



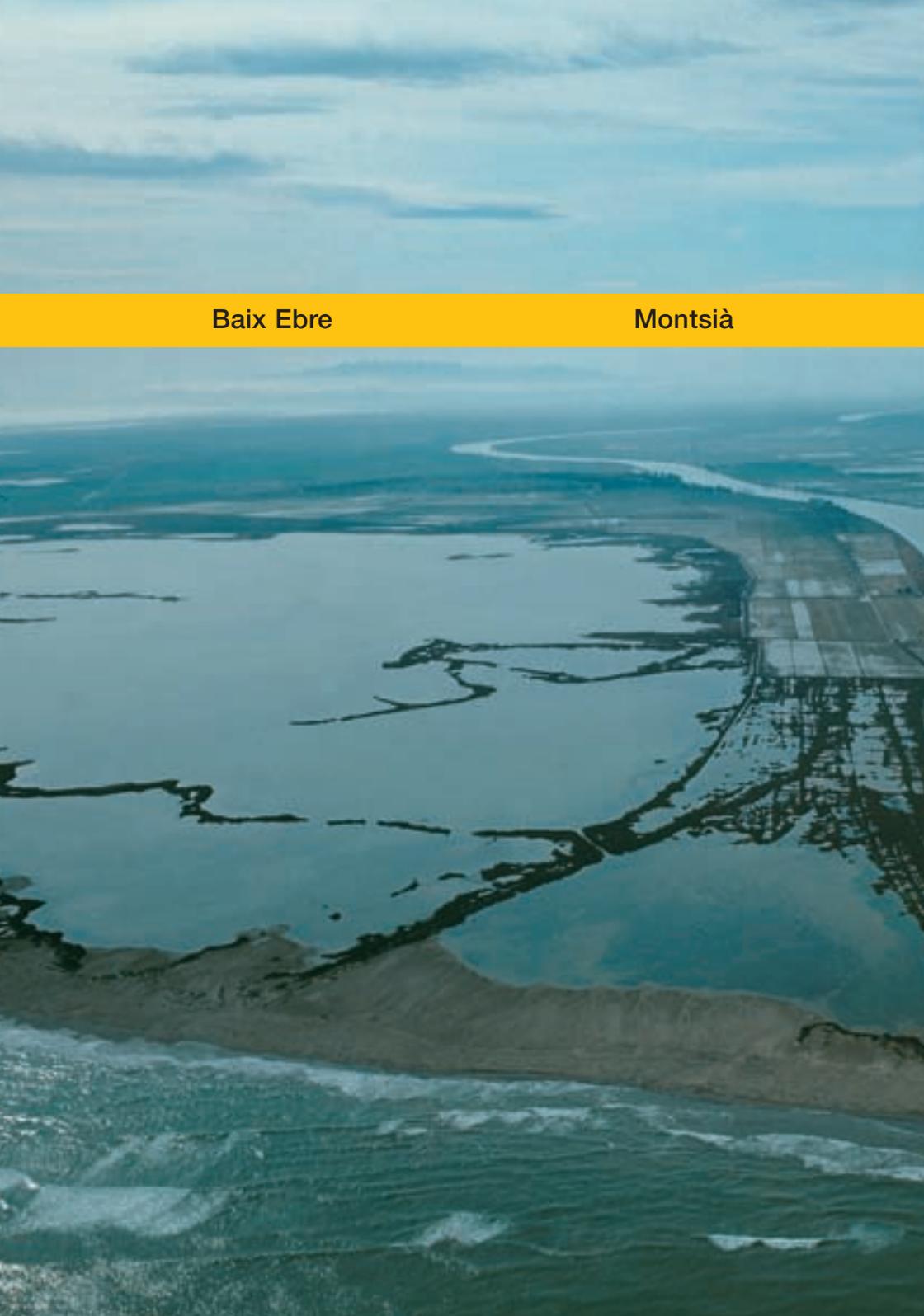
Terres de l'Ebre

Catalonia



Catalonia

Terres de l'Ebre

An aerial photograph of a coastal wetland area. A wide river flows from the top right towards the center, then curves to the left. The river is surrounded by a complex network of smaller channels and marshes. To the right of the river, there are rectangular agricultural fields. In the foreground, the ocean waves are visible, breaking onto a sandy beach. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. A yellow horizontal bar is overlaid on the image, containing the text 'Baix Ebre' on the left and 'Montsià' on the right.

Baix Ebre

Montsià

Terra Alta

Ribera d'Ebre



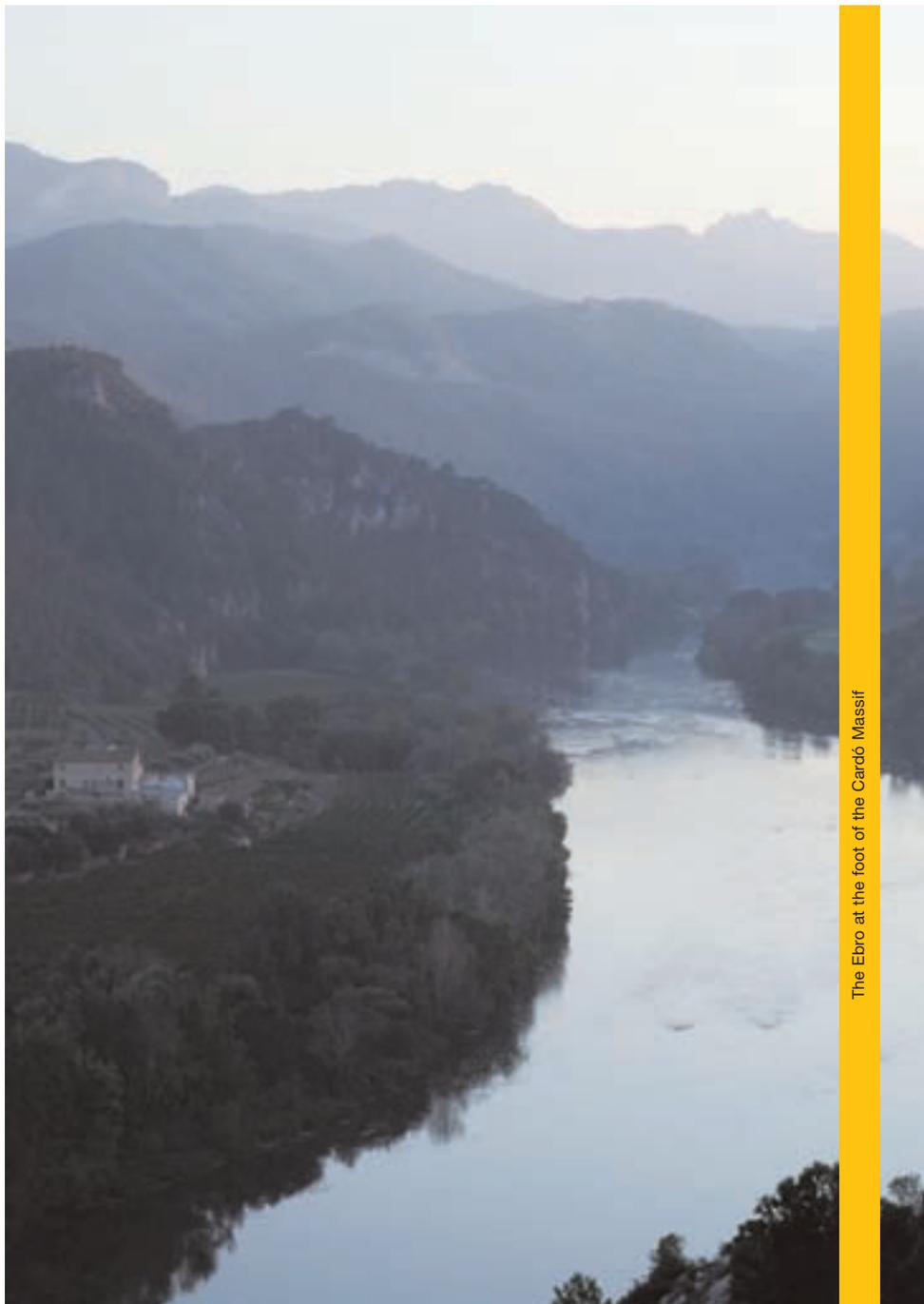


Terres de l'Ebre: Undiscovered Catalonia

When the author Sebastià Juan Arbó wrote *Terres de l'Ebre* (1932), little did he know that the title of his novel would end up defining the entire territory lapped by one of the most important rivers on the Iberian Peninsula, the Ebro. This is, therefore, a riverbank territory. And a sea and mountain territory too. Indeed, in a relatively small area, this corner of southern Catalonia unites the landscapes of the floodplain, the mountain environments of the Els Ports Massif (which Pablo Picasso immortalised in around 60 paintings), the colours of the Ebro Delta and around 150km of wild beaches.

This natural richness had already captivated the Iberians and the Romans, who considered the Ebro river as a strategic route for trade because it allowed not only products to be transported from the sea to inland areas of the Peninsula, but also arable land to be watered. Later on, the Moors, Jews and Christians consolidated major enclaves that competed against one another for superiority in a region that acts as a crossroads between Catalonia, the Valencian Country and Aragon.

All of these cultures have left an important legacy, whose influence can still be felt in the area's monuments (cave paintings, Iberian sites, mediaeval castles, cathedrals, Renaissance palaces, *Modernista* (Catalan Art Nouveau) wineries, trenches from the Spanish Civil War, etc.), gastronomy (which uses the best products from the sea, the river and the land) and popular traditions (which give one of the most unique territories in Catalonia its personality). Consequently, the Terres de l'Ebre are now a peaceful place where tourists can get a glimpse of the influence of history while exploring one of the most important natural areas of the Mediterranean basin.



The Ebro at the foot of the Cardó Massif

The Ebro Delta, a Natural Paradise



The exceptional wealth of flora and fauna on the Ebro Delta makes this area situated in the far south of Catalonia an environmental paradise, brimming with colour and life. It was designated a Natural Park in 1983, thus acknowledging its importance as the principal wetland area in Catalonia and underscoring its prominence on an international scale. Indeed, the area stands out for the beauty of its landscape and particularly for its status as one of the most significant aquatic habitats in the western Mediterranean, alongside the Camargue Regional Nature Park in southern France – situated on the estuary of the Rhône – and the Doñana National Park in Andalusia.

