone capitals even includes a self-portrait. The monastic complex is completed by a chapter house, later converted into the chapel of El Santíssim, and other buildings including the former residence of the abbots, built in the Gothic era but remodelled in the 18th-century. Inside the church are some handsome Gothic and Renaissance altarpieces. The reredos of *Tots Sants*, by Pere Serra (1375), is particularly splendid. One of the monastery buildings houses the Museu de Sant Cugat, which is dedicated to research and to the conservation and dissemination of the historical, artistic and cultural heritage of Sant Cugat.



Monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès

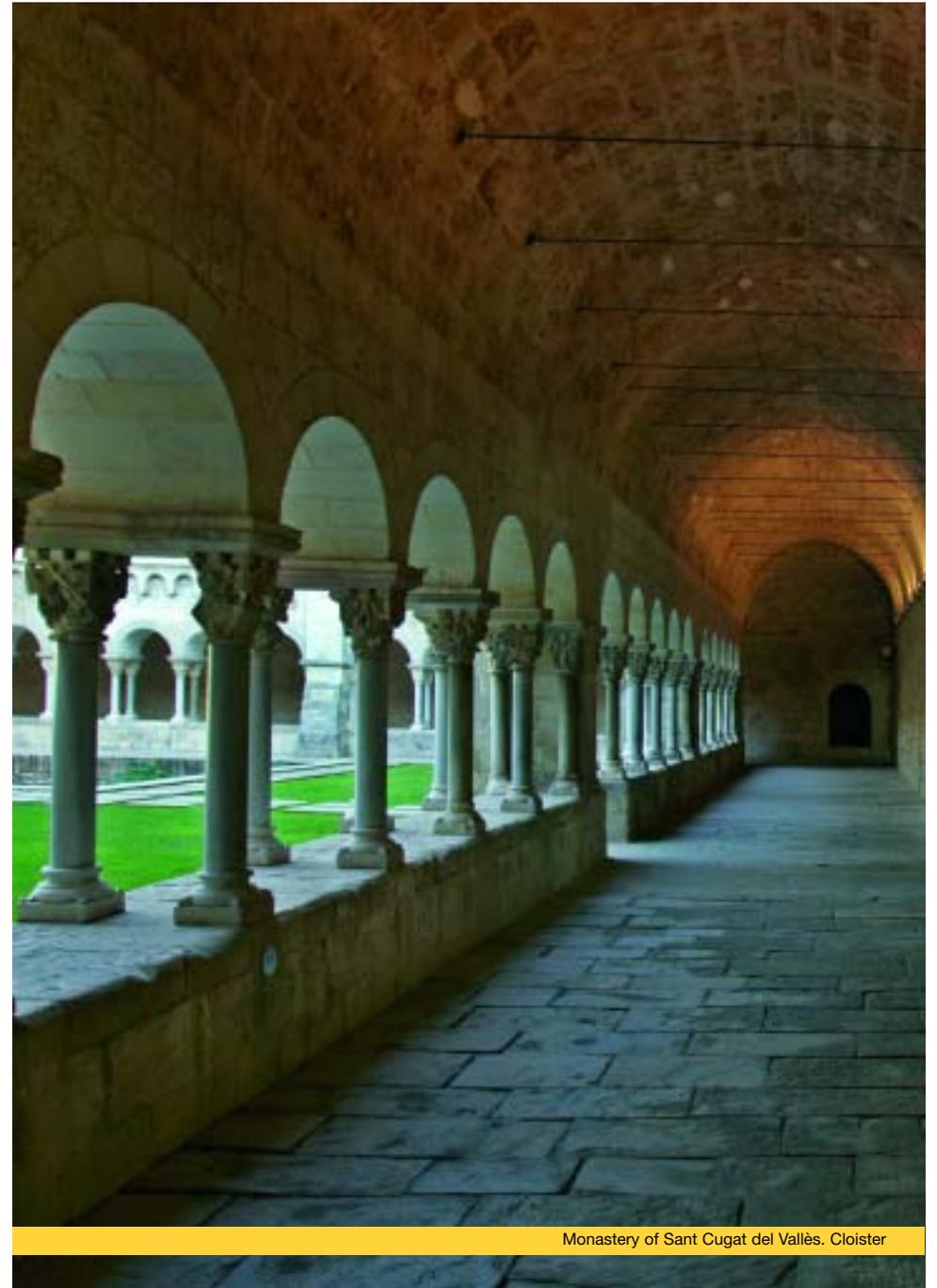


Monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès.
Retablos of *Tots Sants* by Pere Serra

Monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès.
Capital by Arnau Cadell



HELESTORNALLI
SEMPERSEKNA GELLE
OVIENSINATALE
CHRISTIPPEWALE



Monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès. Cloister



Monastery of Santa Maria de l'Estany. Church

Santa Maria de l'Estany. This former monastery of Augustinian canons, founded in 1080, is the most important Romanesque building in the Moianès region. The 12th-century church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, has a single nave, a crossing, three apses, and an elegant lantern supporting a belfry. The church and the 12-13th-century square cloister were declared a historic and artistic monument in 1931. The daylight filters between

the columns in the cloister, the tops of which are adorned by a total of seventy-two extraordinary capitals. They were clearly the joint work of several sculptors' workshops and portray certain unusual scenes, some based on episodes from scripture, others pagan: Mary breast-feeding her child, the slaughter of the innocents – depicted in surprising detail –, animals playing musical instruments, a falconer urging his dogs on with a stick, a hunter



↑ Monastery of Santa Maria de l'Estany. Courtyard

Monastery of Santa Maria de l'Estany. Cloister ↓





Monastery of Sant Vicenç de Cardona

killing a boar, a muleteer, two mermaids playing oliphants, and a girl combing her hair as she waits for her lover. The old monastic buildings round the cloister now house the presbytery, the public library, and a local museum containing liturgical objects from the monastery, ethnological exhibits from L'Estany village, part of the monastery and parish archives, and items of popular art.

