



# Pirineus

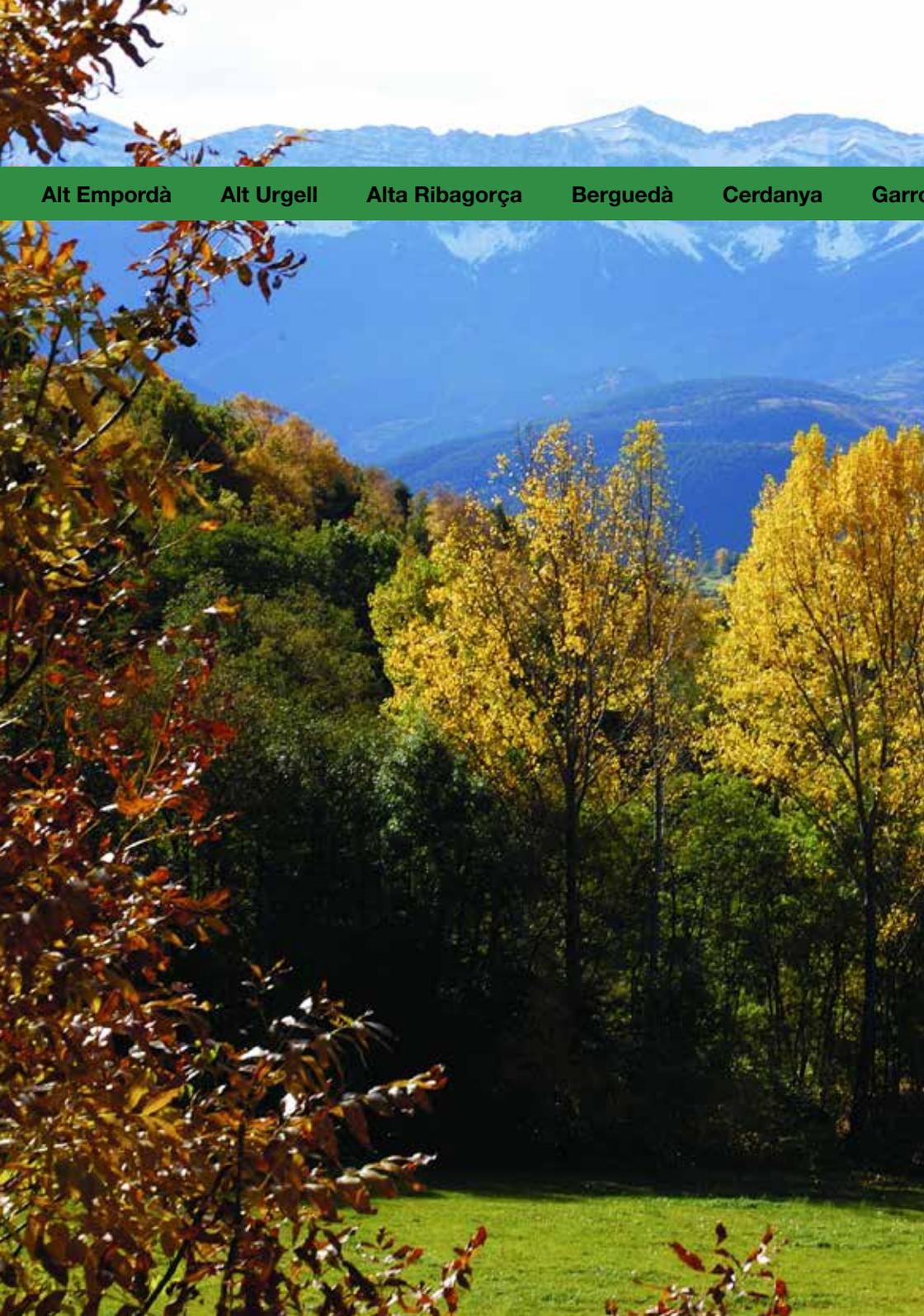
Catalonia





**Catalonia**

**Pyrenees**



Alt Empordà

Alt Urgell

Alta Ribagorça

Berguedà

Cerdanya

Garro

otxa

Pallars Jussà

Pallars Sobirà

Ripollès

Solsonès

Val d'Aran





## The Catalan Pyrenees, a vast mountain range

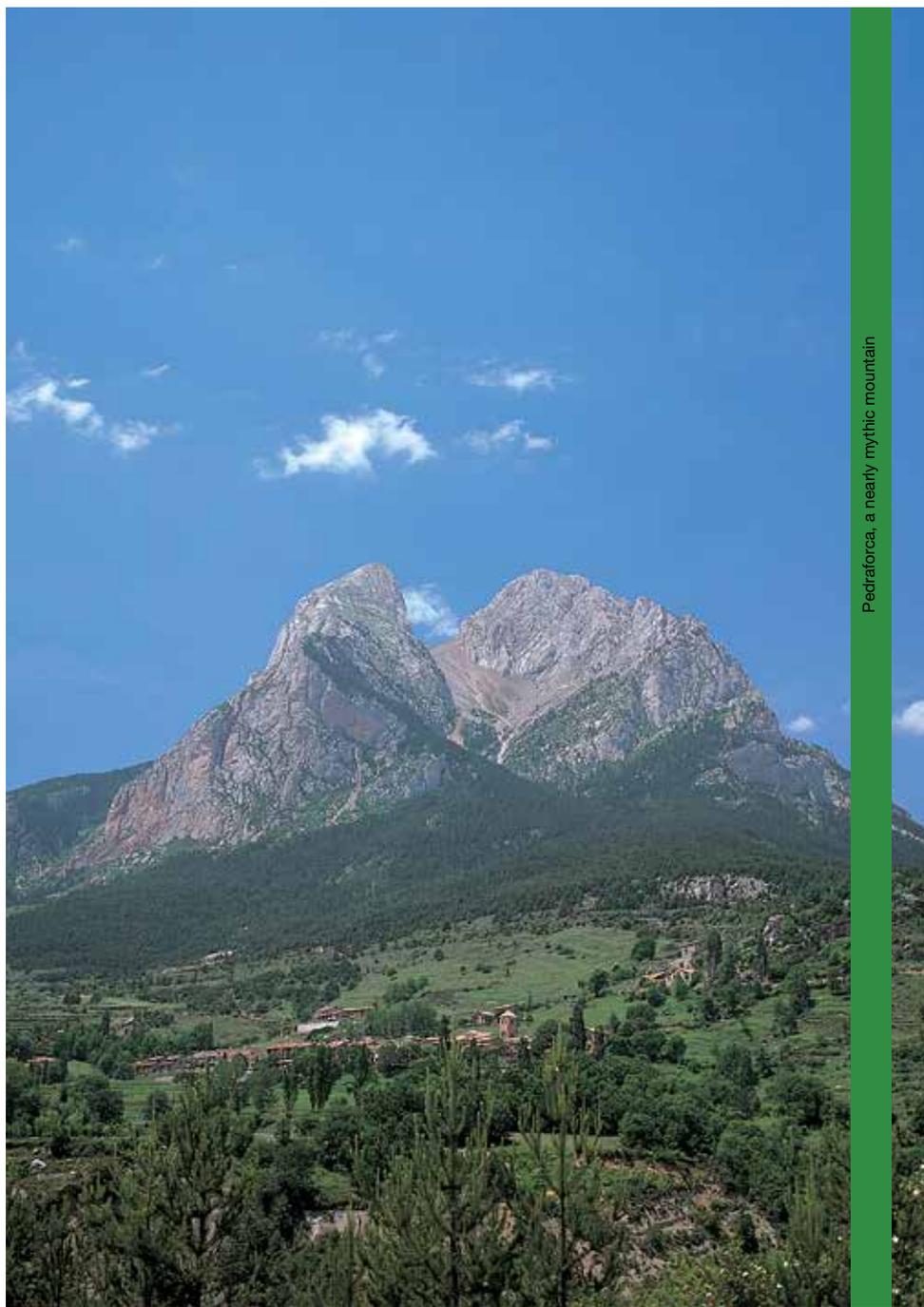
The Catalan Pyrenees is a land of rich landscapes full of contrasts, with spaces of natural interest, special protection reserves and protected areas; some Romanesque architecture declared World Heritage; and valleys full of history. Its excellent gastronomy and hundred-year-old festivals and celebrations make the Catalan Pyrenees an unrivalled tourist destination.

To the east, the Tramontana northerly wind caresses the bronzed coastline of the Albera mountains. Inland, volcanoes punctuate the Garrotxa landscape. Towering above the sanctuary in Núria, the Pyrenees soar to almost three thousand metres in height. The Cadí and Moixeró ranges, as well as the Pedraforca massif, conceal natural alpine treasures as if they were secluded on an island. Catalonia's highest mountain peak is Pica d'Estats, reaching 3,143 metres. A stone's throw away lies Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park, a paradisiacal landscape of lakes. And, to the north, Val d'Aran lays bare to the plains of Gascony. From Cap de Creus peninsula to the views over Aneto, the Catalan Pyrenees boast a rich diversity of landscapes.

The climate varies from valley to valley, from the crystalline waters of the Mediterranean where the

mountains meet the sea to the Atlantic winds that sweep the clouds as far as Val d'Aran. Mention must also be made of the snow capping the lofty peaks for six months of the year. The sunlight, temperature, precipitation and human activity determine the rich flora and, with it, the fauna.

The Pyrenees were also populated of old. Testimony to every era is profuse, from the dolmens and menhirs in the Albera mountains to the latest reservoirs. What's more, the history of the land came into being there. Romanesque churches dating from that time still survive to this day in virtually every town and village. And modern times are manifested in an exuberant culture, brimming with legends, gastronomic delights, song, dance and popular festivities. In the pages that follow we endeavour to whet your appetite. We cannot aspire to anything more, as the entire repertoire is endless. A land steeped in character, the Catalan Pyrenees were coveted by those in pursuit of a relaxing or adventure-fuelled break. The mountains are strewn with trails, snow sought out by skiing enthusiasts in winter, walls for climbing, and rivers to explore by kayak. From beginning to end, the Pyrenees abound in an infinite array of tourist attractions.