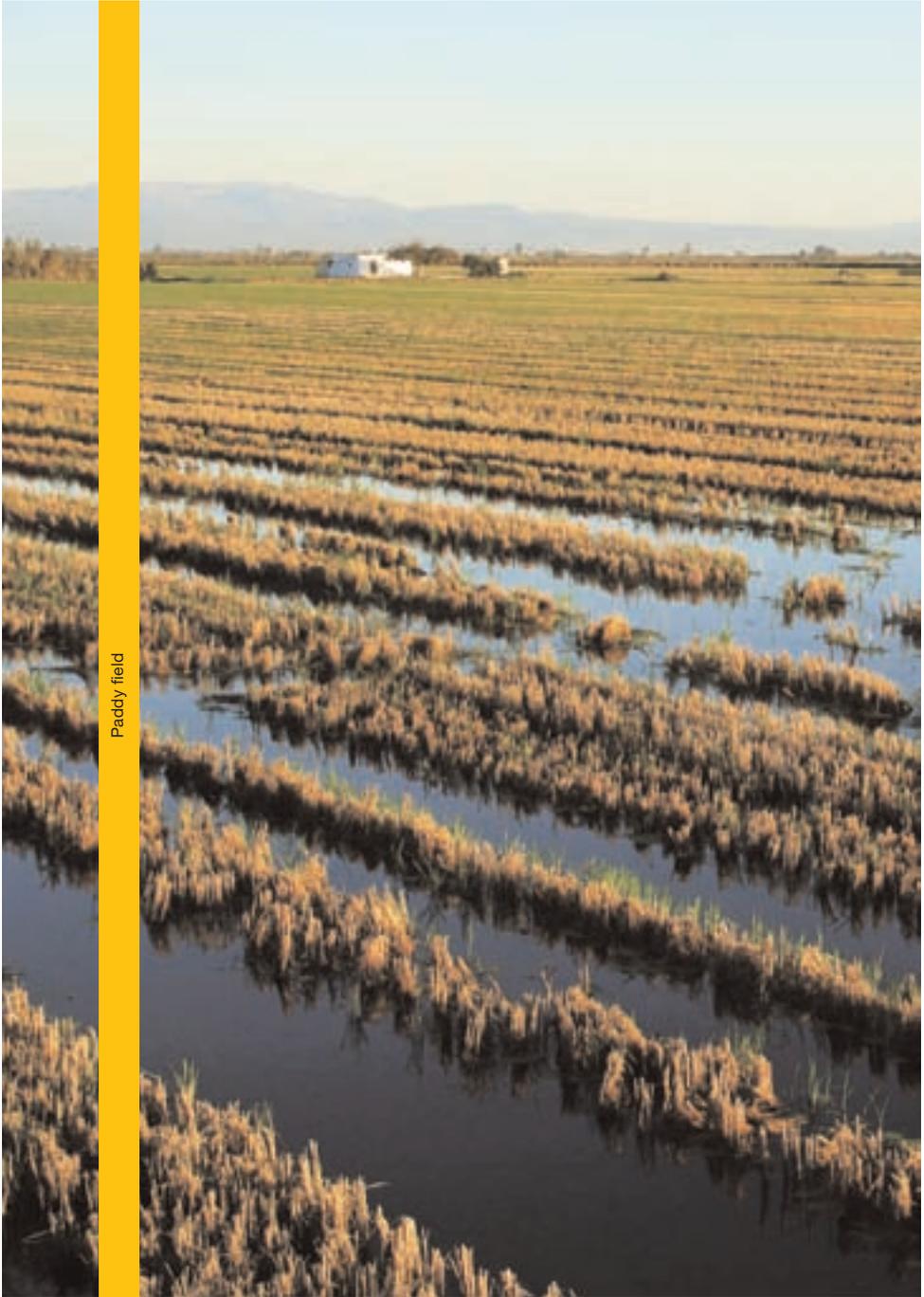
The Ebro Delta, covering some 32,000ha, stretches across the counties of Baix Ebre and Montsià, across the plains of the municipalities of L'Ampolla, Amposta, Deltebre, Sant Jaume d'Enveja and Sant Carles de la Ràpita. However, only a quarter of this whole expanse is included in the **Ebro Delta Natural Park**.

In inland areas of the delta, the prevailing landscape is one of extensive paddy fields that

change colour with the seasons. In contrast, large lagoons surrounded by reed swamps prevail along the coastline. All of this is complemented by large expanses of saline soils and kilometre after kilometre of deserted beaches surrounded by dunes. Of particular note are the ponds of Les Olles, El Canal Vell, La Platjola, El Garxal, L'Alfacada, La Tancada and L'Encanyissada, as are the restricted-access islands of Buda and Sapinya, the peninsulas of Punta de la Banya and of El Fangar, the scrublands of Casablanca and the subaquatic springs of Baltasar. All of the delta's wetlands form part of the Natura 2000 network. In addition, in areas of greatest importance for bird-nesting, access is controlled in spring and summer to coincide with reproductive periods.

Characteristic flora and fauna

The uniqueness of the vegetation – with over 700 species – makes the delta a paradise for botany enthusiasts. The reed swamps are one of the most characteristic elements of the vegetation. The common reed, the bulrush and blady grass are the most abundant plants of this family. On the banks



Paddy field



Ebro Delta Natural Park

of the Ebro, there are riverbank woods where, among others, silver poplars, elms, European alders, poplars and eucalyptus trees grow.

However, the undeniable star of the Ebro Delta is rice. Covering over 21,000ha, paddy fields dominate the landscape of this impressive natural area and represent an ecosystem of major importance for it. The need to be permanently flooded means that these fields act as a temporary marsh where algae, crustaceans and insects become vital elements for birds inhabiting the natural park to feed on. The western marsh harrier, the little egret, the black-crowned night heron, the Squacco heron, the grey heron, the flamingo, the oystercatcher and the common pratincole are but some of the varied birdlife that can be seen on the delta. Indeed, it is an area of special interest for the reproduction of birds, most of which are migratory. Over 400 species have been documented, a figure that represents 60% of all birds found in Europe.

The aquatic environments stemming from the confluence of the marine environment with the river waters of the delta have given rise to a wide diversity of fish species. In this area, therefore, autochthonous fish species such as the eel, the barb, the carp and the mullet coexist alongside others that have been introduced by humans, such as the Wels catfish and the mosquitofish.

La Trinitat Salterns



In order to enjoy this natural area, to watch the birds, to go for a bike ride and to discover the history of the Ebro Delta, you can visit the **Ecomuseu del Parc Natural, in Deltebre**, which gives visitors an insight into the territory's human and natural values. The itinerary is structured around a series of spaces in which the area's typical natural environments are reproduced; these include the river, lagoons, paddy fields and riverbank woods. The itinerary is rounded off with a visit to the aquarium, where the most characteristic fish and amphibian species of the Ebro Delta can be seen.

A visit to the Ecomuseu can be complemented with a stroll around the **Casa de Fusta**, located near **Poblenou del Delta**, right in front of the

L'Encanyissada pond. The Casa de Fusta is one of the most emblematic buildings in the area; it was built in the late 1920s by a group of hunters who, attracted by the quantity and variety of birds inhabiting the area, decided to settle on the delta. It has now been turned into the **Ebro Delta Natural Park Information Centre**, where advice is given on routes, on areas of outstanding interest and on activities that can be done there. Housed in one of the centre's rooms is the Museu Ornitològic, which contains a representative collection of the bird species inhabiting the Ebro Delta. There are nearly 200 examples of 134 different species, all of which attempt to show the specific nature of each delta ecosystem. Furthermore, there are wooden bird-watching huts located at strategic points throughout the Natural Park, thus enabling visitors to take in the magical, colourful and, above all, living nature of the area.