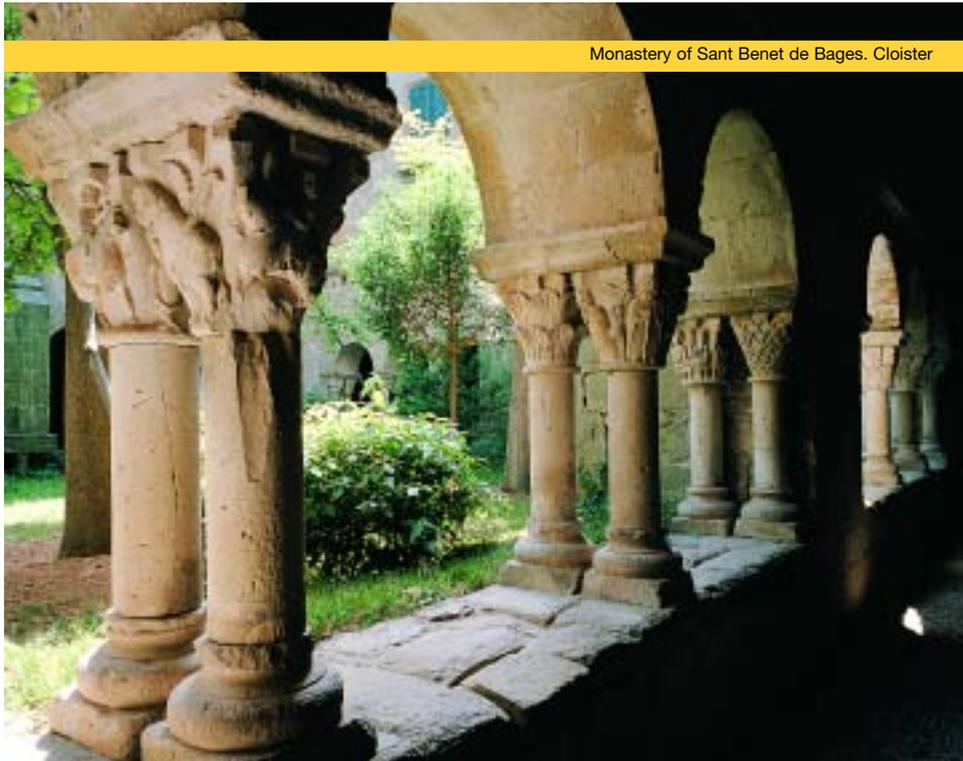
Sant Vicenç de Cardona. As visitors approach Cardona, their gaze is inevitably drawn upwards by the cluster of historic buildings encircled by walls which stand on the hilltop. It is worth climbing the hill to visit the impressive collegiate church of Sant Vicenç, one of Catalonia's most important Romanesque buildings. The surviving stretches of the castle walls give the entire group of buildings the appearance of a fortress. The cas-

tle was once the seat of the Cardona family, the greatest medieval Catalan dynasty after the royal family. It was also one of the last places to surrender to the troops of the Bourbon king Philip V in 1714. The original castle was built by Count Wilfred 'the Hairy' in 886. More rooms in Romanesque and Gothic style were added later. The collegiate church of Sant Vicenç (11th-century) is a fine example of early Romanesque style and is amazingly well preserved. The inside is majestic: the nave is tall and wide with broad canon vaulting, whereas the two narrower side aisles have groined vaulting and are reinforced by pillars which endow the interior with a special elegance. Daylight enters through the windows, which are of interesting design. The finishing touch is provided by the lofty, well-lit cupola over the crossing. Below the high altar is an interesting 11th-century



Monastery of Sant Vicenç de Cardona. Church

crypt with three aisles, columns and groined vaulting. It is known as the chapel of the relics because for a time it contained the remains of Saint Sebastian, Saint Ursula and Saint Agnes, which now lie in Solsona Cathedral. Outside the church is a 15th-century Gothic cloister. The former dukes' palace has been converted into the Parador de Turisme de Cardona. Other features in the immediate vicinity of the church are an 11th-century tower known as Torre de la Minyona and the castle, in which elements from the dukes' palace have been preserved. Walls and fortifications criss-cross the entire hill, showing that it was used for military purposes until well into the 19th-century. A good way to round off a visit to Cardona is by exploring the old quarter and ambling through its medieval streets.



Monastery of Sant Benet de Bages. Cloister

Sant Benet de Bages. The former Benedictine abbey in Sant Fruitós de Bages, a jewel of Catalan Romanesque architecture, was the first monastery on the Iberian Peninsula to be dedicated to the father of Western monasticism. Founded by a noble couple from Osona, Sal·la and Ricarda, in the 10th century, this was an independent abbey until 1593, when it came under Montserrat. The surviving buildings are in various styles and from different periods (11th-20th centuries), though the Romanesque is clearly predominant. Two portals connect the church to the cloister (12th-13th century), which is, without doubt, the most interesting element in the monumental site, formed by four galleries, each with six arches, the capitals decorated in a huge variety of themes. The monks were forced to leave the monastery by the so-called Law of Disentailment in 1835, and the family of the

painter Ramon Casas acquired the site in 1907, after which the architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch directed restoration work. Catalogued as a national monument in 1931, the site now houses the Món Sant Benet cultural and tourist complex.



L'Estany-Sant Miquel del Fai
[BY MOUNTAIN BIKE]

Itinerary: information point in the sports area – road to Sta. Maria d'Oló as far as the GR-177 – Collsuspina - Coll de les Heures – Sta. Coloma Sasserra – Castellcir – Cerverisses stream – St. Quirze Safaja - La Rovireta – Can Sants – Sant Miquel del Fai.

Level of difficulty: difficult, elevation difference 490 m.
34.7 km, 3h 30min.

Access: from L'Estany, C-59 road.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Monastery of Sant Cugat del Vallès

Sant Cugat Museum
Jardins Monestir, s/n
08172 Sant Cugat del Vallès
Tel. (+34) 936 759 951
www.museu.santcugat.org

Monastery of Santa Maria de l'Estany

Pl. Monestir, 4 - 08148 L'Estany
Tel. (+34) 938 303 040
www.monestirestany.cat

Collegiate Church of Sant Vicenç de Cardona

Castell de Cardona - 08261 Cardona
Tel. (+34) 938 684 169
www.cardona.cat
www.mhcat.cat

Monastery of Sant Benet de Bages

(Món Sant Benet)
08272 Sant Fruitós de Bages
Tel. (+34) 902 875 353
www.montstbenet.cat
www.santfruitos.cat

Monastery of Sant Miquel del Fai
(see page 97)

Cardona, Moianès and Sant Cugat del Vallès Tourist Information Offices

(see page 97)