Pedraforca, a nearly mythic mountain



## Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park

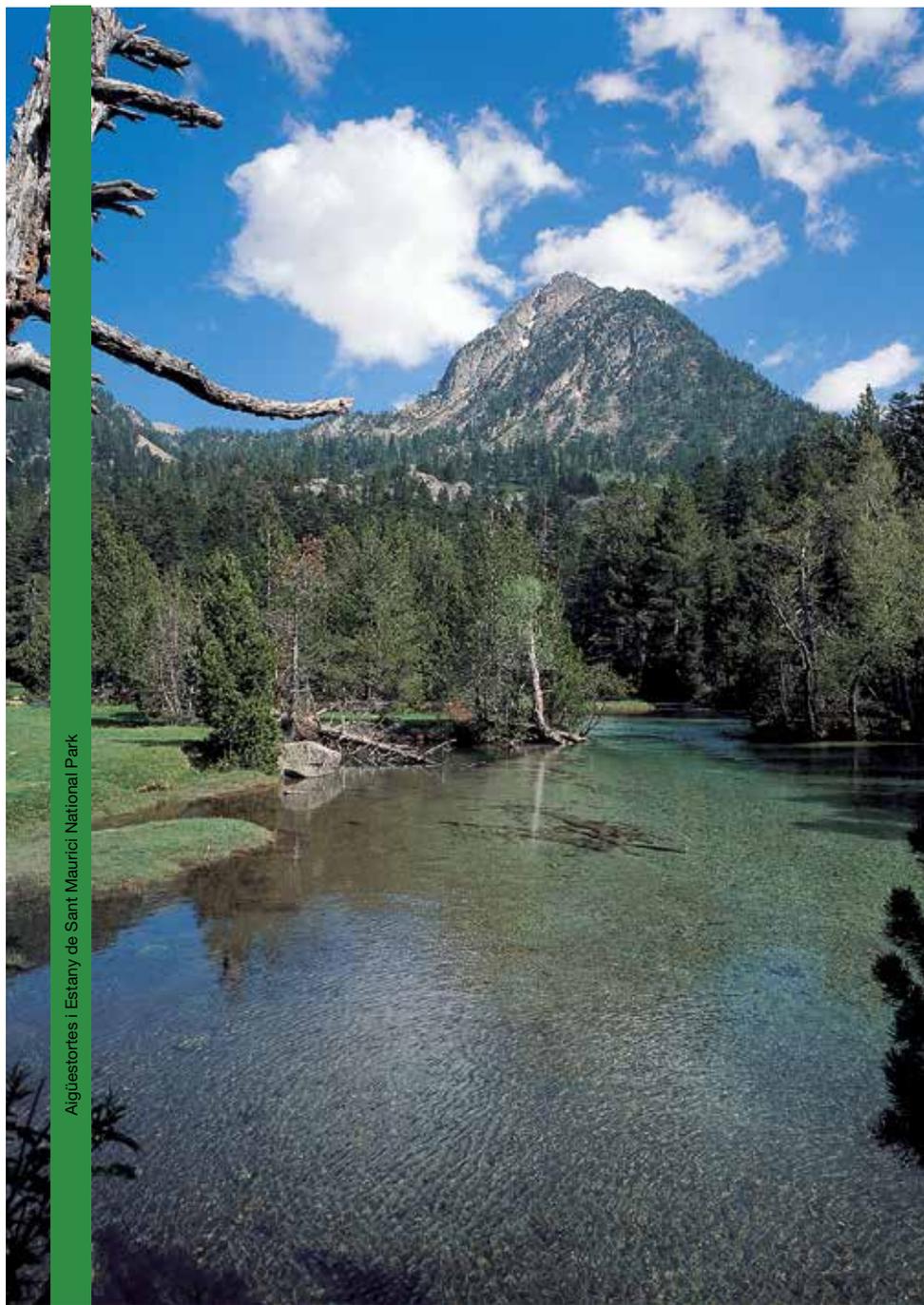
With majestic peaks rising to three thousand metres, cliffs, scree, snow drifts, hundreds of lakes, waters churning into spray and foam or drifting lazily, meadows, forests of black pine with an undergrowth of bilberries and rhododendron, fir and beech trees, the lizard, the capercaillie and a gliding bearded vulture, the National Park boasts a rich and unique high mountain landscape which attracts thousands of visitors year on year.

Over five hundred million years ago, the folding commenced which was to form the Pyrenees mountain range. Nevertheless, it was the force of the ice which was to shape the mountains and valleys of the National Park. The mighty **glaciers** descended through the valleys for tens of kilometres, reaching several hundred metres in diameter and gouging steep-sided crevices into the landscape. The final throes of the ice age ended ten thousand years ago. When the glaciers melted, they left behind deep cirques and u-shaped valleys with flat floors and vertical walls. On every shelf,

lagoons bear testimony to the glaciers' presence. The National Park is home to hundreds of **lakes**, a concentration not found elsewhere in the mountain range.

Early on, vegetation took root in the empty spaces. Birch, oak and aspen, as well as beech, red pine and fir trees climbed the hillsides. Black pine spread even higher with an undergrowth of bilberries, rhododendron and juniper berries, while the higher peaks gave way to meadows carpeted with gentiana, carnations and buttercups. The water violet took root in the peat bogs. Houseleeks and saxifrages grew amidst the scree while moss and lichen sprang up on mountain summits and smooth stone walls.

Each area also has its own fauna. Lizards inhabit the mountain summits and open ridge tops. Ptarmigans hide in snow-covered hillsides while golden eagles, bearded vultures and vultures sweep through the sky. The shrill whistle of the marmot



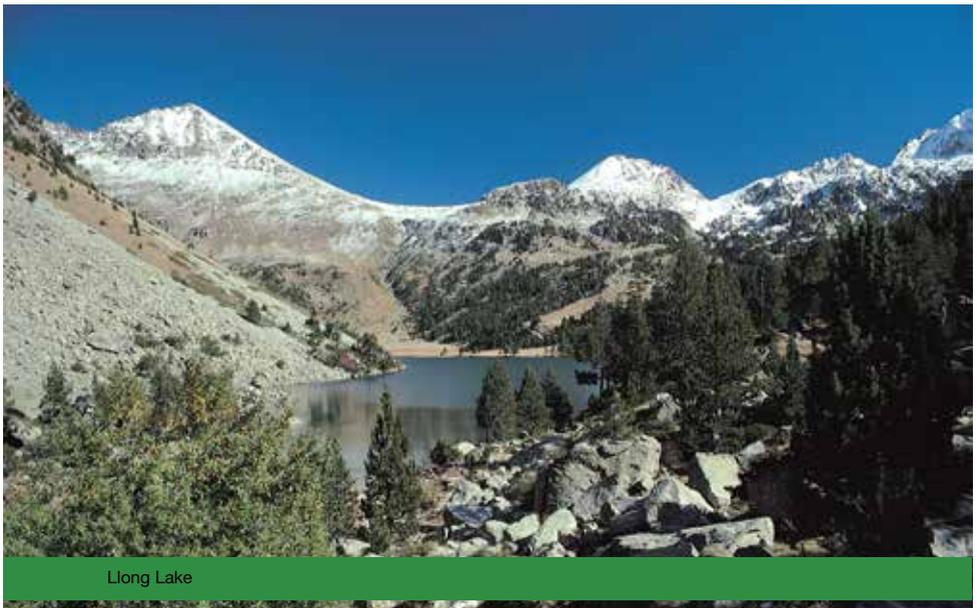
is often heard in the fields. In the woodlands, where wild boars and roe deer lurk, the tapping of the woodpecker or clucking of the capercaillie at mating time can be heard. Otters prey on trout in the rivers.

The high and unforgiving terrain meant few people set foot there, except shepherds who brought flocks there to pasture every summer for centuries. Huts bear testimony to their passage. Woodcutters and hunters also ventured there, and the development of hydroelectric power at the beginning of the last century brought forces to dam the lakes and extend the pipes to direct the water downwards to the hydroelectric plants. Such frenzy gave rise to the need to protect the high mountain landscape. Therefore, Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park was constituted by decree in 1955, the only park boasting said status in Catalonia, which was reclassified by Law 7/1988 on 30 March 1988 by the Government of Catalonia.

The National Park sits astride the counties of Alta Ribagorça to Pallars Sobirà, taking in the counties

of Pallars Jussà and Val d'Aran; covering a surface area of 40,852 hectares of which 14,119 hectares correspond to the park and the remaining 26,733 hectares to the buffer zone. As its name suggests, it is split into two main zones: Aigüestortes in Alta Ribagorça, with an entry point via Vall de Boí, and Sant Maurici in Pallars Sobirà, with an entry point via Vall d'Espot. Each zone has a park information centre.

The Aigüestortes zone features pinnacles rising above three thousand metres. In addition to Punta Alta, mention should be made of the crest line linking Comaloformo and Besiberris. The valley receiving the most visitors is the valley stretching from Vall de Boí and following the Sant Nicolau River. It can be accessed on foot or by taxi and it takes you to Llebreta Lake and the plains where the river meanders and branches off into many streams and torrents, hence its name "Aigüestortes", which means "twisted waters". The valley continues towards Llong Lake as far as Portarró d'Espot pass, where it changes basin and moves to the park's eastern valley slope.



Llong Lake



Marmot

Common Foxglove (*Digitalis Purpurea*)



The Sant Maurici zone can be reached by taxi from Espot or on foot. Sant Maurici Lake is surrounded by meadows and woodland. It lies at the foot of the towering pinnacles Els Encantats, a highly fragmented calcareous rock formation. Legend has it that the mountains represent two hunters who turned to stone for not having attended Mass. The track leading to Sant Maurici Lake continues upwards to the Amitges lakes beneath the mountains of the same name, which draw many climbing enthusiasts. Another entrance to the park from Pallars Sobirà is found below Bonaigua pass and climbs to Gerber Lake amid a luxuriant woodland of fir trees. Access to the park can also be gained via Pallars Jussà above Vall Fosca. A cable car ascends from Sallente reservoir to Gento Lake. The descent can be made on foot, first by following the tracks of the old narrow gauge railway, which transported goods to the reservoirs; then, the path descends straight down to Sallente.

In the Val d'Aran zone, mention should be made of the Montardo summit, which is easily made out. However, Gran Tuc de Colomers surpasses its height by one hundred metres and stands at 2,963 metres. The pinnacle towers above a large cirque where the streams cascade from one lake to the other (over sixty lakes) before spilling into the Garonne River.

Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park is a gorgeous area, a natural jewel, a prodigious combination of stone, water and vegetation. At the same time, it constitutes a fragile environment susceptible to the hazards posed by so much tourism. Activities likely to leave any traces are to be avoided. Those wishing to stay overnight should make advance bookings in the mountain refuges situated within the park. The new trail which links the nine mountain refuges, popularity.

It should not be forgotten that the National Park is an alpine landscape: a storm can brew in a matter

Pastures, a natural resource of the Pyrenees



of hours, temperatures can plummet and snowfall is possible at any time of year. Therefore, visitors should always be well-equipped for any eventuality.



Sant Maurici Lake



Montardo Peak



Sant Nicolau River in the Aigüestortes zone



**Protected  
natural spaces.  
Nature at its purest**

The Catalan Pyrenees play host to myriad natural settings of great interest in terms of their environmental, cultural and architectural value. Some of these locations are afforded various levels of protection in order to preserve the quality and interest of the landscape, the importance of the flora or fauna or the vestiges of human heritage.

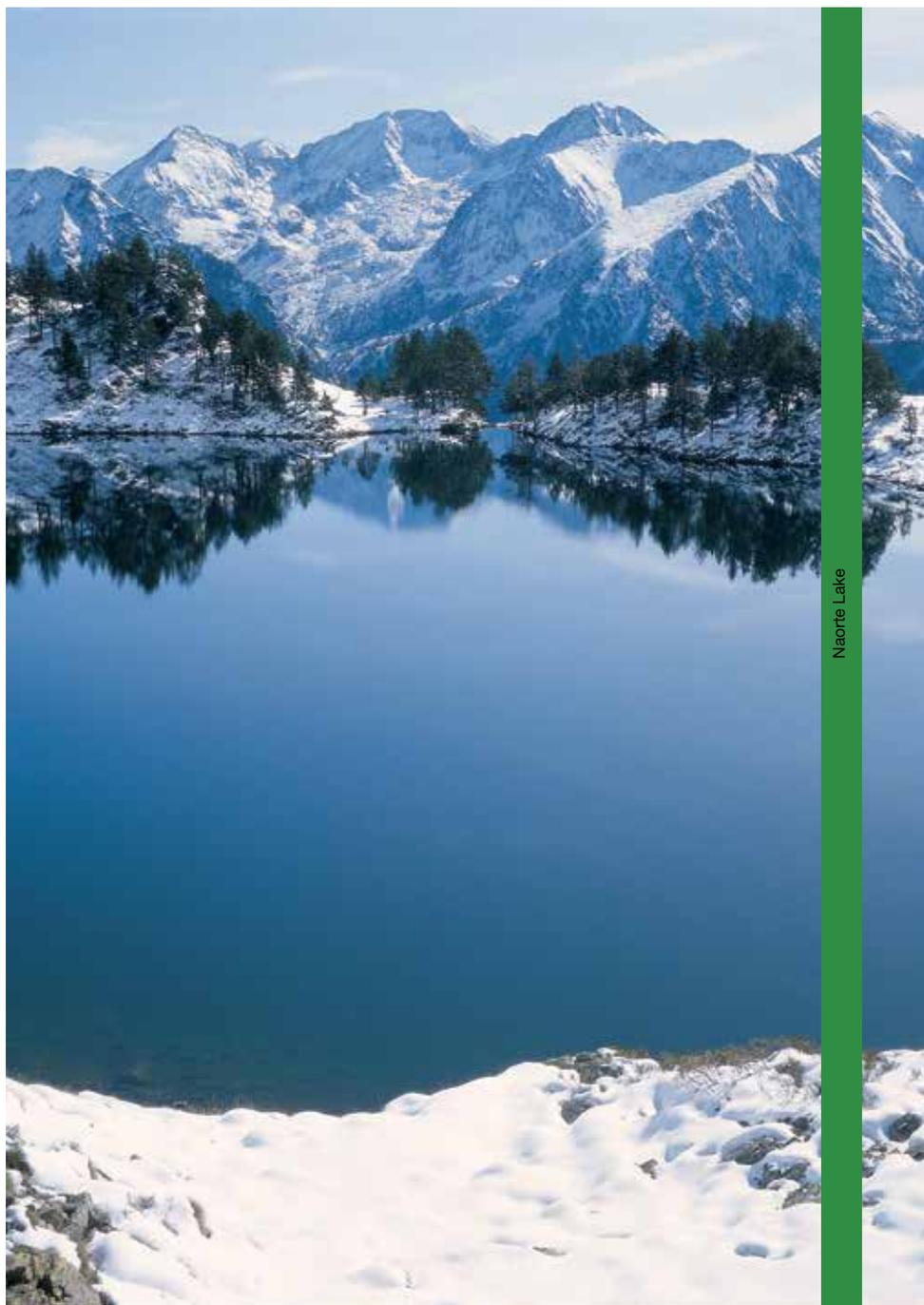
**Alt Pirineu Natural Park** constitutes the largest natural park in Catalonia. It covers almost seventy thousand hectares of high mountain landscape which has remained virtually unspoilt to the present day. The park is home to an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna and is set in the heart of the Pyrenees and spanning the counties of Pallars Sobirà and Alt Urgell.