Dunes

Els Ports Natural Park

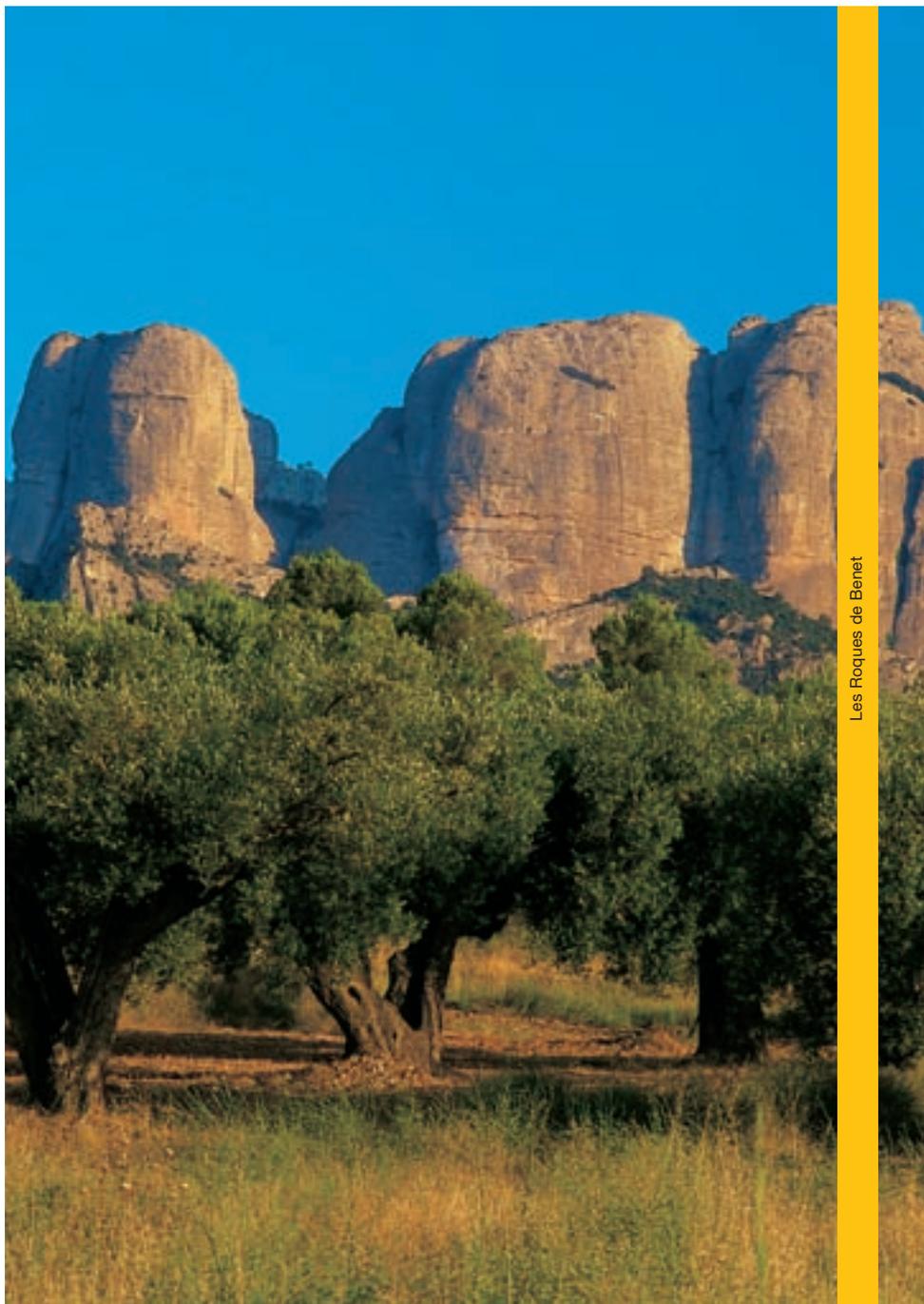


The Els Ports Massif rises up in the south of Catalonia, right where Aragon and the Valencian Country converge. The very craggy limestone relief – with cliffs, caves, faults and gorges that fill it with beauty – plays host not only to Mediterranean environments, but also to forests that are more characteristic of Euro-Siberian climates. There, it is possible to visit the most southern beech forests of the Iberian Peninsula – a wood containing trees that are hundreds of years old, designated a Nature Reserve – and several monumental trees. The area also stands out for its **fauna**: vultures, golden eagles, wildcats, otters and, above all, the Spanish ibex – one of the most representative symbols of the massif – bear witness to the environmental diversity of this vast territory, designated a Natural Park on the Catalan side in 2001. This designation acknowledged the value of one of the most significant natural areas in Catalonia and the third largest in terms of its extension after the Alt Pirineu Natural Park and the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park.

The Park has three main entrances, one in each county. To the north, of particular note is the village

of **Horta de Sant Joan**, where the Ecomuseu information centre can be found. Also in this area are the Terra Alta visitor information centre located in **Prat de Comte**, and the Molí de l'Oli information office situated in **Arnes**. To the east, the park is reached via **Roquetes**, where the administrative headquarters of the Natural Park are located, as is the Baix Ebre visitor information centre, with the “Geoports” permanent exhibition. To the south, the park is reached via **La Sénia**, where it is possible to visit the “Life in Els Ports” exhibition at the Montsià visitor information centre. Before setting off to explore the massif, it is therefore worth stopping off at one of these places.

Further to the south of the massif, the landscape is equally captivating. The Sénia river, whose source can be found in the highest part of the mountain range, forms small gorges – such as the Els Arenals pools – that, in the heat of summer, entice visitors to take a refreshing dip. However, the quintessential point of the whole massif is the **El Caro peak** (1,441m). Situated at the top of the



Les Roques de Benet

massif (it is in fact the highest point), it is surrounded by pine trees shaped by the wind, which grow on the rocky, relatively arid terrain. This vantage point offers a panoramic view over the entire Ebro valley. In front, the **Cardó Massif** rises up and, touching the horizon towards the sea, the Ebro Delta 'antlers' can be made out; following the course of the river, it is possible to distinguish the riverside towns of Deltebre, Sant Jaume d'Enveja, Amposta, Vinallop, Campredó and Tortosa.



View from El Caro peak



Other Natural Areas

The **Cardó Massif** – situated in the county of Baix Ebre and just a few kilometres from the Els Ports Massif – is a combination of rolling and craggy reliefs with small, craggy valleys. While the culminating point is the Creu de Santos (942m), the best-known corner of this territory is the **Cardó spa**, built on the edge of the escarpment of Sallent ravine. This architectural ensemble was originally a 17th-century Carmelite hermitage and convent that, in the 19th century, became a spa; it is located in the municipality of Benifallet though it is reached via Rasquera. A further 13 hermitages were built along this valley, always close to springs.

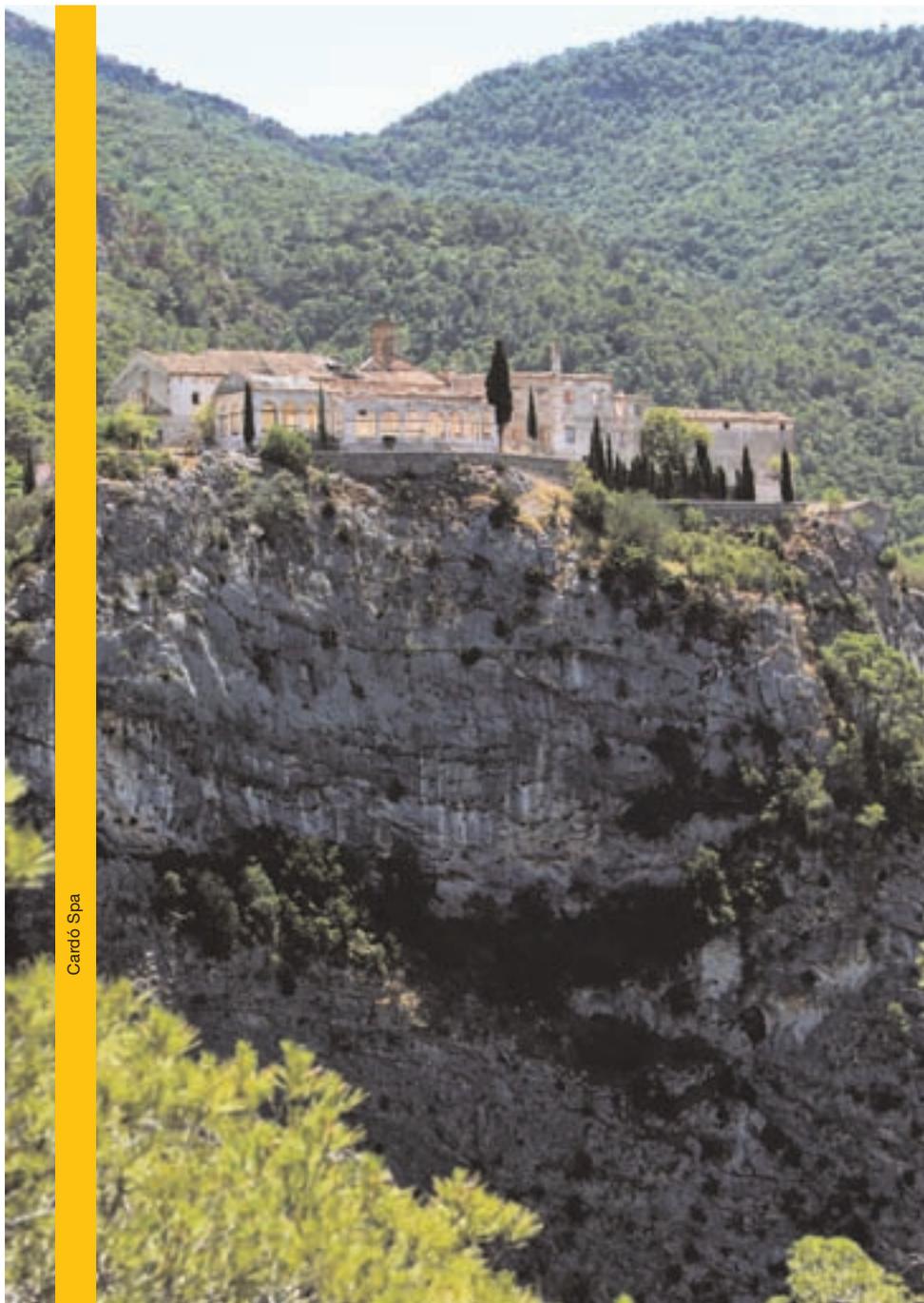
Further south, the **Montsià mountain range** rises up parallel to the sea and forms a magnificent natural vantage point from which it is possible to get an impression of the extension of the Ebro Delta and the inland plains that border on the Els Ports Massif. **The Foradada rock** is one of the most charismatic points on the mountain range; situated at an altitude of 700m above sea level, at the edge of a rocky mass, its sides fall sharply towards the town of Sant Carles de la Ràpita and the bay of Els Alfacs. This small, limestone mountain range conserves many Holm oak and

pine forests, though most of the range is covered in small shrubs. The small valleys that meander through it are crossed by a good number of paths and routes for hikers and mountain-bike enthusiasts.

To the north of the Terres de l'Ebre, in the river valley, it is possible to visit the **Sebes and Flix Meander Wild Fauna Nature Reserve**, the territory's second most important and largest wetland. It consists of two fluvial areas that preserve the wealth of riverbank vegetation. Here, we can find one of the biggest reed swamps in Catalonia, as well as marshes and river islands. In 2001, a project was implemented to reintroduce the white stork and to restore the floodable grasslands by putting horses from the French Camargue out to pasture. The Mas del Director information centre advises visitors on the best educational or recreational options available, and gives them guidance at the new **Camí de Sirga** interpretation centre.

More information

www.reservanaturalsebes.org









The Ebro Coast

The Terres de l'Ebre have around 150km of coastline. This long coastline boasts an enormous diversity of landscapes: while cliffs interspersed with small coves predominate in the north, on the Ebro Delta we find wide beaches of fine golden sand. Of course, both of them – often little known – offer peace and tranquillity that is rather unusual on the Mediterranean coastline of Catalonia.

L'Ametlla de Mar, to the north of the Ebro Coast, is a welcoming, typically Mediterranean fishing town with whitewashed facades; its coastline is one of the most unspoilt on the Catalan coast. The Castle of Sant Jordi d'Alfama rises up in the north of the town; it is a 13th-century fortress – now rebuilt – that was subjected to regular attacks by Saracen pirates. There, the rocky landscape alternates with harmonious coves where the water is crystal clear, such as Santes Creus beach. Following the coast southwards, you will arrive at the beaches of **El Perelló**. This coastline stands out for its reddish rocks and typically Mediterranean vegetation of pine trees, olive trees and century plants that roll down to the shore. In this municipality, the widest beaches are those of

Santa Llúcia and of Morro de Gos, with its fine pebbles. The coves of El Pont de l'Àliga, Moros and La Buena are surrounded by semi-wild areas.