Adventures on Collsacabra

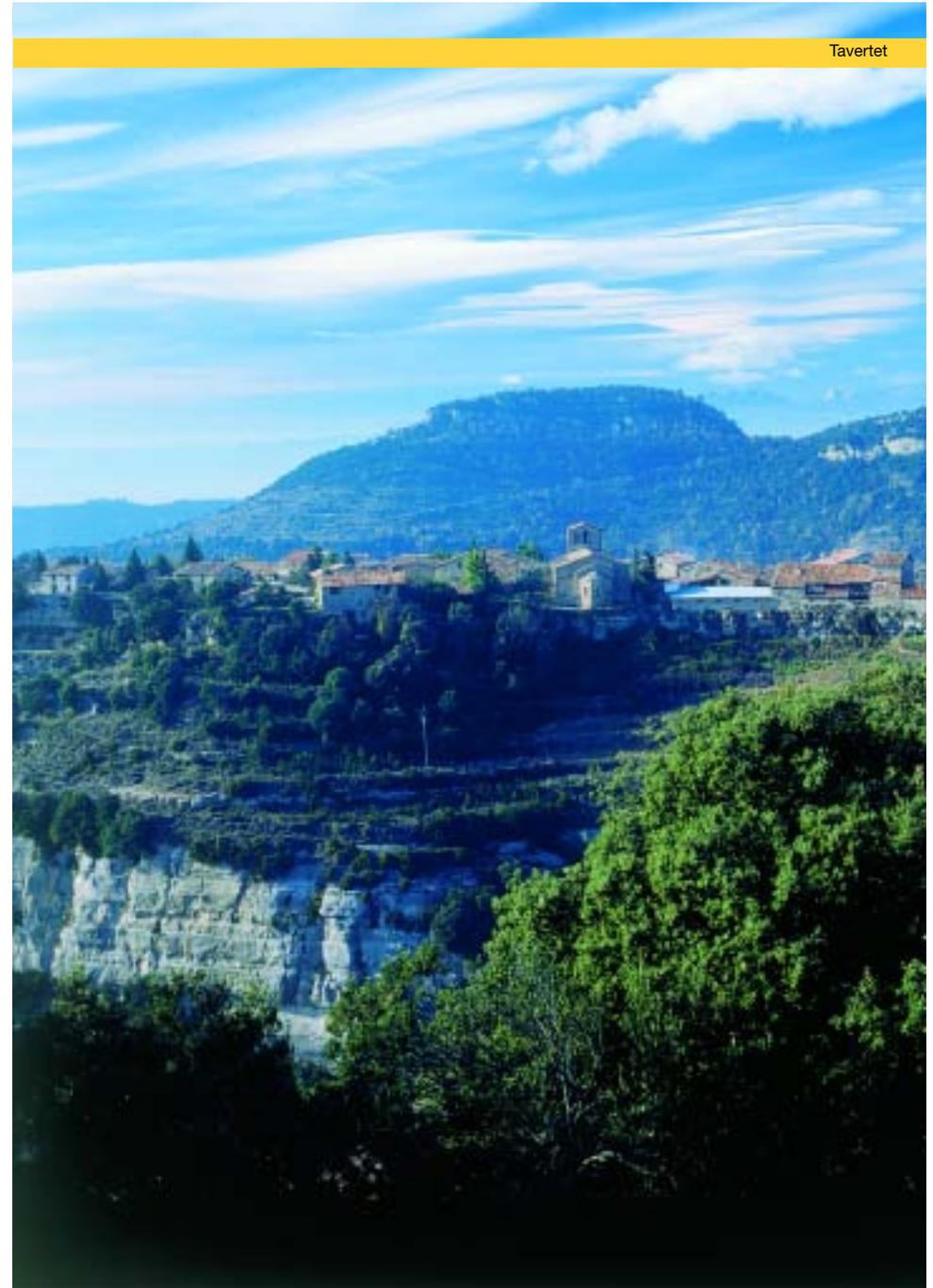
The lofty plateaus of Cabrera and Aiats are rimmed by the plunging escarpment of Collsacabra. This natural paradise, in the eastern part of the Vic plain, lies mostly within the *comarca* of Osona, though it occasionally overlaps into Garrotxa and Selva. The people live in upland villages, some of which – notably Tavertet and Rupit – possess great charm. The waters of the Sau reservoir stretch out like a blue ribbon below the formidable belt of cliffs which rise to two hundred metres in places. It is an environment where all members of the family will find almost unlimited opportunities for activity and adventure.

Ballooning. Getting a bird's-eye view is the most exiting way of discovering the rugged, magical landscape of Collsacabra. Several firms organize balloon trips. Passengers give a hand to get the balloon off the ground. Then, in no time at all, they are in the air and from the basket everything seems minute or vast: the fields, farmhouses, villages and roads look like perfect scale models, while the horizon stretches out to infinity. The balloon flies quite smoothly, as though it were not moving at all, just floating in the middle of nowhere. Most flights include a

filling snack and a diploma to prove participants have had their “baptism of the air”. The Aeroclub de Manlleu also offers flights over Osona in micro-light aircraft.

Horse-riding. Routes for all ages are available. They are organized by specialized instructors, so participants need not be expert riders, or even have ridden at all. On the way they strike up a very close relationship with their truly majestic mounts. Usually a short introduction is given at the beginning to familiarize them with the harness and teach them to mount. Then the group sets out at a pace suited to the riders' abilities – walking, trotting, or, if appropriate, cantering –, always in the company of experienced guides.

Mountain-biking. The Centre BTT Vall de Sau-Collsacabra has 254 km of waymarked trails and several support centres at the disposal of all mountain-bikers. This enables customized routes lasting one day or longer to be organized. There are about sixteen trails, classified by level of difficulty. Some firms rent bikes and organize expeditions lasting several days with accommodation in hotels or farmhouses.





Balloons

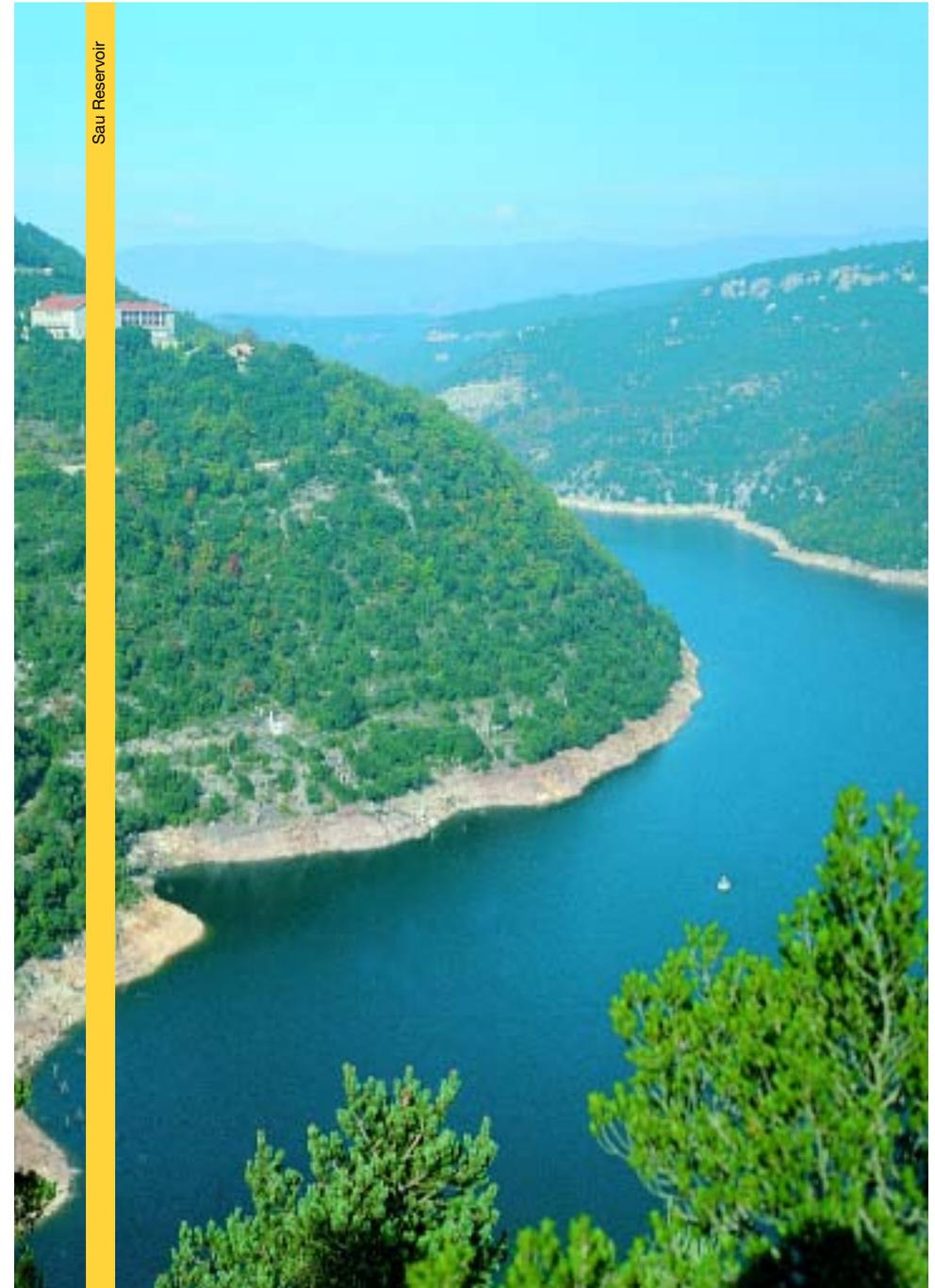
Walking. Collsacabra offers an impressive array of choices for walking and hiking enthusiasts. Numerous routes, easy or challenging, long or short, and suitable for all ages and levels of fitness, can be drawn up from the maps and other publications which are available about the area. The white and red flashes of the GR-2 long-distance footpath cross Collsacabra in a south-north direction, through magnificent, unspoilt scenery, past waterfalls, chapels, tiny villages and Romanesque bridges. Other shorter footpaths (PR) offer round trips to be done in a single morning, or a whole day's rambling through woodland and along the cliff tops.