Among the most treasured spots is **Vall de Bonabé**, home to dense forests of fir and black pine, and **Vall d'Àrreu**, which boasts a magnificent natural landscape that is virtually untouched and only accessible on foot. The **Noarre cirque** is a place which is practically intact, and the **Boavi plain**, at the confluence of various valleys, features a rich

variety of vegetation. The **Virós forest** is yet another of the park's natural jewels, and also **Vall de Santa Magdalena**, featuring settlements, farmhouses and highly esteemed chapels.

After several years' absence, the brown bear has returned to roam through the land, which is also home to the largest population of the enigmatic capercaillie in the country. Other species include the golden eagle, the bearded vulture, Tengmalm's owl, the Ptarmigan, ungulates such as the ibex, the red sheep, the roe deer, the fallow deer, the red deer and the wild boar. The extensive network of rivers and lakes are home to a wealth of fish species such as trout, and some one thousand five hundred species of flora are found, a large number of which are endemic to the Pyrenees.

The most emblematic and highest mountains in the Pyrenees stand in the most elevated area of the park, such as **Pica d'Estats**, rising to 3,143 metres in height, and constituting Catalonia's highest pinnacle. Visitors can become acquainted with the park first hand by following the extensive



Naorte Lake



Ars



Tradicional architecture

network of signposted paths and trails on foot or by way of other sporting activities such as mountain biking, snowshoeing, Nordic or Alpine skiing, horseback riding or river pursuits. Nevertheless, one of the park's main cultural attractions are its myriad Romanesque **churches and chapels** dotted throughout the region, such as Sant Pere del Burgal, Sant Serni de Baiasca, Santa Maria d'Àneu, Sant Pau d'Esterrí de Cardós, Santa Maria de Ginestare, Sant Joan d'Isil (on the banks of the Noguera Pallaresa River) and Santa Maria de Ribera, to name but a few.

The towns and villages preserve interesting examples of **traditional architecture** and a number of noteworthy historic sites such as the fortified medieval village of Escaló and the historic quarter of Castellbò, which exemplify older systems of urban organisation. Sawmills, the remains of forges, mills, pigeon lofts and coal bunkers are other examples of the use of natural resources in these valleys.

**Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park** straddles the Cadí and Moixeró ranges, the Pedraforca massif (declared a Natural Site of National Interest) and Vall de Gresolet, as well as a large part of Tossa d'Alp and Puigllançada. The northern face of Cadí, featuring enormous, almost vertical crags and deep wooded valleys, is one of the park's most emblematic spots, not to mention the silhouette of **Pedraforca**, which stands out as a symbol for mountaineering in Catalonia. Other spots of magnificent beauty include the Cadí meadows and Roca de l'Ordiguier on the northern face of Cadí, and Gréixer valley on the southern side, above which rises Moixeró and which is crowned by the elegant **Penyes Altes de Moixeró**.

A large number of towns and villages have retained their **traditional architecture**, such as Bagà, which was the capital of the Barons of Pinós and features part of the medieval walls and a beautiful porticoed square, and Bellver de Cerdanya, centre of a former mayoralty which dominates the Segre

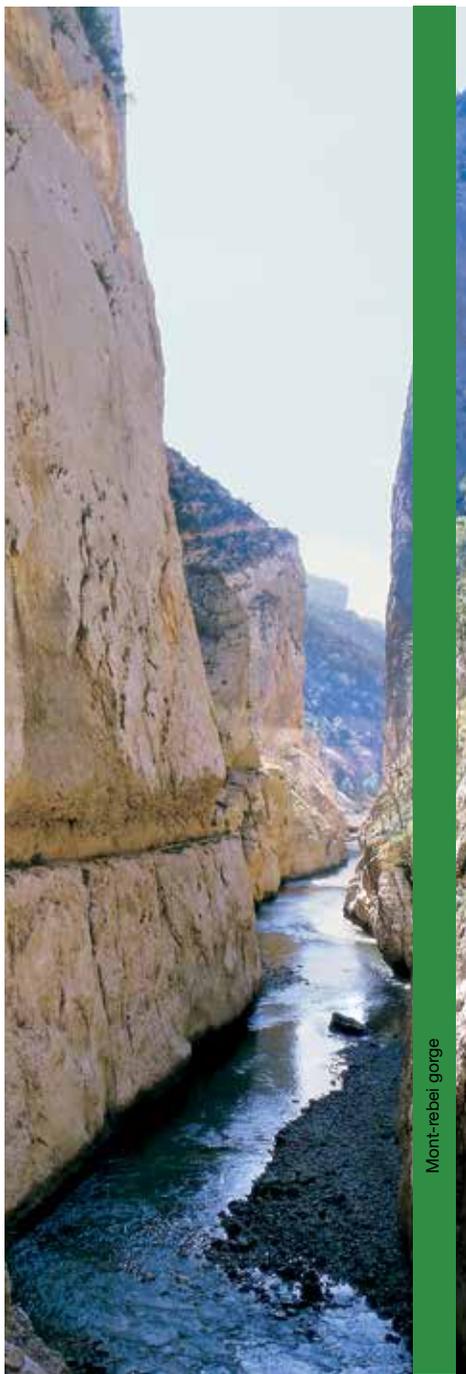


plain. Other small mountain settlements, all set amid enchanting settings, boast fine examples of civic and religious architecture: Adraén, El Querforadat, Cornellana, Cava, Ansovell, Gisclareny, Gréixer, Gósol, Gresolet, Bastanist, the Monastery of Sant Llorenç prop Bagà, the church of Talló, Sant Julià de Pedra, Bor, Coborriu, Tartera, Mosoll, Talltendre, etc.

**Albera and Cap de Creus Natural Park.** These two locations represent the last outlet of the Pyrenees before spilling into the Mediterranean. The Albera massif, declared a Natural Site of National Interest, forms a natural boundary between two extensive Catalan plains: Empordà and Roussillon, taking in peaks such as Puig Neulós (1,257 metres). The western area, from Requesens, features one of the most humid and elevated areas carpeted in cork oak groves, holm oak woods, chestnut groves, oak woods, beech groves and alpine meadows. The eastern area is developed around the Monastery of Sant Quirze de Colera. Albera boasts one of the densest concentrations of megalithic monuments in Europe.

The Cap de Creus peninsula features a spectacular maritime landscape combining the beauty of coastal and inland settings. Diverse habitats exist side by side, therefore giving rise to a great diversity of species, some of which are endemic to the area. The Monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes is the crowning glory of the area's rich architectural heritage. A stone's throw away lies Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park, the second largest wetland area in Catalonia, with look-out points over the lagoons and floodable meadows.

**La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park.** A protected and populated area which constitutes the finest example of volcanic terrain on the Iberian Peninsula, this park contains some thirty strombolic volcanic cones, a number of explosive craters and basaltic lava flows. Noteworthy are the basalt cliffs of Castellfolit de la Roca and Sant Joan les Fonts, the volcanoes of Croscat, Santa Margarida and Montsacopa, and the beech wood Fageda d'en Jordà, immortalised in a poem by Joan Maragall.



Mont-rebei gorge

To the north Garrotxa is a more rugged wilderness of crags and gullies, with places as emblematic as Sant Aniol d'Aguja and Vall del Bac.

**Mont-rebei gorge.** The Noguera Ribagorçana River, on passing through the Montsec mountains, carved this deep gorge in Catalonia which remains intact without being crossed by any road, railway or electricity line. Visitors can enjoy this site of spectacular beauty by means of a track partially dug out of the rock. The walls of the gorge reach vertical heights in excess of five hundred metres.



Arsèguel and the Cadí range in the background



## Val d'Aran Small Occitan country

Lying at the western end of the Catalan Pyrenees, facing northwards, the valley of Val d'Aran is home to a whole host of unique attractions not found elsewhere in Catalonia.

Its orientation allows the Atlantic winds to blow through it laden with moisture. Rain in Val d'Aran falls more regularly here than in the rest of the Catalan Pyrenees according to the whims of the Mediterranean. The water from rivers, streams and torrents empties into the Garonne River. This river increases in volume and winds through the Aquitaine plains before draining into the Atlantic.

Like the clouds and the rain, commerce and culture had free reign in the north. In the south, on the other hand, the mountains made communication difficult with Catalonia and Aragon. For centuries, the snows blocked mountain passes for six months of the year. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Romans entered the valley following the Garonne River and that the language of Aran, Aranese, is a **Gascon** dialect, now a dialectal variant of Occitan, the language in which medieval troubadours

composed their work. **History**, however, linked Val d'Aran with the earldoms of Aragon and Catalonia. In 1313, James II granted Val d'Aran a charter known as the "*Querimonia* privilege", which established considerable tax exemptions. The valley was divided into six terçons (geographical division particular to Val d'Aran), each of which elected a conselher (councillor) to the Conselh Generau (General Council), an institution which remained in existence until 1835 and was restored in 1991.

Upon departing the Vielha tunnel, the slopes are greener and the climate changes, as do the towns and villages as evident from the pointed pyramid-shaped roofs crowning the bell towers. The original layout and architecture of many towns and villages still remain today. On the other hand, **Vielha**, the chief town, at the centre of the valley, is modern and exuberant. Its name is left over from its Roman origins, and the Romanesque and Gothic features in the Church of Sant Miquèu harken to its medieval past. Inside, the finest work of art is Crist de Mijaran, a carved Romanesque figure which is part of a Descent from the Cross. The town's historic



Gausac



Arties ↑

Crist de Mijaran in the Church of Sant Miquèu in Vielha ↓



quarter is home to notable mansions such as Casa de Santesmasses, also known as Tor deth Generau Martinhon. It houses the Val d'Aran Museum, which provides a comprehensive overview of the region.