Past Cap Roig, we come across a beach of the same name, in the municipality of **L'Ampolla**; it is a sandy beach situated between copper-coloured cliffs. Small rocky coves and wide, fine pebble beaches alternate until reaching the town. After the town of L'Ampolla – a traditional summer resort for the region's inhabitants – the coastline changes radically. Indeed, L'Ampolla is the gateway to the Ebro Delta; it is where the long, gently shelving, fine-sand beaches begin. To the south, they are the stars of the Ebro Coast.

The tranquillity of the Delta

At the Ebro estuary, the struggle between land and sea has shaped a coastline of wild beauty, with dunes and **wide, golden beaches**. In the northern area of this stretch of the Delta Coast, of particular note are the beaches of El Fangar, La Marquesa and Riumar, which look deserted. Continuing southwards, we find the large sandy expanses of



Sant Carles de la Ràpita



Dunes on La Marquesa beach ↑

L'Ametlla de Mar



the beaches of Migjorn, of L'Alfacada and of El Serrallo, which is sheltered by the shrub vegetation and has a nudist section. The solitary beach of Els Eucaliptus links up with El Trabucador, a fine isthmus of sand connecting the central part of the delta with the La Banya peninsula, which forms the bay of Els Alfacs and encloses the Ebro Delta to the south.

It is precisely at this point where we find **Sant Carles de la Ràpita**, a town of Moorish origin that took off in the second half of the 18th century, when King Charles III of Spain wanted to turn the bay of Els Alfacs into one of the main trading ports on the western Mediterranean. With the death of the monarch, the project never got any further than the drawing board. Despite that, La Ràpita has become an important fishing port and one of the main tourist attractions of these lands. But the Delta Coast also stretches just a little further south and ends at the estuary of the Sénia river, at the **Les Cases d'Alcanar** fishing village.

If you enjoy hiking and want to discover the Terres de l'Ebre coastline first-hand, you can follow the signs of the **GR-92, the Mediterranean route** running along the entire Catalan coastline. One of the most spectacular stretches is the one between L'Ametlla de Mar and L'Ampolla, which runs along cliffs and through coves, where, if you feel like it, you can take a refreshing dip.

More information

www.ametllamar.cat
www.elperello.cat
www.ampolla.org
www.turismelarapita.com
www.alcanar.cat

L'Ampolla





Active Tourism

In a single territory, the Terres de l'Ebre unites sea and mountain natural areas. And it is precisely that contrast of landscapes that facilitates an enormous diversity of nature-related activities.

Seaside adventure

The uniqueness of the Ebro Delta coastline, with shallow bays and practically no waves, make this stretch of the coast an ideal place for water sports like **water skiing**, **sailing** and **canoeing**. In addition, the combination of gentle winds and waters has turned the bay of Els Alfacs on the Ebro Delta into one of the most popular places on the Catalan coastline for kitesurfing fans. This sport allows surfers to be pulled along at high speed by the force of the wind blowing against a kite. **Kitesurfers** with a little more expertise are able to jump out of the water to do all sorts of spectacular acrobatics while hovering above the sea.

Traditional fishing in the bay of Els Alfacs – one of the tourist attractions that has roused the greatest anticipation in recent years – is an activity that is halfway between active tourism and a gastronomic route. Tourists embark on small fishing boats at the port of Sant Carles de la Ràpita that take them out

into the middle of the bay. There, professional fishermen first explain how to set nets in the shallow zones and then, once the fish have been surrounded, visitors can dive into the sea and catch them by hand. The best moment, though, is at lunchtime, when they are able to taste the fish they have caught in one of the town's restaurants.

Skirting along the banks of the Ebro

Very near the sea, along the entire lower stretch of the Ebro, **kayaking** descents have become consolidated; these allow for placid contemplation of the river from the water itself. One of the most spectacular stretches – among rugged landscape through mountains – runs between the villages of Miravet and Benifallet. A kayak trip allows visitors to skirt along the riverbank woods, to contemplate Miravet Castle from the foot of the cliff it is on top of, and to enjoy the riverside façade.

This enriching journey along the river can be combined with the discovery of the Terra Alta and Baix Ebre **Green Route**, a **cycle-touring route** that runs along the old stretch of the Val de Zafán railway, which used to link Tortosa with several



Green Route towards La Fontcalda



Aragonese towns. The stretch between Tortosa and Arnes has now been turned into a green route. This route is a magnificent choice for enjoying the beauty of the Els Ports Massif while going through tunnels, over aqueducts, through recreational areas and over bridges. It also goes past the Sanctuary of La Fontcalda and the old railway stations of the towns where the train used to stop: Tortosa, Roquetes, Jesús, Aldover, Xerta, Benifallet, El Pinell de Brai, Prat de Comte, Bot, Horta de Sant Joan and Arnes.

A network of routes

The Green Route can be done on foot, by bike and on horseback. But, for **hiking** enthusiasts, these lands offer another very interesting option: **the Way of Saint James in the Terres de l'Ebre**. This route starts at Deltebre, goes through the counties of Montsià, Baix Ebre and Terra Alta, and arrives at La Rioja via Aragon; it follows the historical mediaeval path that took believers from the Ebro Delta to Santiago de Compostela. On this Catalan stretch, most of the route runs along the course of the Ebro river; after Deltebre, pilgrims go through the towns of Amposta, Tortosa, Aldover and Xerta. Once

there, the route redirects walkers along the Canaletes river so that they can visit the Sanctuary of La Fontcalda. From that point, they can then carry on to Gandesa and Batea, the gateway to Aragon. Certain stretches of the Green Route and the **GR-99** coincide with the so-called **Ebro Nature Path**, which runs along the whole length of the river, from its source in Cantabria to the estuary. All of these proposals are additional to the routes that cross the Els Ports Massif from La Sénia in the south to Horta de Sant Joan in the north. The **Southern Stars** (Estels del Sud) Route, for example, is a circular, five-stage itinerary that allows walkers to discover the whole variety of the massif's landscapes.

The Els Ports Massif still holds many more surprises though. The Canaletes river and the ravines of La Vall Figuera, La Caramella and El Racó de la Gralla attract many **canyoning** enthusiasts. In addition, the area's limestone rock has created large walls that are a delight for climbers; in Els Ports Massif and in Montsià and Llaberia mountain ranges, many **climbing** options are now available. Of outstanding beauty, the most popular places are Els Estrets d'Arnes and

Arnes. Toll del Vidre



Les Roques de Benet in Terra Alta; the lower part of La Roca Foradada in the Montsià mountain range and the routes opened in Tivissa and Llaberia, both in Ribera d'Ebre. Of course, account should be taken of the fact that both climbing and canyoning are regulated by law and that neither activity can be done freely because, at certain times of the year, special care needs to be taken not to interfere with the reproductive cycles of protected species. So, in order to do either of these sports – particularly in the Els Ports Massif area – you will need to get permission from the Natural Park authority.



More information

www.camidesantjaume.cat
www.uctortosa.org
www.viasverdes.com
www.estelsdelsud.com

Culture, Music and Traditions

The Terres de l'Ebre boast considerable cultural heritage, often linked to music. Indeed, the popular music of this land – with its own character, differentiated from the traditional music of other parts of Catalonia – has two main manifestations: bands and the *jota*, be it sung or danced.

As a dance, the *jota* is accompanied by a melody that often alternates instrumental and versed rhythms. A group – usually comprising players of the clarinet, trumpet, euphonium, guitar and *guitarro* (a guitar-like instrument used in traditional music in the east of the Iberian Peninsula) – generally accompanies the singers. The singers improvise verses to denounce social problems, congratulate someone they know, describe the life of peasants and, as in the past, to declare their love for someone. The *jota* is, therefore, a genuine form of popular expression and, for that reason, it has been designated a National Dance of Catalonia alongside the *sardana*, which is more characteristic of the north of Catalonia. Since olden times, coinciding with their Patron-Saint feasts, towns and villages have organised popular dances. A good example of such is the Ulledecona *jota*, which has been danced for over 100 years; 200 couples

take part in it and the women adorn themselves with smart shawls. Similar in age and popularity is the Ascó *jota* or “Ball de Coques”. In the majority of towns and villages the *jota* is no longer danced, though in recent years towns like Tortosa – with a deep-rooted tradition of singing and dancing – and Amposta, and villages like Paüls, Prat de Comte, Benifallet and El Pinell de Brai, have restored and strengthened one of the most representative symbols of their popular culture.

Bands

In the Terres de l'Ebre, **music played by bands** became consolidated in the late 19th century, influenced above all by the Valencian music tradition. They are groups comprising players of wind and percussion instruments, and they have now become rooted in most towns and villages in the south of Catalonia, particularly in the counties of Baix Ebre and Montsià. Alongside the *jotas*, bands tend to play a lead role at Patron-Saint feasts and at solemn events such as processions, floral tributes to the Virgins and proclamations. Some of the bands from the counties of the Terres de l'Ebre – among which La Lira Ampostina and



Renaissance Festival of Tortosa

La Unió Filharmònica d'Amposta are particularly outstanding – have gained international repute. In order to enjoy the best exponents of this genre, towns such as Amposta and La Sénia organise annual festivals specialising in music groups of this type.

The other major pillar of popular culture in these counties is **bous** (bulls) in every variant: *bous de plaça* (bulls released among participants in an square), *bous a la mar* (bulls released among participants near the sea), *bous capllaçats* (bulls with a rope tied to their horns and pulled through the streets by participants), *bous embolats* (bulls that have two balls of burning tar stuck to their horns and are released among participants), etc. They have large numbers of followers, especially in towns and villages closest to the Ebro Delta. Despite the controversy generated by this tradition – frowned upon by anti-bullfighting associations – in 2010 the Government of Catalonia regulated the rules and designated the Terres de l'Ebre *bous* a Festive and Heritage Element of National Interest.