Water Sports. The facilities of the Club Nàutic Vic-Sau, founded in 1963, include a clubhouse, a swimming pool and 98 boatsheds, all on the Sau reservoir. From June to September the club runs courses and championships for sailing buffs and those who enjoy skimming over the surface of the water in the exciting sport of water-skiing. The are

also canoe trips to explore the remotest corners of the reservoir, below the reddish cliffs which foreigners have nicknamed "Catalonia's Colorado Canyon".

The Collsacabra Triathlon. Certain specialized organizations and firms hold triathlons of several days' duration in the area around the Sau reservoir, Collsacabra and the Cabrera plateaus. They include canoeing, cycling and hiking and are intended for adults with basic physical training and young people over twelve. **Adventure races** are also held. These feature 4x4s, tyrolean traverse, monkey-bridge crossings, archery and other competitions. They take place amid magnificent scenery and wind up with a wholesome country meal in a farmhouse.

Caving. The darkest mysteries of the subterranean world can be discovered in the Els Ratpenats cave near Rupit. This limestone cave, one of the most beautiful and interesting in the area, is home



Sau Reservoir

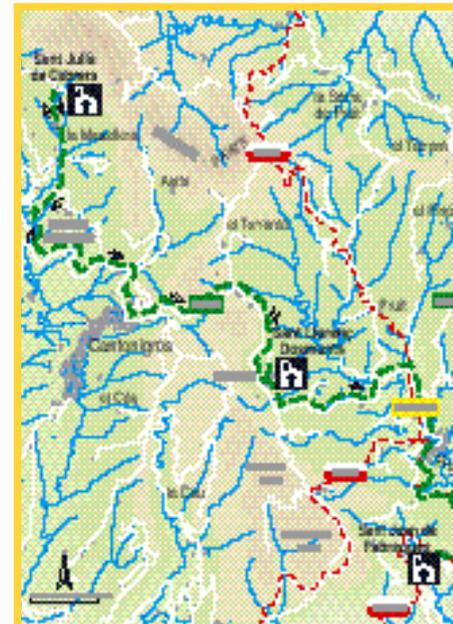


Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres

to a large colony of bats. The route finishes at a large underground lake with a sandy beach. The bravest participants, in neoprene wetsuits, dive into the lake and complete the trip along an underground river.

Touring by car. Many places in Collsacabra can be visited by car, notably small villages which have kept intact their upland atmosphere. The steep streets, old houses and quaint ambience of Rupit, for instance, or Tavertet, with its old stone manor houses, are within any visitor's reach. At the shrine of Cabrera, perched on the edge of the encircling cliffs, travellers can get a good lunch, and at Cantonigròs they can enjoy the International Music Festival, one of the most famous in Catalonia.

The Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres. Standing on a peninsula that juts out over the Sau reservoir, Sant Pere de Casserres is one of the best-preserved groups of Catalan Romanesque monastic buildings. It was built in the mid-11th-century and restored between 1994 and 1998. Visitors can watch an audiovisual or take a guided tour to find out what life was like in a medieval monastery.



Romanesque route across Collsacabra
[BY CAR]

Itinerary: a tour of three beautiful Romanesque churches on the Collsacabra massif in Osona. Sant Julià de Cabrera, along a track 3 km long from Sta. Maria de Corcó. Sant Llorenç Dosmunts, along a small track which starts at the 29 km marker, beyond Cantonigròs. Sant Joan de Fàbregues, 2 km along the GR-2 from Rupit. .

Level of difficulty: easy, includes short stretches of forest tracks.
36 km, 3h

Access: C-153 road from Vic to Rupit.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Vall de Sau Collsacabra Consortium for Promoting Tourism

08569 Rupit i Pruit
Tel. (+34) 938 522 839
www.saucollsacabra.cat

Guilleries - Savassona Natural Area

08519 Vilanova de Sau
Tel. (+34) 938 847 888
www.diba.cat/parcsn

Landscapes of the Ter River in Osona Consortium

Enric Prat de la Riba, 17
08570 Torelló
Tel. (+34) 938 504 915
www.paisatgesdelter.com

Consorci Alba-Ter

Passeig del Ter, 2
08560 Manlleu
Tel. (+34) 938 507 152
www.albater.org

Ruta del Ter

www.rutadelter.cat

Sant Pere de Casserres Monastery

Apartat Correus, 56
08510 Les Masies de Roda
Tel. (+34) 937 447 118
www.santperedecasserres.cat

Manlleu Tourist Information Office

(see page 97)

From Handicrafts to Machines: Industrial Tourism

The ideas associated with the northern European industrial revolution were assimilated in Catalonia much earlier than in most other Mediterranean regions. This can be seen by exploring the architectural and cultural legacy left by industry in every part of the country. Central Catalonia has a large and growing network of industrial museums. They enable us to understand how the transition from handicrafts to machines took place and offer live demonstrations of industrial processes which might seem lost or forgotten. In these unusual museums we can see surprising machines, factories in different architectural styles, mills that still work, ethnographic exhibits, and specially converted industrial plants which recreate before the visitors' eyes a life of great hardship but one which was to revolutionize society. This tour takes us to four specially representative sites in Central Catalonia.

Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya. The headquarters of this large network of twenty museums is in Terrassa, in one of Europe's most attractive and impressive factories: Vapor Aymerich, Amat i Jover, a great Modernist-style industrial building occupying an area of eleven thousand square metres which houses per-

manent exhibitions on industrial architecture, transportation, energy and other related topics. As we walk round the different rooms, we get an idea of the importance of industry in 19th and 20th-century Catalonia. One of the items on show is a Barrau loom, which was invented by a man from the Catalan city of Reus. It was used for weaving corduroy, a hard-wearing material that needed no ironing and was widely used by workers in an age when class consciousness and difficult working conditions were equally representative facets of factory life. The MNACTEC offers various dramatized tours and demonstrations and stages temporary exhibitions on specialized technology-related topics throughout the year.

Museu de la Pell d'Igualada i Comarcal de l'Anoia. The leather museum in Igualada occupies two old industrial buildings which are of great architectural interest in their own right: Cal Boyer and Cal Granotes. In the late 19th-century, Cal Boyer – a classical-style factory, restored in 1986 – housed a large cotton mill known as El Vapor Nou. It comprises two sheds, each with two storeys, and is now a museum devoted to leather and the steam engine, with a section on the topic of man and wa-





Terrassa. Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya



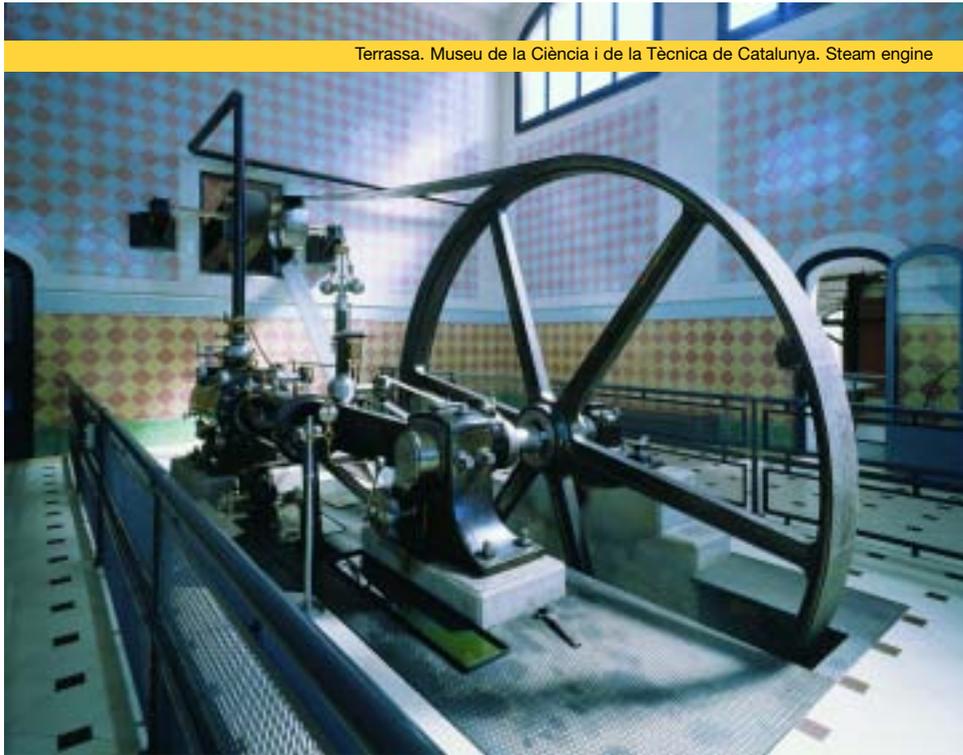
ter, an exhibition room, and an auditorium. The cast iron columns, the broad windows and the wooden framework of the roof are the most interesting aspects of the interior, while outside the most eye-catching features are the tall chimney and the waterwheel. Cal Granotes, an 18th-century tannery on the bank of the old Rec canal, still has its two characteristic floors: the downstairs section through which the water flowed, and the drying room upstairs. Here visitors are shown the vegetable tanning process used in Catalonia, which derived from a technique from Morocco. The museum complex, considered in the field as one of the best in Europe, is of outstanding interest.

Museu Molí Paperer de Capellades. Capellades became one of the country's foremost paper-manufacturing towns in the 18th and 19th centuries and its shaving paper was famous the world over. The Museu Molí Paperer de Capellades was set up in 1958 in an 18th-century paper mill. The permanent exhibition relates the history of paper from its origins up to present-day manufacturing techniques. The tools, products and materials used in olden times to make paper from rags sup-

plied by waste dealers are on show. Paper is still made by hand in the basement. When the guide starts up the press, the pounding is deafening and we immediately realize what a gruelling occupation paper making must have been in such damp, noisy, smelly conditions. The museum also hosts temporary exhibitions and organizes specialized courses and workshops.

The White Gold of Cardona. Salt has been the lifeblood of Cardona for centuries. When the Romans colonized the area, the endless supply of salt produced by the mountain was referred to as "white gold" and in the 10th-century Count Borrell granted the town a charter under which anyone settling there was entitled to mine the salt. Nowadays visitors to the Parc Cultural de la Muntanya de Sal in Cardona can find out about the geological formations and history of the salt valley, and see handicrafts made from salt and the machinery of one of the salt wells. They are driven to the salt mountain in special vehicles. There they don helmets and explore half a kilometre of galleries at a depth of over 80 metres inside the mountain, admiring the unusual shapes and images cre-

Terrassa. Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya. Steam engine

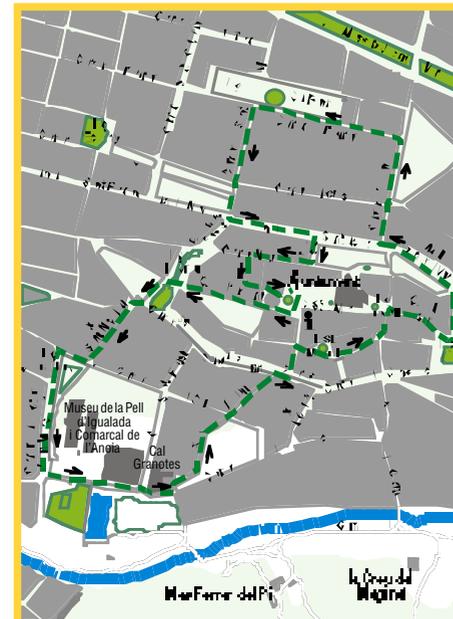


ated by the combination of moisture and salt. An audiovisual and an exhibition of photographs complete the guided tour of the salt mines.