Artistic heritage is speckled throughout the valley. Near the French border, on the left bank of the Garonne, the town of Bossòst retains the 12th-century Church of Era Mair de Diu dera Purificacion, a magnificent example of Romanesque architecture featuring three apses with Lombard decoration, one of two doors featuring three arches, carved columns and capitals, a tympanum showing the Pantocrator and the Evangelists. Vilamòs, perched atop the right bank, also has one of the oldest Romanesque churches, which is now home to the Casa Joanchiquet that has been converted into a museum.

Upstream on the Garonne, are the hamlets of Betren and Gausac, virtually joined to Vielha. Betren is home to the Church of Sant Estèue with a Gothic doorway featuring voussoirs adorned with figures. Gausac preserves the Gothic Church of Sant Martin, characterised by a robust bell tower

that served as a watchtower. It is not unique in this respect, as other churches also served as fortresses such as the fortified site surrounding the **Church of Santa Maria d'Arties**. Romanesque in style, it retains its basilical layout and a Gothic altarpiece painted by the Vielha master and wall paintings dedicated to the Last Judgement in Late Gothic style. Arties developed around it and now spreads out in a mosaic of slate roofs. Foremost among the old 16th-century mansions are Ço de Paulet and the solid tower of the home of the Portolà family, from which came Gaspar de Portolà, the first governor of California. Arties also features the Church of Sant Joan with a Romanesque base that evolved an austere Gothic style. It has been refurbished as a venue for temporary exhibitions.

In **Salardú**, special mention should be given to the Church of Sant Andreu in Romanesque-Gothic transition style with three naves, three apses and an eight-sided bell tower. The church's interior houses a magnificent Romanesque Christ, reminiscent of that of the Church of Casarilh downriver, and Late Gothic wall paintings restored in the last century.



Torà River

Upriver lies the neighbouring hamlet of Unha with the Romanesque Church of Santa Eulària, which has a bulb-roofed bell tower. Cattle raising and forestry were the mainstays of the valley's economy, though it also had a long-standing **mining tradition** with the extraction of iron, cobalt, galena and, above all, zinc and lead. Mina Victòria, in the northern part of the municipality of Arres, bears testimony to this, and has recently been restored. Visitors can also see the Fabrica dera Lan (Woollen Mill) in Vielha, which was driven by the waters of the Nere River, and the Grain Mill in Salardú.

Besides eking out a living, the townsfolk called for festivals and dances, and many traditions are still celebrated today. In chronological order, spring marks the celebration of Magràs or Carnival, followed by the Holy Week procession in Bossòst. On 13 May, the Holy Cross Festival takes place in Salardú in which crucifixes from the eight villages of the municipality are assembled around the figure of Christ on the Cross. On 23 June, the villages of Les and Arties (see section on festivals) are

the scene of the most spectacular celebrations to mark the summer solstice. In addition, each town or village has its own festival. The more modern festivals include the Hèsta d'Aran on 17 June to mark the restoration of the Conselh Generau. Also deeply rooted is the Corsa Aran per sa Lengua, a language race advocating the promotion of Aranese and bringing together runners from the various terçons, which culminates in a concert.

Yet there is more to Val d'Aran than simply towns and villages, work and festivals. Visitors must explore the **mountains**. A third of the terrain in Val d'Aran rises above two thousand metres. In the months of snowfall, thousands of skiing enthusiasts take to the slopes of the Baqueira Beret ski resort. However, the options do not end there. Hikers must visit the Artiga de Lin and Uelhs deth Joèu, where the gushing springs of the Aneto glacier rise. Montcorbison, a stone's throw from Vielha, offers an easy ascent and commands magnificent views. Mentioned in the chapter on Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park are Montardo

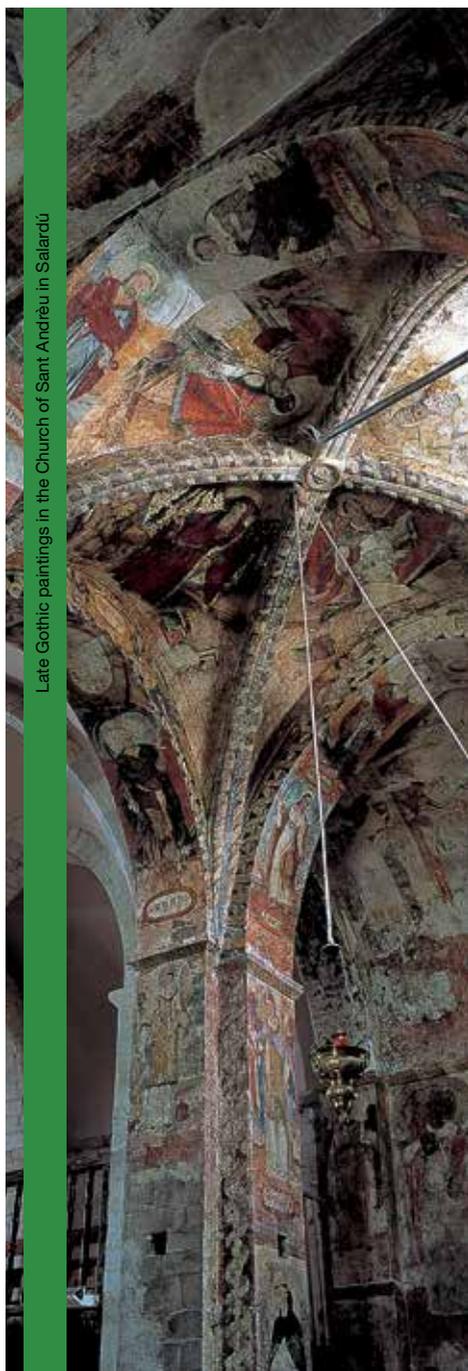
Unha



Popular dances in Arròs

peak and the Colomèrs cirque featuring an extensive lacustrine area. On the slopes closing off the valley to the north, a classic excursion from the Beret plain to the Sanctuary of La Mair de Diu de Montgarri can be made on foot or using snowshoes in winter. Hectare upon hectare of skiable slopes are available for cross-country skiing enthusiasts. In summer, the north of the valley is a little-known area with alluring peaks such as Tuc de Maubèrme.

To replenish your energy after an active day, the valley's **cuisine** offers a superb varied menu, which is described in the section on cuisine. Further information pertaining to the cuisine in addition to the other facets of Val d'Aran is outlined in the book dedicated to the valley in this same collection.



Late Gothic paintings in the Church of Sant Andreu in Salaradú

## Vall de Boí, World Heritage

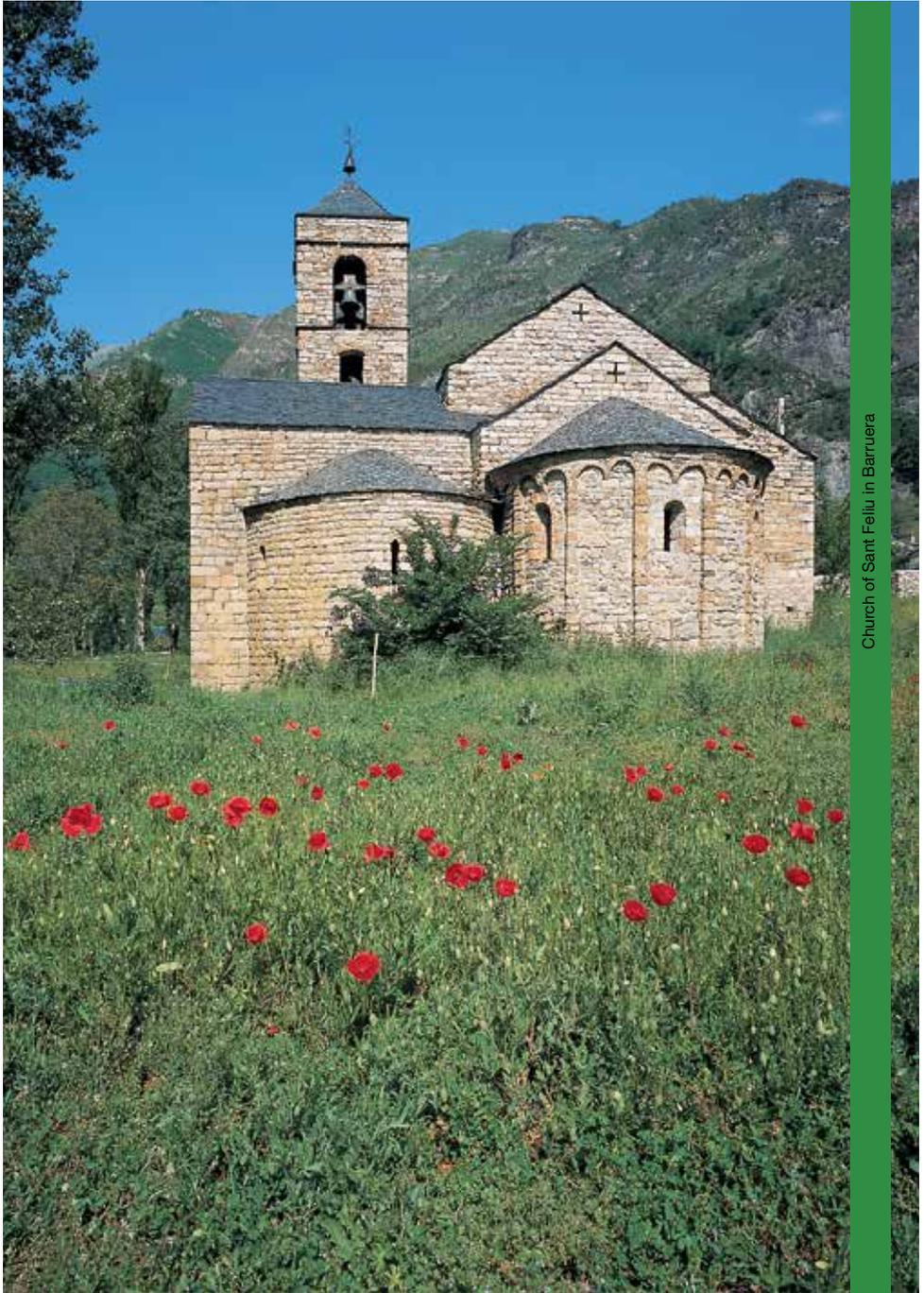
The finest moment of Romanesque architecture reached its apogee in Vall de Boí, which features an unusual concentration of churches built during the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries. It retains its bell towers, elegant external decoration and internationally renowned religious paintings. A group of nine churches in Vall de Boí (Assumpció de Còll, Santa Maria de Cardet, Sant Feliu de Barruera, the Church of La Nativitat and the Chapel of Sant Quirc de Durro, Santa Eulàlia d'Erill la Vall, Sant Joan de Boí, Santa Maria de Taüll and Sant Climent de Taüll) were designated World Heritage by UNESCO.

**Jewels of the Catalan Romanesque.** The churches were constructed on the initiative of the lords of Erill, feudal lords documented from 1077 who exerted control over the entire valley. The valley's remoteness proved conducive to preserving a large part of the current set of buildings. Between 1919 and 1923, the Barcelona Museum Board, on assessing the risk of robbery, initiated the transfer of most of the pictorial work. The **frescoes** were removed and are currently housed in the National Art Museum of Catalonia

(MNAC) in Barcelona. The **churches** of Santa Maria and Sant Climent in Taüll were declared Historical-Artistic Monuments in 1931. Years later the Government of Catalonia declared the entire set of Romanesque churches an Asset of Cultural Interest. An architectural restoration initiative was instigated in 1994, and in 2000 the site was officially designated World Heritage by UNESCO.

**Route through the Vall de Boí.** One of the first Romanesque churches in the valley is found in Còll, lying on the outskirts of the village. The small church features a 12th-century Romanesque doorway. A little further up the valley is **Cardet**, which is home to the Romanesque Church of Santa Maria, with a single nave and a considerably high apse; its interior contains a statue of the Blessed Virgin of Cabanasses.