Religious traditions

The popular fervour of these lands can be felt at **Easter**, when the streets of the main towns and villages are lined with believers and onlookers

ready to watch the **processions** of laypeople wearing tunics and men dressed as Roman soldiers, as well as the *passos* (sculptures depicting the final moments of Jesus' life). On Palm Sunday, the town of Tortosa draws all the attention, since this is where the Passion of Christ is enacted on the streets of the old town. Today, a modern Easter interpretation centre allows visitors to enjoy the town's cultural and religious wealth all year round.

Furthermore, from the beginning of Lent until after Easter, the **Passion of Christ** is enacted in Uldecona; it is one of the most famous theatrical performances of this type in Catalonia. In the same period, the streets of Vilalba dels Arcs – in the county of Terra Alta – and the fields surrounding the village also become the backdrop for the local theatre company's performance of the Passion of Christ.

Historical recreation festivals

Beyond the Patron-Saint feasts and the religious calendar, many towns and villages organise fairs and festivals to raise awareness of their historical legacy. Thus, in October, the Iberian sites of Alcanar, Tivissa, Gandesa and Vinebre promote an open day to commemorate their past. The historic centre of Batea also hosts a mediaeval market.



Passió of Uldecona

Nowadays, however, the most important historical recreation in the Terres de l'Ebre is the **Renaissance Festival of Tortosa**. For four days every July, the city returns to the 16th century. More than 3,000 people dressed in Renaissance costumes wander through the old quarters of the town and enjoy over 60 shows a day performed by 500 actors, musicians and jugglers. All of this is accompanied by drinks and food from that period, which can be tasted in the taverns of the so-called Saboga Route and in the town's restaurants participating in the Renaissance Gastronomy Days. Among other recognition, the Renaissance Festival has been designated a Festival of National Tourist Interest and has been awarded Catalonia's Plaque of Honour for Tourism.



More information

www.festacatalunya.cat

www.firesifestes.com

www.festes.org

www.fcsocietatmusicals.org

www.saragatona.com

www.passiouldecona.org

www.festadelrenaixement.cat

The *jota*, typical dance of the area

Band



Flavours of the Sea and the Mountain

Olive oil, citrus fruit, rice, honey, sweet fruit, wine, seafood, mushrooms and game are but some of the products that are used in the **varied gastronomy** of the Terres de l'Ebre. The fact is that the diversity of landscapes that can be found in this territory makes it possible to enjoy the mouth-watering flavours of the sea and the mountain.

Rice, fish and seafood

Recognised by the *Denominació d'Origen Protegida* (PDO, Protected Designation of Origin), the **Ebro Delta's rice** (*arròs*) is the star ingredient of local recipes: paella, black rice (using squid ink), *arròs a banda* (rice with fish, cooked together but served separately), *arròs rossejat* (Sautéed rice casserole), rice with cabbage and beans, *arròs caldós* with duck, with *galeres* (*Squilla mantis*) and broccoli, and, for the more refined palates, rice with lobster. Indeed, it is in the Delta – the territory that accounts for 98% of Catalonia's total rice production – where specific varieties of rice for preparing each of these dishes are grown.

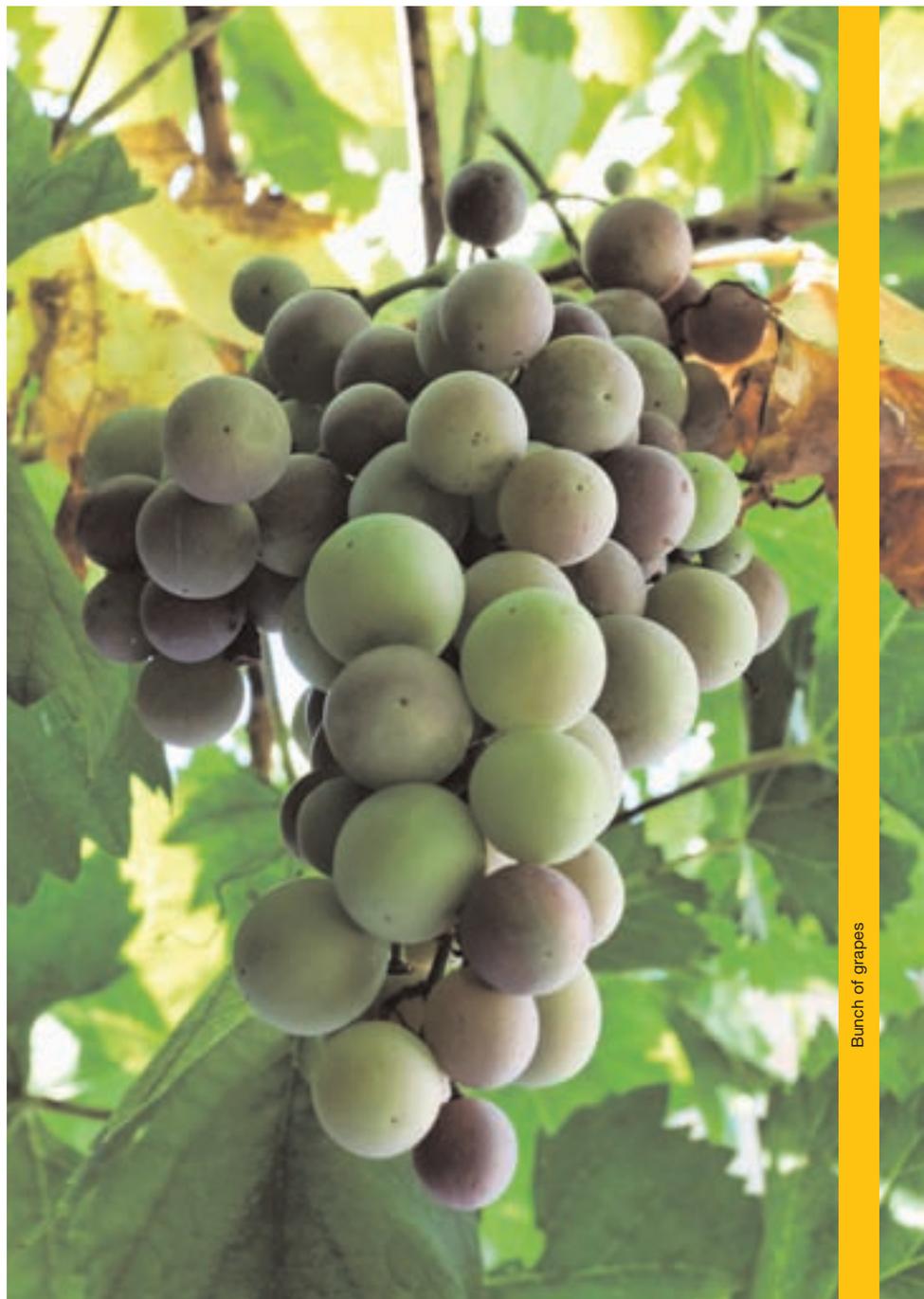
Among the most traditional fish in the typical cuisine of the Ebro estuary, of particular note is the **eel**. It is presented *xapada* (opened, dried in the sun and seasoned with salt and red pepper), fried or in stock. In addition, the seaside towns of Alcanar,

Sant Carles de la Ràpita, L'Ampolla and L'Ametlla de Mar have active fishing ports that stand out for the quality and diversity of fish and seafood sold there. *Galeres* (*Squilla mantis*) and shrimp – cooked with salt or served as an accompaniment to paella – are some of the products in greatest demand in the region.

But the gastronomic itinerary along the Ebro Delta coast becomes unique in the bays of Els Alfacs and El Fangar, two places that are ideal for cultivating these varieties of seafood. Indeed, it is in these natural areas where the sea and the Ebro river's freshwater meet, a unique mix that makes the Pacific oysters and mussels collected there outstanding. In order to savour them, you can go to the seaside restaurants or take part in the Mussel Pickers Route (*Ruta de les Muscleres*); participants are taken out by boat to the middle of the bay of Els Alfacs or of El Fangar to taste – on the nurseries themselves – oysters and mussels that have just been picked.

Inland cuisine

In the inland territories of the Ebro valley, meat plays a lead role. In Tortosa, you should try the *baldana* – a black sausage with rice, onion and pine nuts – and in the villages of Terra Alta, the



Bunch of grapes

lamb. In Ribera d'Ebre, of particular note are recipes made with **game**, such as boar stew, partridge chasseur and rabbit with snails and *rovellons* (*Lactarius sanguifluus*, a species of fungus). But the most unique dish in the inland plains of the Terres de l'Ebre is the **clotxa**. In olden times, it was the traditional breakfast eaten by peasants at wine-grape harvesting time, and now it is the star of the show at a host of culinary days held in the villages where attempts are being made to restore it. It is made from a round, rustic loaf of bread, which is cut in half and filled with roasted tomatoes, onions and garlic. It is complemented with pilchards in brine and a generous drizzle of olive oil.

In fact, the counties of Terra Alta, Baix Ebre and Montsià constitute one of the Catalan territories with the longest tradition of **oil** making. Its olive oil production – based on cultivars such as *morruda*, *sevillenca*, *empeltre*, *arbequina* and *farga* – is recognised by the *Denominació d'Origen Protegida* (PDO, Protected Designation of Origin). The result is an extra virgin olive oil that is aromatic and fruity at the start of the campaign, and slightly sweet at the end of the season.

The deep-rooted nature of this dry-land crop in the south of Catalonia is clear to see when visiting the **millenary olive trees** in Ulldecona, in the

county of Montsià, which constitute the most numerous ensemble of trees of this type in Catalan lands. Indeed, it is in this area where nearly 2,000 trees between 1,000 and 2,000 years old have been listed. L'Arion is one of the most highly recommended places for visiting olive trees; there are more than 200, among which is the Farga de l'Arion, measuring 8 metres in girth and listed as a monumental tree by the Government of Catalonia. The route ends with a tasting of oil made from the fruit of these monumental trees.

A land of wine

The *Denominació d'Origen* (DO, Designation of Origin) **wine of Terra Alta** – which has become very popular in recent years – is the best option for accompanying the typical dishes of Terres de l'Ebre cuisine; they are wines that have a distinct Mediterranean character, made mostly from traditional grape varieties. Of particular note among white wines are the exclusive Terra Alta Grenache Blancs, made exclusively from that variety. Red wines are made mostly from Grenache Noir, Hairy Grenache and Cinsault varieties. The Mediterranean nature of the area allows up to four types of **fortified wines** to be made. Of particular note among these are white *mistela*, red *mistela* and *ranci*.