Museu Industrial del Ter. This museum is located in an old cotton mill at the end of the Ter industrial canal. Its purpose is to investigate and explain the key role played by the river in the economic, social and urban transformation of the area and the numerous changes brought about by the arrival of capitalism in these regions of the Catalan hinterland. The permanent exhibition focuses on industrial society, the factory, the river and energy. The museum also contains an interesting array of cotton machines, turbines, and underground passages and canals which turned the shafts that drove the machinery. It offers guided tours of the canal, built between 1841 and 1848, which depart from the old mill wheel of the Molí de Dalt. The

nine turbines drove as many as seven factories and two mills, which turned Manlleu into the region's leading cotton manufacturing town.

The Path along the Ter. The **Camí Vora Ter** is a series of ancient paths and tracks that run along the river Ter, close to the water's edge, between the towns of Roda de Ter and Manlleu. Along the way are wells, locks, weirs and many other devices which, today as in years gone by, serve to regulate and harness the current. As we follow the meandering river, we come to water-powered factories and workers' villages, such as that of Can Llanas. Soon we find ourselves beside the Ter industrial canal, at the end of which stands the Museu Industrial del Ter. A visit to the museum makes an ideal finishing touch to this route, which can be done on foot or by bicycle.



The old quarter of Igualada [ON FOOT]

Itinerary: Pl. Ajuntament (Neoclassical building and porticoes), Pl. Mercader (Cal Sabater, Modernist-style tannery), Cal Boyer and Cal Granotes (museum). Then Pg. Cabres, Pl. St. Miquel and C. Sta. Maria (Neoclassical basilica), C. Roser and church of El Roser, Pl. Rei, C. St. Jordi and Rambla as far as Pl. Cal Font, Ptge. Rosés and Pl. Ajuntament.

Level of difficulty: city tour.

Access: from Pl. Ajuntament.

More information:
Palau Robert Routes
www.gencat.cat/probert

Science and Technology Museum of Catalonia (MNACTEC)

Rambra d'Ègara, 270 - 08221 Terrassa
Tel. (+34) 937 368 966 - www.mnactec.cat

Xarxa de Turisme Industrial de Catalunya (XATIC)

Masia Freixa - 08224 Terrassa
Tel. (+34) 937 397 421
www.xatic.cat

Igualada Leather Museum - Anoia Local Museum

Dr. Joan Mercader, s/n - 08700 Igualada
Tel. (+34) 938 046 752
www.igualadatourisme.cat

Manresa Technique Museum

Ctra. Santpedor, 55 - 08240 Manresa
Tel. (+34) 938 772 231

www.parcdelasequia.cat

Ter Industrial Museum

Can Sanglas - Pg. Ter, s/n - 08560 Manlleu
Tel. (+34) 938 515 176
www.mitmanlleu.org

Capellades Paper Mill Museum

Pau Casals, 10 - 08786 Capellades
Tel. (+34) 938 012 850
www.mmp-capellades.net

Sal Mountain Cultural Park

Ctra. Mina, s/n - 08261 Cardona
Tel. (+34) 938 692 475
www.salcardona.com

Landscapes of the Ter River in Osona Consortium

Alba-Ter Consortium
Ruta del Ter
(see page 71)

Igualada, Cardona, Manlleu, Manresa and Terrassa Tourist Information Offices and Tourist Reception Centre (CAT) in Sallent

(see pages 96 and 97)

Festivals in the Heart of Catalonia

Year in, year out, a vast array of festivals and gatherings take place one after the other: annual local festivals, markets, pilgrimages, all-night revelries, fairs, parades and countless other celebrations which are well worth experiencing on the spot. Many arose from ancient pagan rites, others from the Christian liturgy. Still others have been created in recent years and have already won tremendous popularity.

The First Months of the Year. Round about the feast of Saint Anthony (January), the traditional parade of Els Tres Tombs takes place in many localities in Central Catalonia, including Igualada and Terrassa. On the Sunday before carnival day, the people of Balsareny hold the Festa dels Traginers to pay tribute to an ancient profession: that of the muleteers who transported merchandise from one town to the next. The carts and harness used in the cavalcade are veritable museum pieces. In Torelló they hold a spectacular carnival which has one especially original feature: the Desfilada de Senyorettes, during which men in drag parade through the town. Many other titillating events are also part of the programme. In the second fortnight in February, Manresa is the setting for the

Festes de la Misteriosa Llum, a festival commemorating a miracle that took place in 1345: a lawsuit between the diocese and the town was brought to an end when a beam of light from Montserrat lit up the church of El Carme and the city bells pealed out of their own accord. The two-week-long celebrations include an entertaining fair (Fira de l'Aixada) and a parade of giants and dwarfs on the main feast day. Two confraternities, the Favets and the Tremendos, also take part. March is the month of the International Jazz Festival in Terrassa. The highly varied programme features both indoor and outdoor concerts by leading jazz musicians from home and abroad. For lovers of good music, this event is a must. Vic is the place to be during the ten days before Palm Sunday (March or April), because the famous Mercat del Ram is in full swing. It takes its name from the market of palm fronds and sprigs of laurel which is held on the Saturday before Palm Sunday on Plaça Major and Carrer Verdaguer. Besides buying palms of different shapes and sizes, visitors to Vic's most important festival enjoy a varied programme of cultural activities and entertainment. On Palm Sunday itself, a procession takes place: the Processó dels Armats. For the fe-





▲ Pine-tree Festival, Centelles

Escaldàrium Festival, Caldes de Montbui ▼



ast of Corpus Christi (June), the people of Sallent hold the festival of Les Enramades, during which the streets through which a procession is to pass are decked with box-tree branches, flowers and other trimmings. This tradition dates back to the 14th-century. In La Garriga too, the Corpus Christi celebrations are one of the most characteristic events on the calendar. Here multi-coloured flower carpets are laid in the streets. Then, towards evening, a procession takes place and a popular liturgical narrative about the martyrdom of Saint Stephen – *El Plant de Sant Esteve* – is enacted. A prehistoric market (Mercat de la Prehistòria) is held in mid-May in Moià. The event-packed programme gives visitors a chance to learn how our prehistoric ancestors did things like tanning, firing pottery, or cutting meat with flints. Exhibitions, markets, talks and tours of the famous prehistoric caves of El Toll are further attractions.

When Summer is “a-coming in”. The **SOLC Festival**, devoted to the music and traditions of the Lluçanès region, gets underway in May and goes on until well into summer. The programme includes a variety of attractions such as concerts of traditional music, folk dancing, talks, exhibitions, walks, demonstrations of ancient crafts, *correfocs* (parades with fireworks), and gatherings of “giants”. There is even a sausage championship, not to mention feasts, plays, handicraft workshops, and gatherings of amateur singers, all with a home-grown, traditional flavour. Round about the **feast of Saint John** (midsummer), rejoicings take place all over Central Catalonia to mark the summer solstice with bonfires, dancing and merry-making. A Festival of Traditional Music is held about the same time in Calaf. On the feast of Saint Peter (29 June), the people of Sant Cugat del Vallès perform the *Ball del vano i el ram*, an unusual dance dating back to the 18th-century, in an arrangement for *cobla* (a typical Catalan folk band). The festival of **Sant Miquel dels Sants** takes place in Vic during the week of 5 July. The parade that tours the streets (*cercavila*) features figures from the medieval Corpus Christi celebrations, among them the characteristic *macers* and *caps de llúpia*. In

Lluçà they stage a reaping and threshing festival – **Festes del Segar i del Batre** – which is a legacy from cereal farming traditions. The reaping festival, at the end of June, includes demonstrations of reaping by hand, sharpening tools, and using the scythe, sifter, binder and other implements which are now part of history. At the end of July the threshing festival completes the cycle. A threshing machine which was used many decades ago to separate the grain from the straw is started up and a slender strawstack is built by a professional stacker.