The Church of Sant Feliu lies a bit outside the village of **Barruera**. It contains a single nave and highly robust bell tower with a square base. **Durro** is reached via a secondary road. The 12th-century Romanesque Church of La Mare de Déu de Durro has a single nave with barrel vaults and a porticoed lateral porch. The bell tower



Church of Sant Feliu in Barruera

Church of Santa Maria in Cardet



features a square base with Lombard arches; the church's doorway is formed by archivolts on two sets of columns. A 12th-century Romanesque statute of the Blessed Virgin from the Church of Durro, which was part of a Descent from the Cross, is currently on display at the MNAC.

**Erill la Vall** lies on the right bank of the Noguera de Tor River. Its 12th-century Church of Santa Eulàlia exemplifies a jewel of Romanesque architecture in Lombard style with a single nave, a central apse and two apsidal chapels in the shape of a cross. It features a porch with semi-circular arcs and a highly stylised bell tower. At the beginning of the 20th century, a set of 12th-century Romanesque wooden carvings, representing the Descent from the Cross, were discovered in the sacristy. Today, the collection is divided between the Vic Episcopal Museum and the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC). However, the church's interior is also home to a faithful reproduction of the works.

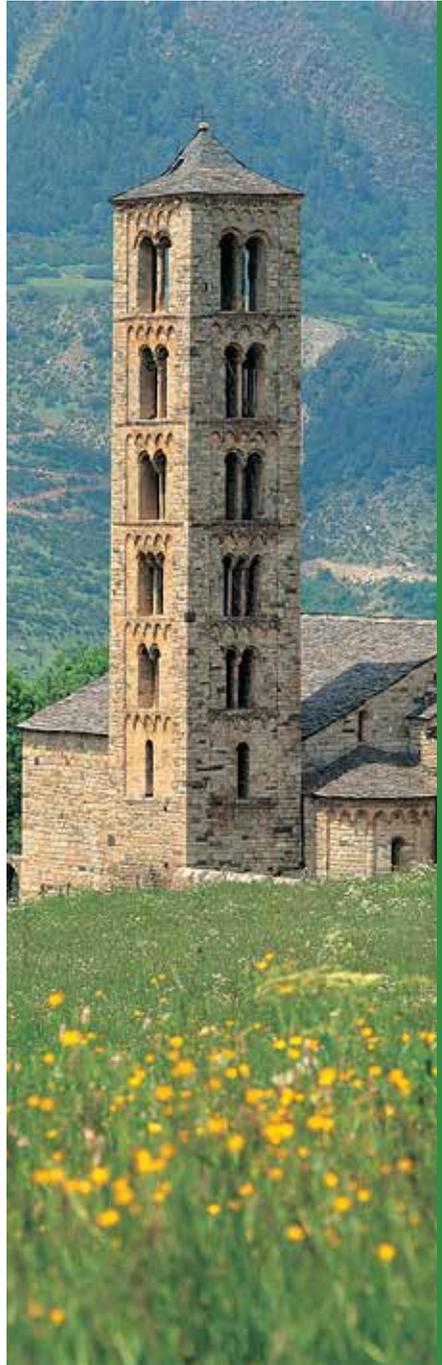
A turnoff in the road leads to Boí. The Church of Sant Joan retains its Romanesque bell tower in Lombard style and an apse. The remainder of the building is the product of diverse restoration work. The interior features reproductions of its 11th- and 12th-century wall paintings.

Finally, less than a kilometre away, the road leads to **Taüll**. This village comprises two separate centres surrounding two of the most emblematic Romanesque churches in the Pyrenees: Santa Maria and Sant Climent. The Church of Santa Maria constitutes the parish church in Taüll. Dating from the 12th century, it dominates the main square. It features three naves separated by columns and crowned with three apses and a bell tower with a square base. The interior contains a reproduction of the pictorial works which adorned the church. The Church of Sant Climent stands in the lower end of the village. Dating from the 12th century, it was built

Hand of God (MNAC), Sant Climent, Taüll



Fragment of the altar frontispiece of Sant Pere de Boi (circa 1260), MNAC



Church of Sant Climent in Taüll

at the same time as the Church of Santa Maria. Both churches were consecrated by the Bishop of Roda in December 1123. The Church of Sant Climent also has three naves, separated by columns and three apses adorned with characteristic Lombard arches and mullioned windows, as well as a bell tower which soars to six storeys. The interior features a set of striking polychrome wall paintings, including a reproduction of the famous Pantocrator, or Christ in Majesty, in the central apse.

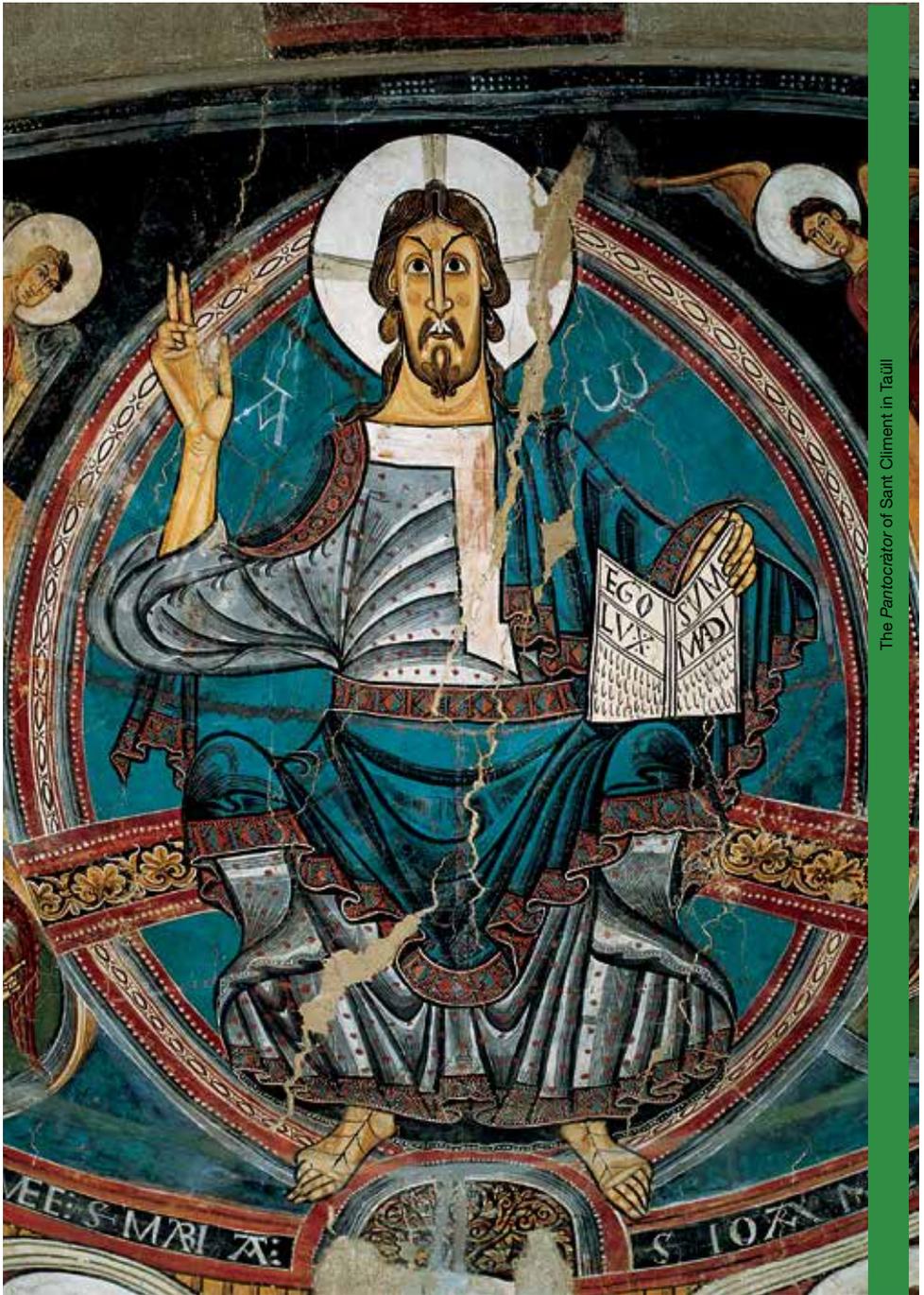
**A spa amidst the mountains.** A soothing bath could be the means to unwind after imbibing so much culture or taking in Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park. The first thermal baths in **Caldes de Boí** date as far back as the

18th century. Today, the town boasts two hotel establishments, a spa resort, a beauty salon and function rooms.



Caldes de Boí





The Pantocrator of Sant Climent in Taüll



## Contrasting valleys, bustling riverbanks

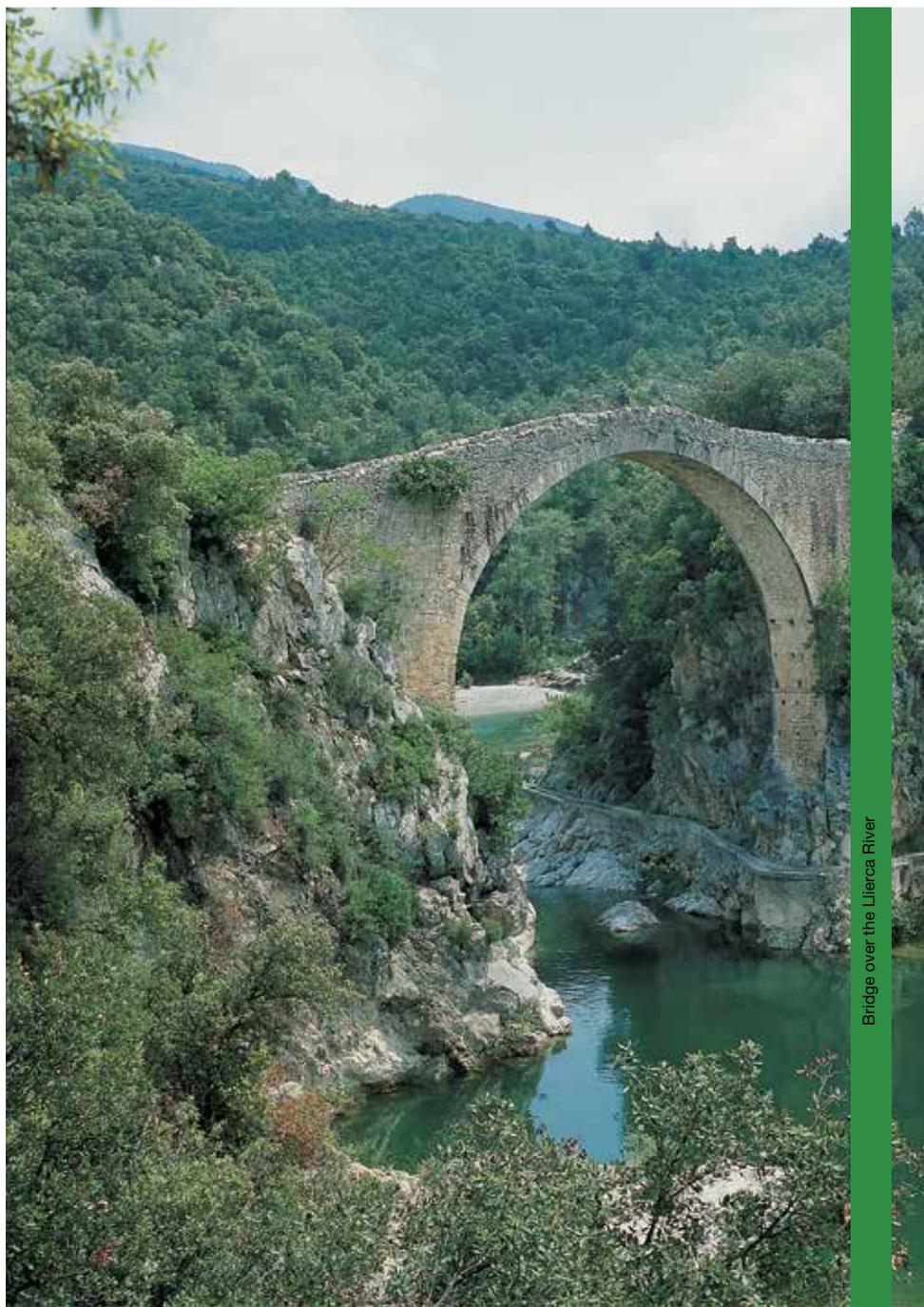
The rivers descending from the pinnacles of the Pyrenees have carved out dozens of valleys, each one different than the next. Seven have been selected which feature wide-ranging settlements and attractions, in order of the sun's path from east to west. It provides only a taste of the extensive network of valleys.