Olive grove



Sweet fruit

The cool and temperate climate of the inland Ebro valley is good for growing sweet fruit. Orchards cover large expanses of land closest to the river or plains delimited by the Els Ports Massif and the Montsià mountain range. Of particular note is the production of the **clementine mandarin**. A cross between the common mandarin and the bitter orange, it has a strong, sweet flavour and is very juicy. It is recognised by the *Indicació Geogràfica Protegida* (PGI, Protected Geographical Indication). Cherries, which are used to make delicious pastries and jams, are plentiful in villages like Paüls and Miravet, whereas peaches fill the fields of Benissanet and other towns and villages of Ribera d'Ebre.

Sweet desserts

When it comes to sweets, the Terres de l'Ebre have an unrivalled trump card: the **pastisset**. Heavily influenced by Arab culture, this traditional sweet is made from flour, oil, sugar and *mistela* or aiguardent (a beverage with a very high alcohol content), and then filled mainly with *cabell d'àngel* (a jam made from Siam pumpkin), though they can now be found with curd cheese, chocolate, apple, orange and sweet potato fillings. Although the

most celebrated ones are from Tortosa, Benifallet and Rasquera, they are made in most Ebro municipalities. Their characteristic shape is similar to that of a pastry. Pastries made with lard, *ametllats* (based on almonds), *carquinyolis* (similar to biscotti) and *punyetes de Roquetes* (round in shape and made from eggs, sugar, milk, almond flour and lemon, and sprinkled with icing sugar) are some of the most noteworthy popular pastry sweets in these counties.

More information

www.gastroteca.cat
www.doterraalta.com
www.do-deltadelebre.com
www.acobem.com
www.dopoliterraalta.com
www.cuinalarapita.com
www.platigot.com





Life on the water's edge

The Ebro river is the natural backbone of the lands in southern Catalonia. Here, the river is everything: a place of encounter and exchange, and a means of bringing people and things together. In the Iberian period, it was also a highly valued communication route for transporting products from the sea to inland areas of the Peninsula. So, boats and catboats would make their way up and down the river loaded with wheat, oil, wine and almonds. With the Industrial Revolution, coal and cement trading was strengthened.

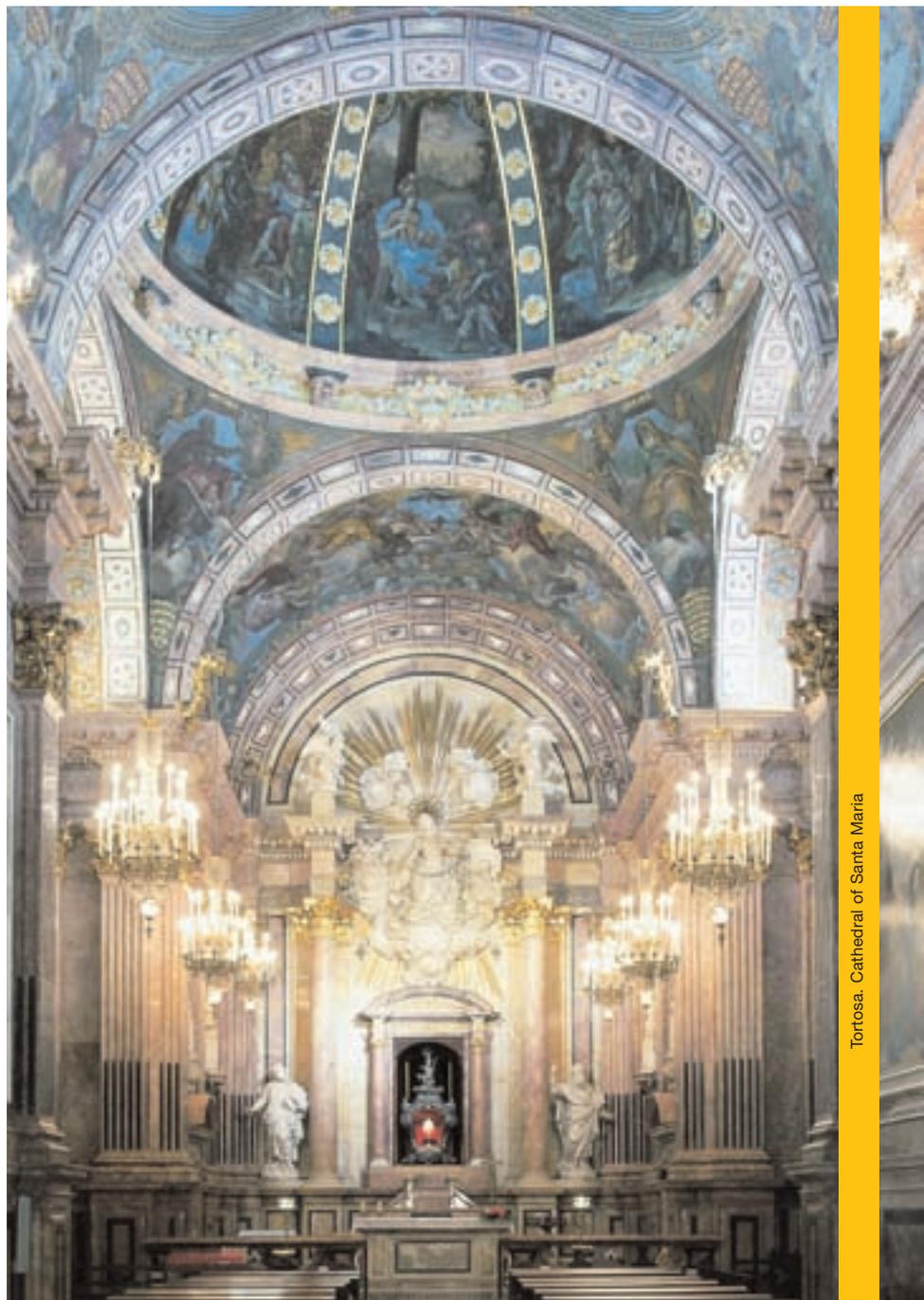
The first civilisations to inhabit the territory settled along the river. Villages then became consolidated, especially from the Middle Ages onwards, with the arrival of the Moors. The influence of history can still be felt in places like **Miravet**; situated at the foot of a Templar castle, this village kneels at the flowing waters of the Ebro river. From the oldest cultures, the heritage of craftsmen has been conserved. Indeed, in the Raval dels Canterers quarter of the village, a number of potters using millenary techniques to work the clay can still be found. The village also conserves one of the last traditional shuttle boats that used the water's currents to

make it work. Until the bridges were built in the 19th century, this was one of the traditional ways of getting across the Ebro river.

Downstream, the waters slip through the narrow Barrufemes pass, which separates the counties of Terra Alta, Ribera d'Ebre and Baix Ebre. Along this stretch, small fruit orchards coexist alongside cliffs covered in riverbank woods that come out onto the village of **Benifallet**. Further south, between the villages of **Xerta** and **Tivenys**, we can find the dam right in the middle of the river. This dam is one of the most representative symbols of the lower course of the Ebro river. While it was built at the height of Moorish domination, in the 19th century it was used to channel water towards the two canals that allow fields to be irrigated.

Tortosa and Amposta

If you allow yourself to be guided by the water, you will come to **Tortosa**, which, with around 35,000 inhabitants, is the largest town in the Terres de l'Ebre. Iberians, Romans, Moors, Jews and Christians have all left their mark on it. When in Tortosa, visits to the La Suda Moorish castle, the



Tortosa. Cathedral of Santa Maria

walls and fortifications surrounding it, the Palau Episcopal (Bishop's Palace) and the architectural ensemble of the Reials Col·legis (one of the most important Renaissance complexes in Catalonia, used for educational purposes) are highly recommended. The Gothic Cathedral of Santa Maria – the most imposing building in the old town – houses the permanent exhibition of the Cathedral's Treasure, a collection of 200 works of art, including paintings, sculptures, tapestries and mediaeval codices. A number of outstanding objects are also conserved there, such as the 16th-century choir stalls and the 15th-century altarpiece of the Transfiguration. Besides the exhibition, the visit includes a tour around the central nave, the canons (priests) refectory, the dormitory, the cloister and a section of the underground passages. Although the 1938 bombardment during the Spanish Civil War razed most of the town to the ground, the streets of the old town still conserve a number of mediaeval palaces and fine *Modernista* houses.

The delta plain, formed by an accumulation of fluvial sediments, begins to widen from Tortosa. Just a few kilometres from the estuary, the town of **Amposta** stands out; it is the capital of the county of Montsià. A suspension bridge that has spanned the river since 1915 has become one of the most representative architectural symbols of the town; it has two large stone pylons sticking out of the river on both sides, in the shape of a triumphal arch. Amposta Castle stands on a small elevation of conglomerate rock on the right bank of the Ebro; it conserves part of the mediaeval defensive structure and the ruins of a soap factory (18th century), a flour mill (19th century) and two rice factories (20th century). In Amposta, you can visit the **Museu de les Terres de l'Ebre**, which has several permanent exhibitions devoted to archaeology, history, nature and life along the river.

A catboat trip

In order to get up close to the natural spaces along the river and, at the same time, to relive the splendour



Assut de Xerta

of river transport that made the Ebro valley a very lively place in centuries past, it is worth embarking on *Lo sirgador*. It is a **traditional catboat** – an elongated, fairly flat-bottomed boat that has been used since olden times to sail along rivers with irregular flows – that, in spring and summer, offers tourists trips from Tortosa to the riverside villages of Xerta, Benifallet and Miravet. In addition, this river trip can be combined with cycling itineraries along the Green Route, as well as with guided visits to towns and villages where the catboat stops off.



Catboat on the Ebro

More information

www.miravet.cat

www.tortosaturisme.cat

www.turismeamposta.cat

www.ebrenavegable.cat

www.llagutsdelebre.cat



Amposta. Suspension bridge

Monumental Villages

Like most villages in Ribera d'Ebre, **Miravet** belonged to the Knights Templar between the 12th and 13th centuries. Its castle, an exceptional vantage point with impressive views over the Ebro river, had originally been built as a Saracen stronghold, right on the border between the Christian counties in the north of Catalonia and the Moorish kingdoms in the south. Today, the fortification is one of the best examples of Templar architecture in Europe: a fortified Romanesque monastery with Cistercian-style influences. In recent years, a considerable part of it has been restored, and it is one of the country's great monuments now managed by the Museu d'Història de Catalunya.