At the Height of Summer. During the summer months, many towns and villages stage their annual festival or **Festa Major**. The programmes include special events which may vary from one place to another. Anyone in Central Catalonia at this time is almost certain to come across a Festa Major. But certain large-scale events also take place. One is the **Festival de Música de Cantonigròs**. In the second week in July, choirs and folkdance groups from all over the world meet in the little town of Cantonigròs in Osona until the streets overflow with people, music and dancing. In July a festival of fire and water – **Escaldàrium** – is staged in Caldes de Montbui, the spa town *par excellence*. It is an allegory of the origins of Caldes and its waters. The local troupe of “devil dancers” make the elements of water and fire into the stars of the festival and encourage everybody to join in. Live music, composed specially for the occasion, is an added attraction. On the last Sunday in August, a famous traditional dance is performed in Castellterçol: the *Dansa de Castellterçol* and *Ball del Ciri*. It is an elegant, ceremonious dance which originated in the 17th-century. Six couples perform it on the square (Plaça de la Vila) and offer it to the entire population. On the second Sunday in September, a traditional bull chase (**correbou**) dating back many centuries takes place in Cardona. The participants tie the bull’s horns with ropes and some even provoke it from inside a large wicker basket.

Autumnal Celebrations. On 28 September each year, Sant Boi de Lluçanès is the scene of the **Fira**



▲ Muleteers' Festival, Balsareny

Festival of the Mysterious Light, Manresa ▼



Palm Sunday Market, Vic

de l'Hostal del Vilar, a festival to mark the end of the cycle of transhumance. It is the largest gathering of the entire year in the Lluçanès region and features a cattle market and other traditional festivities. At about the same time, a pork and beer festival (**Festa del Porc i la Cervesa**) is held in Manlleu. Participants can sample beer and products made from pork, and attend presentations of special dishes and similar events. One of Catalonia's most important sheepdog trials is held on the first Sunday in October in Castellterçol (**Concurs de Gossos d'Atura**). The shepherds come from Catalonia itself, the Basque Country, Aragon and France. Vic is the venue in September or October for the **Mercat de Música Viva**. The event draws numerous musicians who perform all kinds of music (traditional, ancient, classical, jazz, and modern) at shows all over the city. At the end of October a chestnut festival (**Fira de la**

Castanya) is organized in Viladrau to mark the festival of All Saints. The many attractions include a chestnut feast, a witches' dance, a musical dramatization of a traditional tale – *La Càfila del cavaller d'Espinzeila* – which is performed in the streets by the villagers themselves, and a fair of naturally grown produce. In the first weekend in November, a fair offering a range of traditional entertainment from all over the Mediterranean (**Fira d'Espectacles d'Arrel Tradicional**) is held in Manresa, filling the city streets with people, music, shows, dancing and theatrical performances. One of the foremost mountain film festivals (**Festival de Cinema de Muntanya**) is held in Torelló in November, while in Vallgorguina there is a woodland craft fair (**Fira d'Artesans del Bosc**) featuring demonstrations to do with carpentry, pottery and the fruits of the forest. A fir-tree fair (**Fira de l'Avet**) is staged in Espinelves in early December.



Floral Decorations in Sallent



Festival of Els Tres Tombs, Iguatalada



↑ Fir-tree Fair, Espinelves

International Jazz Festival, Terrassa ↓



Crowds flock to this little village in the Guillerries hills to stroll through the streets just looking at the stalls or choosing this year's Christmas tree. Around the beautiful Romanesque church, there are also stalls selling home-made produce.

As the Year Draws to a Close. An age-old pine-tree festival (**Festa del Pi**) takes place in Centelles on 30 December. The lead-up begins early the previous morning when a group of men armed with shotguns (*galejadors*) and other townspeople set out for the spot in the woods where the chosen pine tree stands. After a hearty snack, they fell the tree, load it upright on a cart pulled by two oxen and take it back to the town. On the stroke of noon, the shotguns are fired and the tree is welcomed by folkdancers, who perform the *Ball del pi* (pine dance). Then the pine is carried into the church on the men's shoulders, decorated with apples and wafer biscuits, and hung over the altar, head down, where it will remain until the Epiphany. In Catalonia, as in other countries with traditions reaching far back into the past, not a day goes by without a festival.

Popular Festivals and Patron Saints' Festivals

cultura.gencat.net/cpcptc/festes/Home.aspx

Fairs and Traditional Festivals

www.firesifestes.com

All the Festivals

www.festes.org

www.festacatalunya.cat

A Modern Cuisine with all the Old-fashioned Flavour

The cuisine of Central Catalonia is based on the produce of the farms and mountains. The result is an explosion of powerful flavours and aromas. A list of specialities such as sausages from Castellterçol, La Garriga or Sant Celoni, beans from Lliçà, pigs' trotters, dishes made from offal (*tripa a la catalana*, *sang i perdiu*, *cap i pota amb samfaina*), rice casserole (*arròs a la cassola*), and farmhouse soup (*escudella de pagès*) are recited like a mantra by the waiters in local restaurants. Stews flavoured with delicious truffles from the woods of Osona and Lluçanès; *almosta* (consisting basically of potatoes, onions, sausage, pork and salt cod); *tripa i pota* (a hearty snack of offal); *llonza llaminera* (cutlets roasted with mushrooms or beans, a speciality of Vallès); *sopa de perdiu amb tófonos amb crosta* (partridge and truffle soup); *cua de bou en civet* (oxtail civet); or the famous *bacallà a la manresana* (salt cod with prunes and pine nuts), which has become popular far beyond the boundaries of the region, are a few more examples of this cuisine based on the produce of market gardens and hillsides. All year round these dishes are enhanced by many varieties of mushrooms and by wines bearing the Pla de Bages designation of origin: reds made from Merlot and

Cabernet Sauvignon grapes and whites prepared with the native Picapoll grape, which yields an aromatic wine with just the right level of acidity.

The Alícia Foundation is an international technological research centre specialising in cooking and the dissemination of heritage related to agricultural food and gourmet cuisine in order to promote good eating habits. It is located in the old Benedictine monastery of Sant Benet de Bages, a magnificent multi-function complex that has been restored under the name Món Sant Benet.