**Vall de Sant Aniol.** "Garrotxa" means tangled, wild and difficult terrain, a name which is understood once visitors set foot inside the valleys that enclose the county to the north. Upstream on the Llierca River lies a single-arch medieval bridge hanging over a deep gorge. A small distance above the small hamlet of Sadernes, the valley narrows between calcareous walls. Vall de Sant Aniol flows through the Gitarrau mountains and Plansesserres hill, and the river stagnates in calm crystalline pools. Holm oak, boxwood, chestnut and oak trees line the path. On the left bank the path continues to Bassegoda hill; on the right bank, another path climbs to the village of Taleixà, now deserted. Following the river takes you to the Sanctuary of Sant Aniol d'Aguja, in a magnificent location, where the writer Marià Vayreda set the beginning of his novel *La punyalada*. Further up lies the Brull waterfall.

**Vall de Núria.** The Núria rack railway departs from the villages of Ribes de Freser and Queralbs, where a visit to the Romanesque church is a

must. The train leaves ash and hazelnut trees in its wake; oak groves blanket the valley floors and black pine trees cast their shadow on the valley slopes. Climbing the valley, at the edge of precipices, the rack railway ends at the shores of a lake. At the same time, it reaches the site of the Núria Sanctuary with a chapel that is home to a 12th-century Romanesque carving of the Blessed Virgin. The sanctuary also has a restaurant, gift shops and a hotel. Further upwards is a hostel; we are now at two thousand metres above sea level. The mountains framing Vall de Núria soar to three thousand metres. In addition to a small ski resort and horseback riding in summer, the valley offers a whole host of excursions such as the ascent of Puigmal or the peaks of Noufonts, Fossa del Gegant and Infern, and hikes to the Ulldeter and Carançà gorges.

**Cerdanya.** Unlike the rest of the valleys in the Pyrenees which are oriented towards the north or south, Vall de la Cerdanya extends from east to west, between the high mountains of the Pyrenees and Moixeró and Cadí. This is because Cerdanya is the product of a trough fault. From the pre-Roman settlement, names such as Bor, Urús, Alp and Das remain. A considerable number of Romanesque churches still stand from the Middle Ages such as Sant Pere d'Olopte, Santa Cecília de Bolvir and the



Bridge over the Llerca River

majestic Church of Santa Maria de Talló, as well as the old wall of Bellver. However, the Treaty of the Pyrenees partitioned the valley, as illustrated by the town of Llivia, which is completely surrounded by French territory. At the heart of Cerdanya lies the chief town of Puigcerdà, which is perched atop a hill commanding stunning views of the region. At the beginning of the last century, tourists were attracted by the clean air and coolness in summer. Today, in winter, it boasts a large ski resort which combines La Masella and La Molina, and, in summer, a thousand hikes amidst the pine and fir trees of Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park or towards the Pera or Malniu lakes and the peaks which form a boundary with Andorra.

**Vall d'Aigua d'Ora.** At the eastern end of Solsonès county, the Aigua d'Ora River flows from the town of Navès through a long valley. In addition to solid traditional farmhouses, the valley is home to an eco-museum where visitors can see the workings of an old sawmill and a water-driven mill. The valley is set against the Busa mountains rising on a plateau surrounded by imposing cliffs. Below, where the river narrows, stands the magnificent Romanesque

Church of Sant Pere de Graudescales. Part of a short-lived monastery, the 12th-century church has a floor plan in the shape of a Latin cross, a dome over the transept crossing and three apses.

**Vall de Cardós.** Road access is somewhat difficult where the waters of the Noguera de Cardós flow. Further up, the valley opens out and the village of Ribera de Cardós comes into view, offering accommodation in small hotel establishments and adventure sports. It also contains a Romanesque bell tower adjoining the church, narrow streets and slate walls and roofs. Framed by the peaks found within Alt Pirineu Natural Park, the valley takes advantage of the few plains available to establish settlements: Surri, Anàs, Estaon (built on a spur), Ginestarre (featuring a small Romanesque church which dominates the entrance to the hamlet), Aineto (built on a cliff), and Tavascan. Overhead, the mountains reign supreme.

**Valls d'Àneu.** At the crown of Pallars Sobirà, the Àneu valleys take in four municipalities which include twenty-four towns and villages. Surrounded by Alt Pirineu Natural Park and Aigüestortes i Estany



Núria Sanctuary

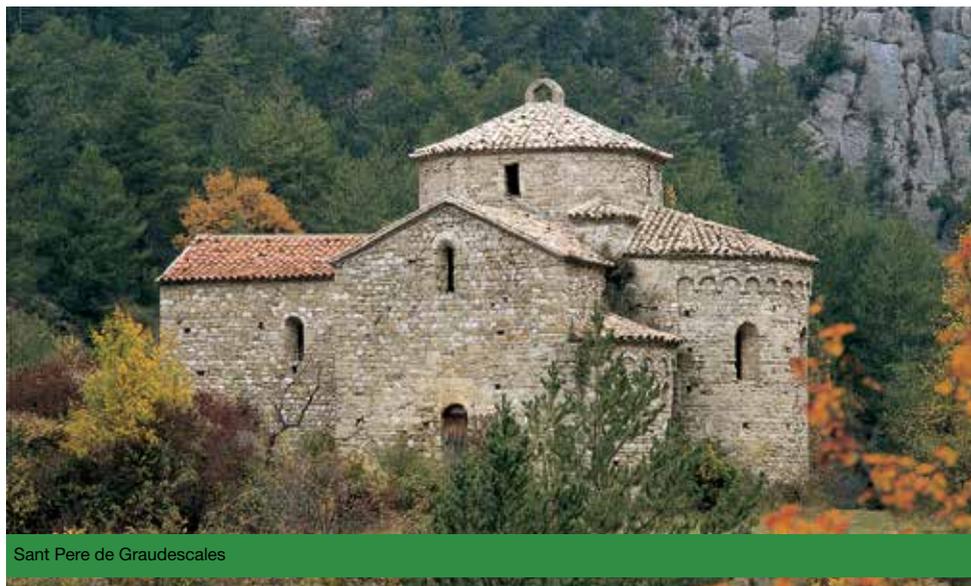
de Sant Maurici National Park, its natural interest is plain to see. At the same time, the valley is home to a wealth of Romanesque treasures such as the Church of Sant Joan d'Isil and the Church of Santa Maria d'Àneu in Escalarre, the site in Son de Pi, the Benedictine Monastery of Sant Pere del Burgal in Escaló and the bridges in Espot and Esterrí d'Àneu, not to mention the Eco-museum of Valls d'Àneu (see further details in the chapter on mountain life). Also worth visiting is the Territori i Paisatge Foundation in Planes de Son, which fosters an appreciation of nature and the environment.

**Vall Fosca.** Closed in by the mountains, the sun sets very early here. The head of the valley flanks Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park. The valley extends to the south following the course of the Flamisell River. Cabdella, the final village, retains the Romanesque Church of Sant Vicenç, which commands magnificent views. Below, visitors can see the Hydroelectric Museum in the Cabdella power plant. Further south, the village of Espui is also home to a Romanesque church dedicated to Sant Julià, and the Chapel of Sant Martí stands alongside



Olopte

La Torre de Cabdella. The village of Estavill retains the medieval layout of a fortified villa and a number of covered streets.



Sant Pere de Graudescales



## La Seu d'Urgell, crossroads of the Pyrenees

Boasting a strategic location at the heart of the Catalan Pyrenees, the chief town of Alt Urgell is set between the mountains of Andorra and the final spurs of the Cadí mountains, dominating the alluvial plain deposited by the Segre and Valira Rivers. It is an ancient crossroads between Pallars Sobirà, Andorra and Cerdanya and has experienced the history of the land at first hand.

**The cathedral.** The original city, otherwise known as Orgellia, dominated the hill of the current neighbourhood of Castellciutat. It served as an Episcopal See, which was plundered by Muslim invaders. It was later moved to the plain where a cathedral was constructed and consecrated in the 9th century. The large Romanesque Cathedral of Santa Maria d'Urgell replaced the church, characterised by a refined Lombard architecture built in the 12th century. It contains one of the finest examples of a Catalan Romanesque cloister featuring columns crowned with granite capitals of Roussillonais influence and adorned with carved figures from medieval mythology. The Romanesque Church of Sant Miquel is adjoined to the cloister,

the only one to have survived among the group of episcopal churches promoted by Saint Armengol at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Diocesan Museum of Urgell.** Adjacent to the cathedral, the museum houses one of the finest collections of medieval art in Catalonia. Among the valuable artworks from the Diocese of Urgell is a considerable collection of Romanesque Blessed Virgin statues. However, the most renowned works on display include the legendary *Beatus of Liébana*, a 10th-century illuminated manuscript; the Gothic altarpiece of Abella de la Conca by Pere Serra (1364) and the silver urn of Saint Armengol by the Baroque silversmith Pere Lleopart (1755).

**Medieval quarter.** In close proximity to the cathedral are two arcaded streets. One is Carrer dels Canonges, the main axis of the ancient city lined with noteworthy buildings such as Cal Botxí, Cal Roger and Ca l'Armenter, which is adorned with Gothic windows and ornamental beams. The other arcaded street, Carrer Major, contains the Bladeria (the scales where the townsfolk came to weigh