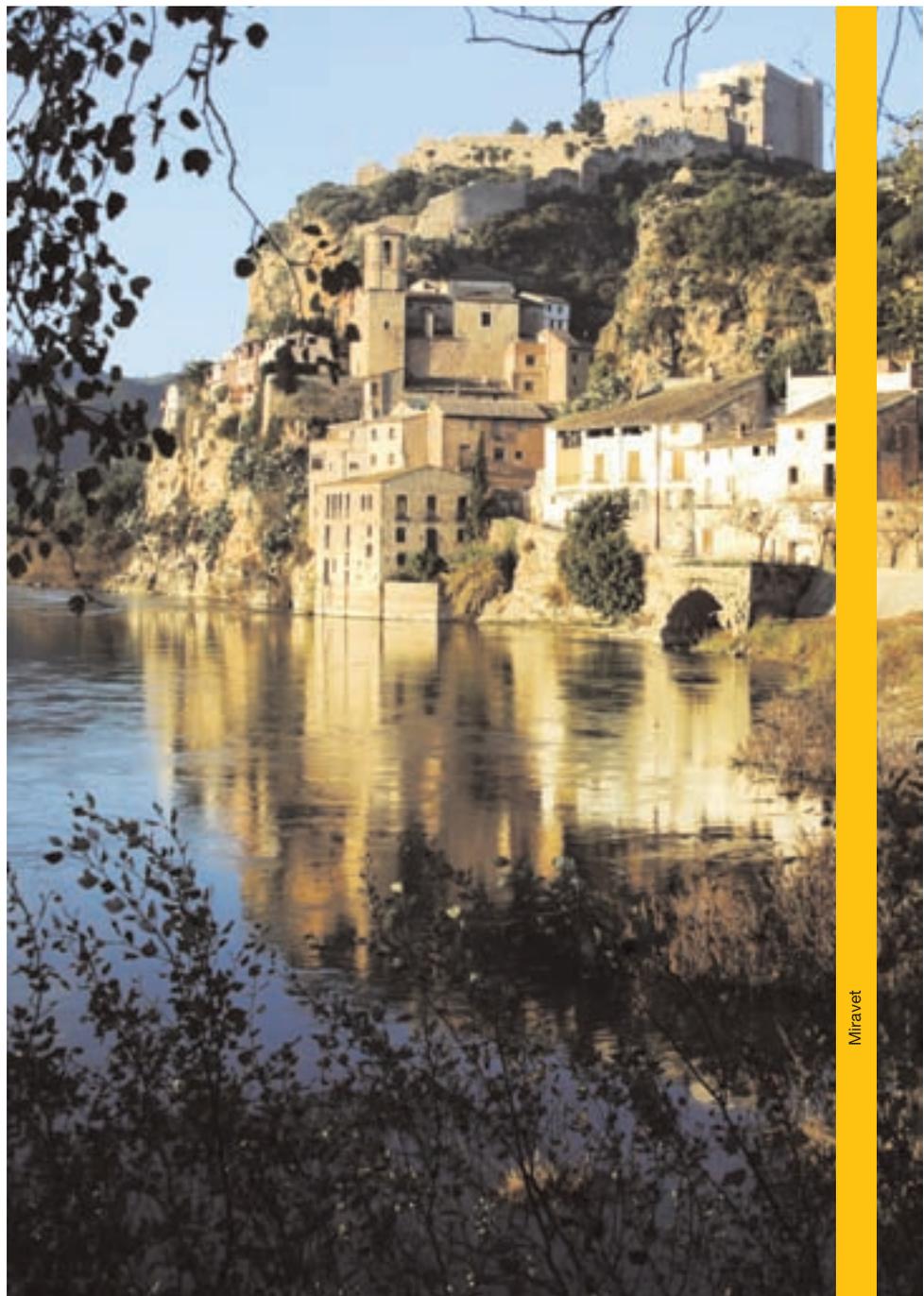
Miravet Castle is a good place to start the **Domus Templi** (Houses of the Temple) **Route** in the Terres de l'Ebre, an itinerary that includes the fortress of La Suda Castle in Tortosa. It was in 1148, after conquering Tortosa, that Ramon Berenguer IV, the Count of Barcelona, divided up his extensive domain among everyone who had helped him, such as the Montcada or Entença families, the Genovese, the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller. Even though this imposing castle already existed in Moorish times, the building we can see today is practically the entire work of the

Knights Templar, a religious order that had important obligations there. The magnificent views over the old town and the Ebro valley from this walled complex allow us to understand the strategic importance of its location.

The Renaissance in Terra Alta

In inland areas of the Terres de l'Ebre, it is possible to enjoy the splendour of the Renaissance. While the great Templar fortresses and most of the churches were built in the Middle Ages, civilian architecture had its heyday in the 16th century, a legacy that is still conserved today in the form of remarkable buildings turned into town halls, with their exuberant galleries and porches.

The entrance to the Renaissance town hall of **Arnes** – one of the most exceptional in Terra Alta – is sheltered by a covered gallery with a porch of imposing pillars. The town hall also stands out for the classical decoration of the ornamental windows on the first floor and of the gallery on the second floor. The austere elegance of the building can be appreciated from the simple cornice and the gargoyles that protrude from the vertices of the roof. In front of the town hall, of particular note is the



Miravet



Arnes. Town hall

Baroque-style Church of Santa Magdalena; behind it there is a belvedere that overlooks the north side of the Els Ports Massif, where a giant silhouette of Les Roques de Benet mountain has been carved. Gothic elements can also be found in other parts of the village, in palatial houses and in the gates of Miquelet, Portalet, Sardinera and Sastre, which, in their time, were the entrances to the village.

The village of **Horta de Sant Joan**, surrounded by vineyards and with the outline of the mountains on the horizon, was articulated around the old castle that no longer exists. All that remains of the urban structure are the narrow, concentric streets that converge on the porticoed church square. The town hall stands out from the solemn, broad-walled buildings surrounding the square, most of which were built in the 16th century. In the middle of the town hall façade, a mural of Ferdinand VII of Spain commemorates the Cadiz Cortes (sessions of the Spanish legislative body that met in the safe haven of Cadiz). Just above, the window shutters of the loft can be made out; this is where the assembly room is located. On the ground floor, the old prison can be visited. There are other noteworthy

Renaissance buildings in this village such as the Casa Clúa, the Casa Pitarch and the Casa del Delme (or Casa de la Comanda), a former 16th/17th-century palace.

Horta de Sant Joan and Arnes, in the county of Terra Alta, are two rural villages that stand out for their Renaissance buildings and, above all, for the views that they offer over the northern part of the massif. It is worth following the Els Estrets river, flanked by impressive rock walls that enclose gorges of cold, crystalline water, where you can take a dip in hot weather.

The footsteps of Picasso

However, to talk of Horta de Sant Joan is to talk of Pablo Picasso. The painter discovered the village for the first time at the age of 16, when he was invited to go there by his fellow student Manuel Pallarès. Over the eight months that the young Picasso spent in this corner of Els Ports, he painted 60 canvases, most of which were inspired by the local landscapes. During a second stay some 11 years later, he created his first Cubist works; some of the places linked to the life and work of the

Malaga-born genius are still conserved in the old town. Today, the village's old hospital houses the **Centre Picasso**, where reproductions of canvases that the artist painted in Horta de Sant Joan are exhibited.

Horta is also a stop on the **Geniuses' Landscape Route**, an itinerary through places that inspired the legacy of four universal artists with close ties to various towns and villages in the counties of Tarragona. Besides Picasso, this cultural route helps visitors to interpret the oeuvre of Pau Casals in El Vendrell, of Joan Miró in Mont-roig del Camp and of Antoni Gaudí in Reus.