The Cold Meat Platter. The queen of cured sausages is the famous *llonganissa* from Vic, which can be purchased in many shops in Osona. Its origins date back to olden times: fresh meat that could not be eaten immediately had to be stored, so it was preserved by salting. Nowadays *llonganissa* is made from the thigh, loin and bacon of adult pigs. But cured sausages vary in quality and the key to success is the method used to dry the meat. This takes time and must be done in natural drying rooms. Vic and the surrounding area are ideal: the fog that often shrouds the Vic plain allows the sausages to be cured at the right pace,



and this gives them the right aroma and the right mould on the outside. As a result, the meat is dense and compact. *Llonganissa* tastes excellent on its own, but it also goes perfectly with bread or *coca* (savoury pastry) and a good, mildly-flavoured wine that will not drown the aroma of the sausage. *Llonganissa* from Vic is a healthy, balanced food, easily digestible and highly nutritious. Some years ago the *Daily Express* called it the "Rolls Royce of sausages". But other varieties of cured sausage are made here as well. *Somalla*, for instance, is a partially dried sausage, made from light ingredients and suitable for all sorts of diets. The slices have a characteristic figure-of-eight shape. *Fuet* is the same, but rounder and longer. There are countless types of raw sausage (*botifarra*) as well, while blood sausage (*bull*) enjoys pride of place in many shop windows in Central Catalonia (in Mura, Talamanca, Manresa and Navarcles, for instan-

ce). Magnificent cured and raw sausages are also made in La Llacuna. The range of striking flavours and aromas is unlimited.

Bufet Potatoes. *Patates del bufet* are grown in the highlands, in the rich dark earth of the Pyrenean foothills. The seed potatoes, they say, came from Brittany and reached Catalonia through Alt Urgell, Ripollès and Osona, but no one can remember when or how. *Bufet* potatoes used to be a great favourite in Catalonia, but production dwindled until, in the 1970s, they almost vanished. Twenty years later a group of farmers retrieved them from oblivion. They set up a special market in Orís, where the official price is set, depending on the harvest and the quality. The market takes place on the first weekend in October and visitors can sample dishes prepared from these delicious potatoes. Nowadays they are enjoyed by the most



↑ Making Montserrat curd cheese

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demanding gourmets. Indeed one variety, the black *bufet* potato, is the last word in potatoes. Foreign imitations should be rejected. The genuine article can easily be bought in markets and farmhouses around Osona.

Ganxet Beans. The *mongeta del ganxet* is the star of beans. The name refers to its shape (*ganxet* means hook). *Ganxet* beans, like many traditional crops, were once a filling, poor-man's dish to ward off hunger: nowadays they are highly appreciated in the finest kitchens. *Ganxet* beans are whitish in colour, with a very thin skin, and they melt like butter. There are various methods for growing them and they can be small or large. Most growers are located in Vallès, which provides the best soil and the most suitable climate. *Ganxet* beans can be bought from farmhouses and markets throughout the region, from November onwards, which is when they are picked. A specialized gourmet festival is held in Caldes d'Estrac on three weekends in autumn: the *Jornades Gastronòmiques de la Mongeta del Ganxet*.

Castellfollit Beans. In the course of his *Travels in Catalonia* in the late 18th-century, Arthur Young noticed farmers in Bages sowing a particular type of bean: *mongetes de Castellfollit*. They are still grown today and have been the object of a recent promotion campaign. Castellfollit beans have a delicate, shiny skin, they do not disintegrate when cooked, they never become lumpy, they have a subtle aroma, and they leave a pleasant taste like sweet corn in the mouth. Combined with salt cod – *mongetes amb bacallà* or *bacallà amb mongetes* –, they constitute one of the most successful traditional dishes, not merely in Central Catalonia, but throughout much of the country. Castellfollit beans are also served with *botifarra de música* (a sausage stuffed with dried fruit and nuts). They ripen early – late July and early August – and grow at altitudes of around 700 metres. So when Castellfollit beans are ready for picking, *ganxet* beans have only just been sown in Vallès. Another traditional crop, Collsacabra beans, has been grown for centuries in the hills of Osona. They are also



found in neighbouring Garrotxa, where they are called *fesols de Santa Pau*. They can be tasted in certain restaurants in Cantonigròs and Rupit. The most traditional way of serving them is with *carn de perol* (meat from the freshly slaughtered pig).

Alta Anòia Chick Peas. These small, smooth chick peas (*cigronets de l'Alta Anòia*) have a firm, not at all floury texture and a robust but delicate flavour. They have been home-grown in Alta Anòia for generations and survived in local market gardens thanks to farmers who went on planting them for their own consumption. There are still families who grow them in the traditional way, and the result is a chick pea of very superior quality. The special fair held in September or October (*Fira del Cigronet de l'Alta Anòia*) is an opportunity to taste this delicious pulse. Another characteristic feature of this hinterland region is the Alta Anòia sheep, a native breed

raised only on family farms. Its meat can be stewed, casseroleed or grilled and one of its prime qualities is that it is always tender. The most typical dish of the Anòia region, however, is onion stuffed with meat, fish and other ingredients.

Produce of Montserrat. Several emblematic products made in the vicinity of the mountain also bear its name. The most characteristic is curd cheese: *mató de Montserrat*. It should be purchased direct from the producers, who set up their stalls outside the monastery, whatever the weather, and also sell cheese, honey, pastries (*coques*) and cakes (*pastissos*). *Mató* is made from cow's milk, it has a soft, smooth texture and a fresh, moist, rather sweet and creamy taste. It is sold wrapped in cotton. It is best enjoyed with a spoonful of honey and this combination (*mel i mató*) is often found on Catalan restaurant menus.

In Monistrol de Montserrat, at the very foot of the mountain, a pastry and curd cheese fair (Fira de la Coca i el Mató) is held every year at the end of October. Another great favourite is the Montserrat tomato, a native variety, grown primarily in market gardens around Marganell. It is quite unmistakable: green and pink in colour, highly scented, with firm flesh, but empty in the middle. It is perfect for salads and for stuffing.

And Finally, the Sweet Touch. Capellades is famous for its *coca de pinyons* (pine-nut pastries), Montseny for *pedres del Montseny*, made from chocolate, nuts and dried fruit. Soft, spongy *pa de pessic* can be found in many cake shops in Vic,

while those in Igualada sell the famous local *coca* (pastry). La Llacuna, Calaf, Caldes de Montbui and La Panadella are known for their *carquinyolis* (hard almond biscuits). Another almond biscuit (*ametllat*) is typical of Castellfollit de Riubregós, while aniseed biscuits (*borregos*) are the tradition in Cardedeu. Many more biscuits and cakes made from local recipes are available in the shops of Central Catalonia. The sweet side of Catalan cuisine is on show in their windows. The list would be endless, so visitors are advised to don their napkins and choose for themselves.

www.gastroteca.cat



Bufet potatoes



Ganxet beans



Useful Addresses

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Bages County Council

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www.ccbages.cat

Osona County Council

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Vallès Occidental County Council

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Vallès Oriental County Council

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www.catalunya.com

Sallent 08650

Tourist Reception Centre (CAT)
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