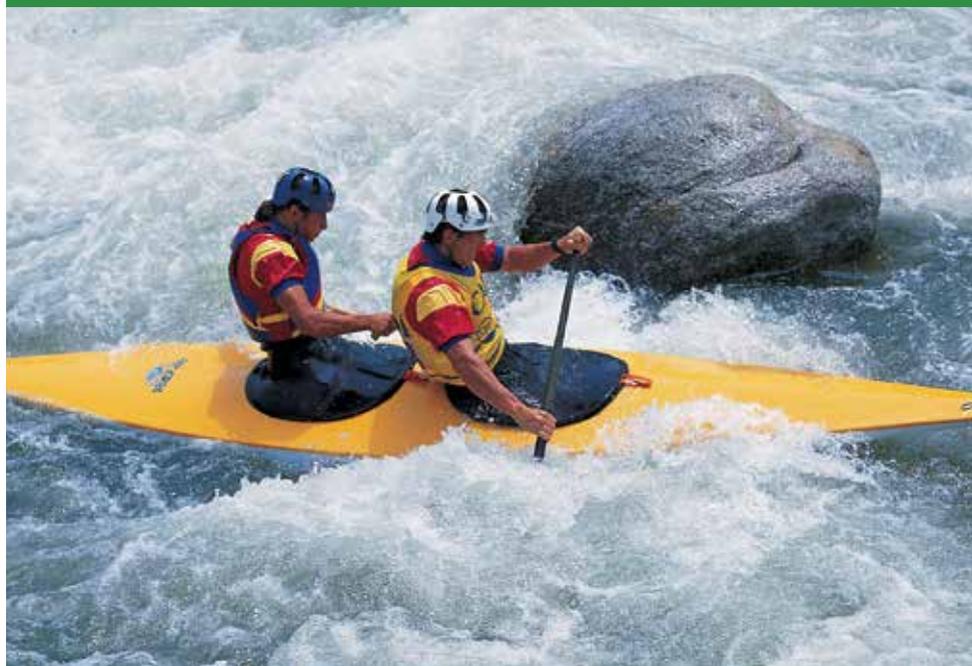


Cloister of the cathedral



Silver urn of Saint Armengol ↑

Canoeing in Segre Olympic Park ↓

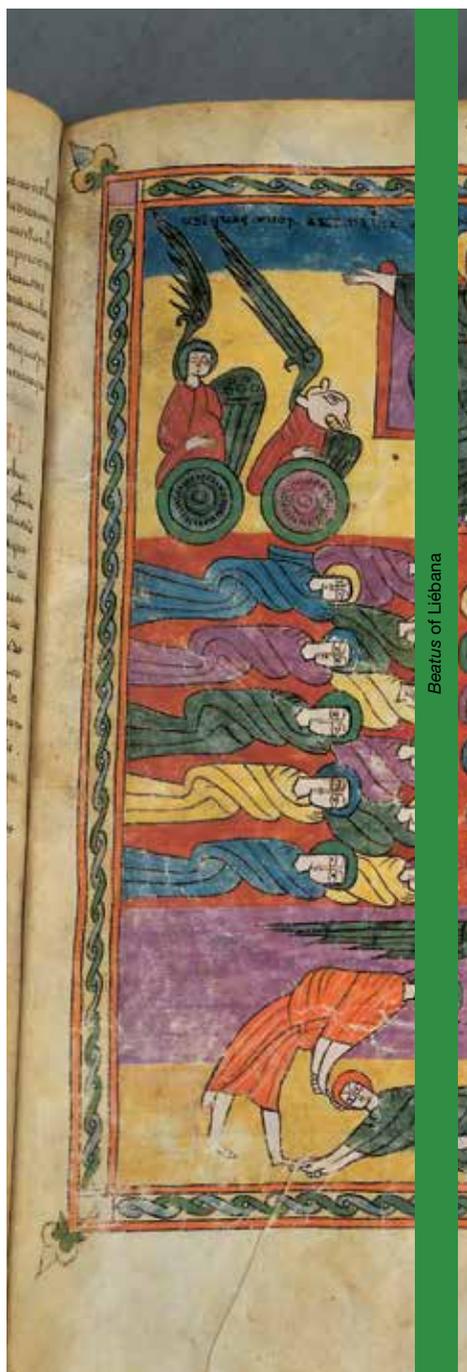


their wheat for sale) as well as a number of stately buildings. The streets Carrer de Capdevila and Carrer de les Eres are part of the city's extension in the 13th century.

**Cultural city.** Over the course of the year, events are held such as the Joan Brudieu International Music Festival in July and August, performances of *Retaula de Sant Ermengol* in the first fortnight in August, and the Saint Armengol Fair on the third Sunday of October with four themed spaces: the Pyrenees Farmhouse Cheese Fair, the Pyrenees Tourist Products and Nordic Skiing Fair, the Farmhouse Produce Fair and the Handicrafts Fair on Carrer dels Canonges, designated for craftspeople from the Pyrenees. Throughout the year the Gothic Church of Sant Domènec, currently an exhibition hall, organises numerous exhibitions, conferences and concerts.

**Markets.** The town had a weekly market from 1029 and a renowned trade fair from 1048. Today, the streets of the historic quarter play host to a market with a multitude of stalls on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Products that are handmade and typical of the Pyrenees are available in the town's stores, such as the best cheeses and butter in the area, cold meats, honey, mushroom preserves, meat and fresh garden produce.

**Segre Olympic Park.** These unique sports facilities were built for the 1992 Olympic Games and comprise a network of whitewaters and still waters, with a system of mechanical lifts for canoeing, rafting and hydrospeed.



## Olot, volcanic town



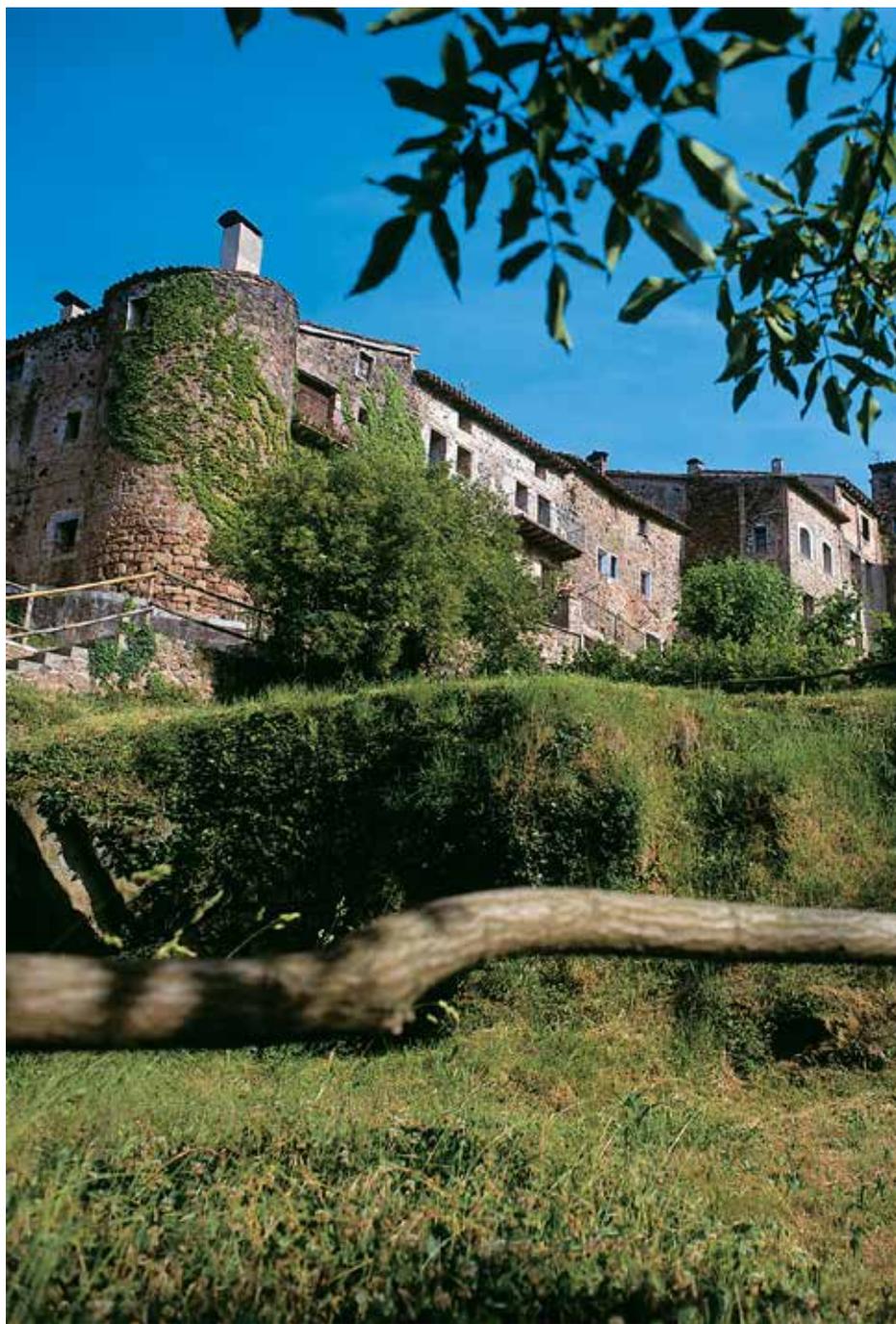
When we speak of explosive craters, earthquakes, tongues of fire and volcanic flows, the gateway to hell is bound to spring to mind rather than the landscape of the Garrotxa region or its chief town of Olot. All in all, four volcanoes stand sentry on the fringes of Olot: Bisaroques, Montolivet, Garrinada and Montsacopa. The most emblematic is Montsacopa, which towers above the town and features the Chapel of Sant Francesc surrounding its crater.

There is no need to fret: the volcano has been dormant for over 11,000 years and five centuries have passed since the last two devastating earthquakes. Virtually no wall was left standing, which the inhabitants of Olot turned to their advantage to change the city's location, thereby moving away from the terrain under the jurisdiction of the Monastery of Ripoll. The city was thus rebuilt at the foot of Montsacopa. On descending the volcano, visitors should head towards the Passeig d'en Blay (popularly known as El Firal), which plays host to the market every Monday. The next stop is **Casa Solà Morales**, the city's most noteworthy example of *Modernista* (Catalan Art Nouveau) architecture, restored by Lluís Domènech i Montaner and with caryatids carved by Eusebi Arnau. Visitors should then explore the **Church of Sant Esteve**, solid with a Baroque façade and altarpieces, and a painting by El Greco at the Parish Museum. A stone's throw away is **Can Trincheria**, which has been turned into a museum.

The Regional Museum is housed in the former hospice. In addition to temporary exhibitions, it outlines the history of the county and displays works by a large number of artists who have passed through the town. Special mention should be given to the Olot Art School founded by the brothers Joaquim and Marià Vayreda together with Josep Berga, pioneers in the act of painting outdoors in Catalonia. In addition to the sculptures by Miquel Blay and Josep Clarà, the work *The Charge* by Ramon Casas and the "cigarillos Paris" poster series are noteworthy.

In the centre of Olot, visitors should also explore the streets encircling the main square and the **Carmelite cloisters**, a Renaissance work which is now home to the Olot Art School. South of Plaça de Josep Clarà lies Passeig de Barcelona, shaded by vast plantain trees. There begins the **Eixample Malagrida**, a garden city initiative, courtesy of a Catalan emigrant who made his fortune from tobacco sales in Argentina. His stately home, Torre Malagrida, was also built there, and has since been converted into a youth hostel.

Crossing the Fluvià River brings visitors to the landscaped Parc Nou (New Park), with a pedunculate oak grove which would have occupied the Olot plain had it not been cleared. The wood is carpeted with linden, ash, elm, cherry and maple trees, and an undergrowth of holly, hazelnut,



Santa Pau

boxwood and hawthorn trees. The park is also home to the **Volcano Museum**, which occupies the Torre Castanys building. Visitors can gain an insight into the nature, causes and effects of volcanic and seismic phenomena and even feel the tremor of an earthquake thanks to a simulator. The museum also devotes a space to the main ecosystems in Garrotxa, which, needless to say, should be seen at first hand. A stone's throw away, for instance, is the **Moixina** (wood with marshes) and a little further away, the beech wood **Fageda d'en Jordà**, which inspired Joan Maragall to pen a poem, as well as the Croscat volcano and Santa Margarida volcano. Alternatively, visitors can hop on their bicycles and take the Carrilet Route, a greenway over railway tracks that leads to Girona.



House of the Volcanoes



*The whaserwomen*, 1833.  
Joaquim and Marià Vayreda Vila (MCG)



Santa Margarida volcano



## Solsona, stone roots

Solsona's distinctive personality is manifested in a rich heritage that conveys strength due to centuries of laying stone over deeply embedded foundations. Its arcaded streets, Gothic, Renaissance and Neoclassical mansions and graceful fountains call for a leisurely visit. However, the tranquil town can also swing into bustling exuberance with *trabucaires* (men in traditional costume firing salvoes from blunderbusses in the air), giants and beasts in the myriad festivals held throughout the year. Solsona and the Solsonès region also hold a rich legacy from Baroque times, of which the Miracle shrine and the altarpiece of the Chapel of Mare de Déu dels Colls in Sant Llorenç de Morunys are especially prominent.