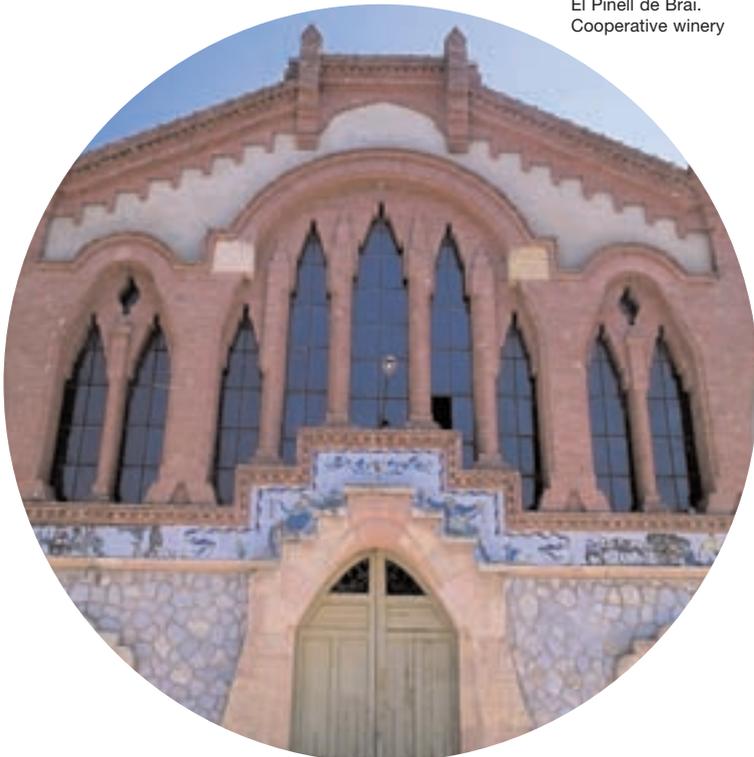
Great wine cathedrals

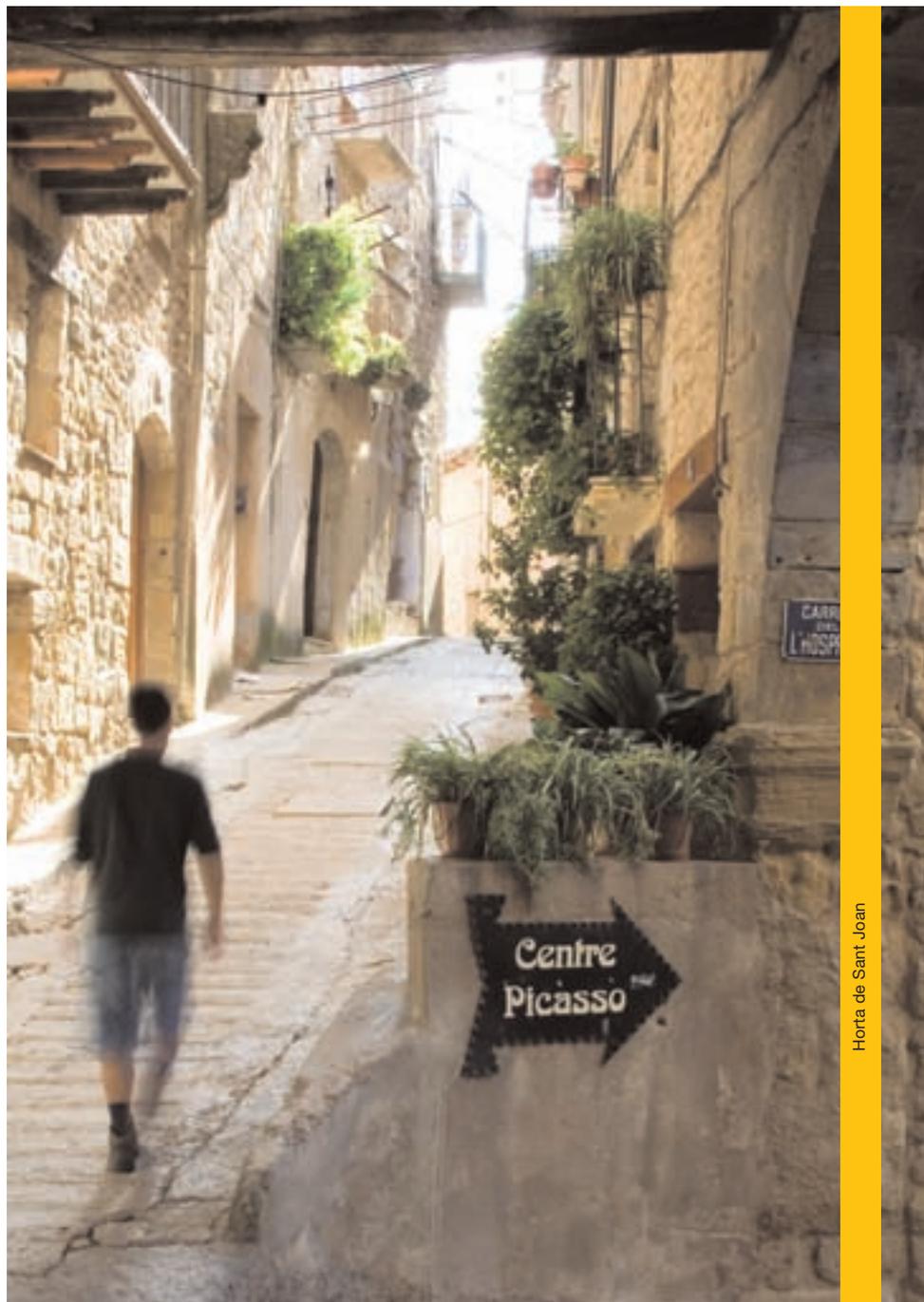
In the late 19th century, the architectural fervour of **Modernisme** (a style linked to European Art Nouveau) also reached the countryside, in areas

connected with cooperativism and the mechanisation of agricultural production processes, particularly for winemaking. In this context, the **wineries of Gandesa and El Pinell de Brai** in Terra Alta were built, where the drive and organisation of peasants in the first third of the 20th century was especially significant.

The El Pinell de Brai *Modernista* winery is the architectural expression of agrarian cooperativism in Catalonia. Commissioned to Cèsar Martinell in 1919, it combines elements of traditional Catalan architecture with the technical innovations developed by his master, the genius Antoni Gaudí. In line with the *Modernista* maxim, the building is a harmonious blend of aesthetics and functionality. Indeed, the sensation of internal spaciousness that it conveys and the light streaming through the ornamental windows together manage to recreate

El Pinell de Brai.
Cooperative winery





Horta de Sant Joan

the interior of a Gothic-style nave. A visit to the cooperative winery in Gandesa, also by Martinell, is highly recommended too. Completed in 1920, it stands out for the external structure of its roof, which is supported by Catalan vaults. On the outside, of particular note are the two huge water towers hovering above the roof and the green-glazed clay gargoyles.

At the Terra Alta Designation of Origin Regulatory Council, also in Gandesa, it is possible to visit the **Wine and Oil Space**, an interpretation centre that gives visitors an insight into the uniqueness of the area's wine and oil products, which are recognised by their quality label. In the centre's shop, it is possible to buy over 100 types of wine and oil, among which the area's cultivar products are of particular note, such as white wine made from Grenache grapes and oil made from *empeltre* olives.

More information

www.mhcat.cat
www.domustempli.com
www.terra-alta.cat
www.elpaisatgedelsgenis.cat

Terra Alta Designation of Origin wines



Gandesa. Cooperative winery





Routes with History

From prehistoric times to the destruction caused by the battles of the Spanish Civil War: this is the timeline that various areas across the four counties of the Terres de l'Ebre allow us to travel along.

Prehistoric sites

The Terres de l'Ebre are home to an exceptional exhibit of **cave paintings** forming part of the Levantine rock art of the Mediterranean basin. This style, which prevailed along the Mediterranean seaboard of the Iberian Peninsula and dates back to 10,000 B.C., is characterised by the reproduction of naturalistic scenes of hunting, dancing and gathering. Among the paintings that can be seen in villages such as **Tivissa**, **Freginals** and **El Perelló**, schematic and stylised depictions predominate. However, one of the main cave-painting sites in the south of Catalonia is located on the outskirts of **Ulldecona**, in the Serra de Godall hills, near the hermitage of La Pietat; in the hills' caves, there are more than 10 Neolithic shelters with painting that are nearly 8,000 years old. Along almost half a kilometre of walls and grottos, over 400 depictions

of hunting scenes can be found. Nearby, it is possible to visit the **Abrics de l'Ermita Cave Painting Interpretation Centre**, which helps to put the history of these prehistoric findings into context. In 1998, the Levantine rock art of the Mediterranean basin – and, therefore, the Terres de l'Ebre sites – were designated as World Heritage by UNESCO.

The Iberian Route

Until the arrival of the Romans, the Ilercavones were a tribal group that controlled the final stretch of the Ebro. They formed a dynamic community linked to river trading. Indeed, in antiquity, the Ebro was one of the few rivers of the Iberian Peninsula to be navigable with proper boats. Two thousand years later, a route promoted by the Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya allows visitors to discover the legacy that the Iberians left behind in **Vinebre**, **Tivissa**, **Gandesa** and **Alcanar**.

Of all the sites, the one that stands out most is the Ilercavone village of El Castellet de Banyoles, in the municipality of Tivissa. It is situated on the left



Ulldecona. Cave paintings near La Pietat sanctuary



The old town of Corbera d'Ebre

bank of the river and, because of the wealth of ceramics and metalwork found there, it is believed to have been founded in the 4th century B.C. Excavations have revealed an urban layout in which the centre is free from buildings. At the entrance, of particular note are two pentagonal towers; these are the only example of this type of structure in the Iberian world. A tour around the site allows visitors to get an insight into the history of this settlement where earrings, bracelets, rings, mirror handles, small sculptures and coins have been uncovered. These are now exhibited at the headquarters of the Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya in Barcelona.

Located further inland, on the other side of the Ebro, is the El Coll del Moro site, in the municipality of Gandesa. Further south, much closer to the estuary, of particular note are the ruins of the Iberian village of La Moleta del Remei. There, the walled complex has been conserved, with an enclosed centre of streets and houses; the latter are rectangular and built against the wall. Located in the old town of Alcanar, in the county of Montsià, is the Casa O'Connor. Here, it is possible to visit an interpretation centre where some of the objects found at the La Moleta del Remei site are exhibited.

Battle of the Ebro

In 1938, the counties of Terra Alta and of Ribera d'Ebre witnessed first-hand one of the most decisive conflicts of the Spanish Civil War: the Battle of the Ebro. Today, the signs of that conflict can still be seen in the façades of many houses, in the trenches dug throughout the hills and mountains, and in the shelters built along the banks of the river. A visit to these spaces – and to the interpretation centres that put them into context – allows people to get an insight into the events where they actually took place.

The most representative Battle of the Ebro location is undoubtedly the old town of **Corbera d'Ebre**, which is in ruins. The village, situated on top of a hill overlooking the plains of Terra Alta, has become a silent witness to the armed violence of the war. The village was completely

razed to the ground and, once the war was over, a new village was built on the skirt of the mountain. In order to understand the whys and wherefores of those ruins and to get an insight into the importance of the battle in the context of the Spanish Civil War, it is worth visiting the 115 Days Interpretation Centre located at the foot of the old town of Corbera. It is an instructional space that introduces visitors to the dynamics of the conflict: the combats, the rearguard and the consequences for the civilian population, among others.

This historical itinerary can continue on to El **Pinell de Brai**, where the Voices of the Front Interpretation Centre takes a closer look at the role of the press and of propaganda in the war's development. Hill 705 of the Serra de Pàndols mountain range, a strategic point for controlling the valley during the conflict, can be found in the municipality. In addition, other interpretation centres can be visited in various towns and villages of Terra Alta. In **Batea**, the exhibition entitled "Blood Hospitals" explains how assistance was organised to help injured people and tells us about the healthcare network created around the Battle of the Ebro. In **Vilalba dels Arcs**, the exhibition

entitled "Soldiers in the Trenches" gives visitors an insight into day-to-day life in the trenches throughout the long battle. The Internationals in the Ebro Interpretation Centre in **Fatarella** analyses aspects of international politics and diplomacy, and particularly the volunteer movement that emerged in response to the non-intervention policy of democracies. Before any visit, you should always confirm the opening times, since most of the aforementioned centres are not open every day of the year.

Alcanar. La Moleta del Remei



Batea. "Blood Hospitals" exhibition

Terres de l'Ebre map





Centre Picasso

Parc Natural dels Ports

Baix Ebre

Montblai

Pais Valencià

0 10 km

MAR MEDITERRANEA

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