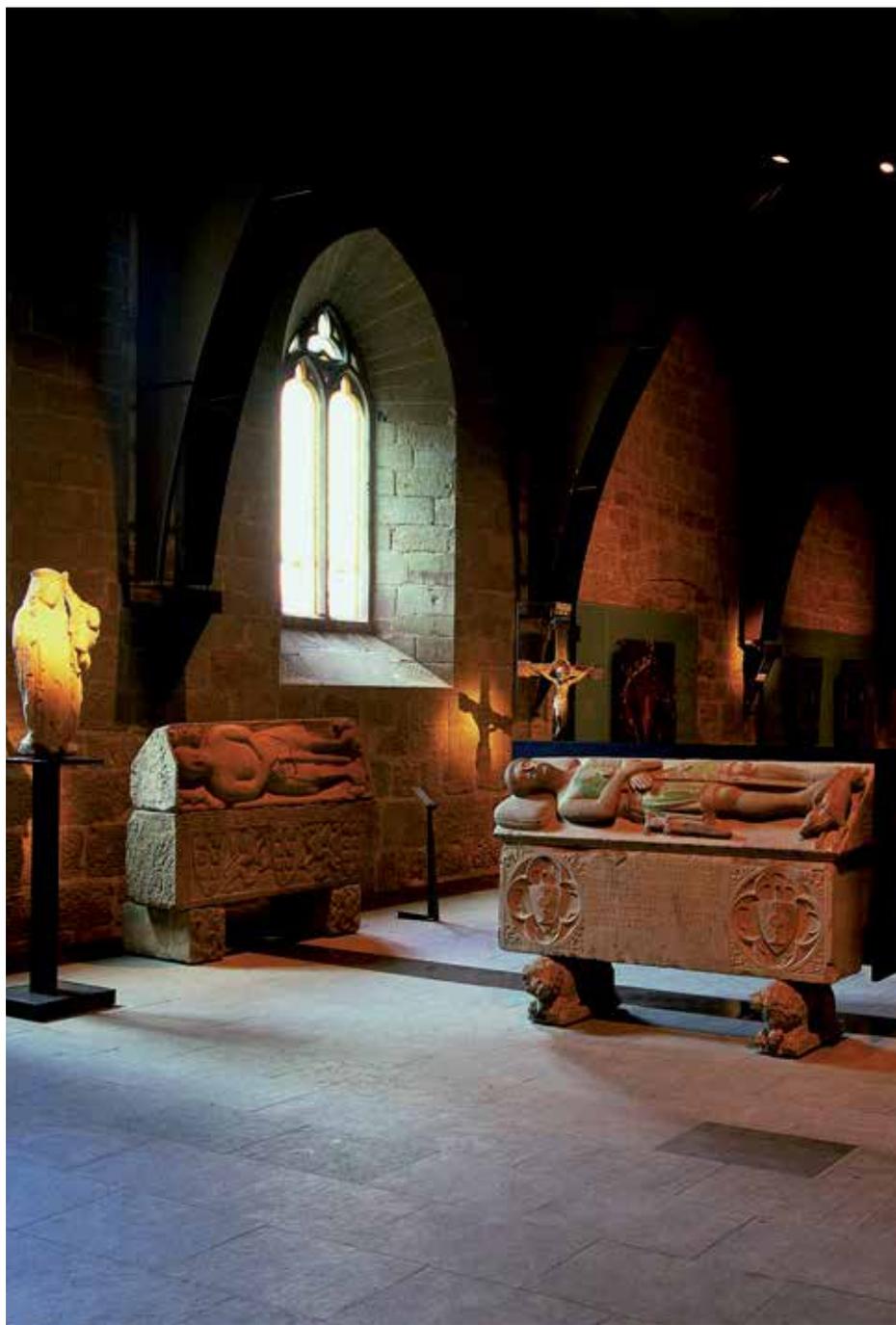
**Diocesan and Regional Museum.** It houses the Episcopal Palace, an emblematic Neoclassical building. Within its walls lies a remarkable collection beginning with prehistoric, Iberian and Roman utensils. However, the museum's main collection centres on medieval times. Of particular note are the pre-Romanesque frescoes of the Church of Sant Quirze de Pedret, a large number of Blessed Virgin statues, the sides of the altar of Sagàs and the Gothic *Last Supper* by Jaume Ferrer I. It also

includes a large selection of liturgical objects from later periods.

**The old city.** A stroll through the cobbled streets should include the arcaded main square, where a market is held on Fridays. On Carrer del Castell lies the Renaissance-style town hall and bell tower. A stone's throw away is the 15th-century fountain in Plaça de Sant Joan. South of Carrer del Castell is Carrer de Llobera, another gateway to the city, lined with several stately homes and the Knife and Cutting Tools Museum. The museum describes the city's industrial tradition which competed with cities renowned for their ironwork, such as Olot and Toledo.

**Bridged gateway.** Much of the 11th-century ramparts surrounding Solsona have survived to the present day. This gateway, dating from the end of the 18th century, still constitutes the main entrance to the heart of the old quarter. Above, the three Romanesque apses of the cathedral can be seen.

**The cathedral.** The current Gothic cathedral preserves the three Romanesque apses and bell tower of the former cathedral. Its interior contains



a Baroque altarpiece as well as a striking 12th-century stone sculpture of the *Mare de Déu del Claustre*, the patron saint of the city.

**Olius.** Six kilometres east of Solsona stands the Romanesque Church of Sant Esteve. It is worth exploring the interior to see the intimate Romanesque crypt featuring six slender columns supporting a vault clad with pumice stone. On the other side of the road lies the Gaudí-influenced cemetery designed by Bernadí Martorell in 1916, which blends in with the surroundings.

**Miracle shrine.** Twelve kilometres south of Solsona, the Miracle shrine comprises various austere buildings, in stark contrast with the grandiose Baroque altarpiece of the church. Carles Morató spent ten years sculpting the altarpiece, and Antoni Bordons spent ten years gilding it. Reminiscent of an opera, it features gesticulating saints and angels, explosions of gold, scrolls and spiralling clouds.



Crypt of Sant Esteve in Olius



Diocesan and Regional Museum and cathedral



Altarpiece of the Miracle shrine in Riner





## Mountain towns

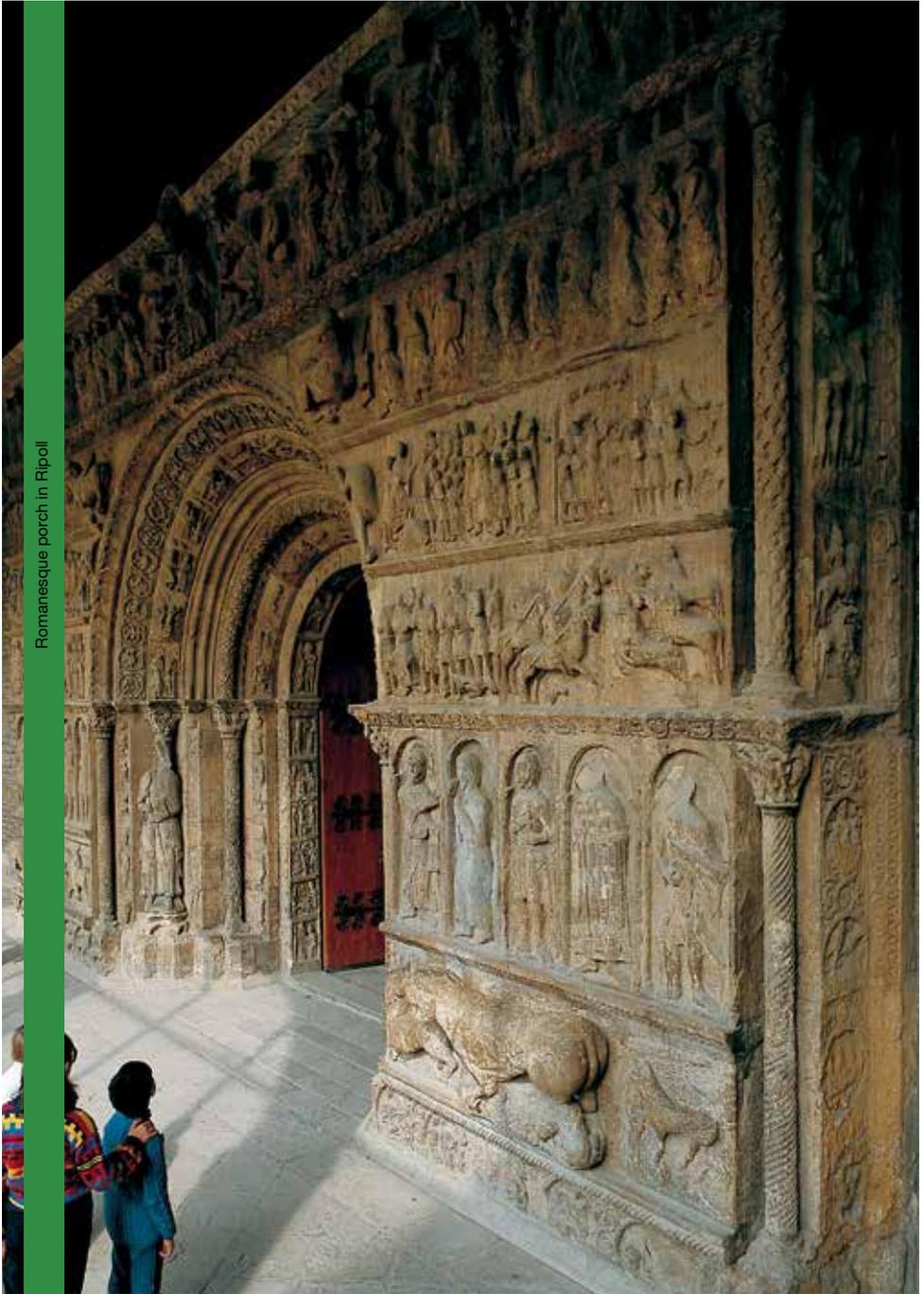
Located in the very heart of the mountains, the small cities and towns of the Pyrenees are situated in strategic places that have become historic crossroads and centres linking the mountains to the plains. This is the case with Ripoll, Puigcerdà and Berga, not to mention Tremp, Sort and El Pont de Suert. We are speaking here of historic cities with a splendid past which still constitute commercial centres and markets where people from the nearby mountains come to gather. These are cities and towns with character.

**Ripoll.** The valley determined the location of the chief town of Ripollès at the point where the Ter and Freser rivers meet. At the very heart of the town lies the monastery's church, founded by Count Wilfred the Hairy at the end of the 9th century. The Count's most representative symbol, a flag with four bars, waves from the bell tower. For centuries, the monastery was the most important in Catalonia, until it was plundered and burned in 1835; visitors must see the unique Romanesque doorway. The town grew around it and was soon known for its iron and steel industry, the result of a procedure known as *farga catalana* ("Catalan forging"). The Ethnology Museum contains a fine selection of weapons manufactured there.

**Puigcerdà.** The chief town of Cerdanya is located at the summit of the same peak that gives it its name and dominates the surrounding plain as one of the most spectacular vantage points in Catalonia. Puigcerdà has always been an important commercial and service centre. The town houses Gothic frescoes in the Convent of Sant Domènec as well as monuments like the Gothic bridge of Sant Martí, the hospital and Can Deulofeu. Yet what really sticks out in Puigcerdà is the setting surrounding its large lake: a great 14th-century irrigation basin around which were built spacious summer villas that give it a regal look. We are speaking here of the beginning of the 20th century, when the middle classes of Barcelona fell in love with the cool and invigorating climate of Cerdanya.

**Berga.** This town is located at the foot of the pre-Pyrenees mountains, in a strategic spot that makes it a bridge between mountain and plain. A few bits and sporadic stretches are what remain of the old town walls and the old castle, as well as the old gateway on Plaça de Santa Magdalena. Prominent among its architectural heritage is the Romanesque Chapel of Sant Pere de Madrona, the Church of Sant Joan featuring Gothic elements and remnants

Romanesque porch in Ripoll

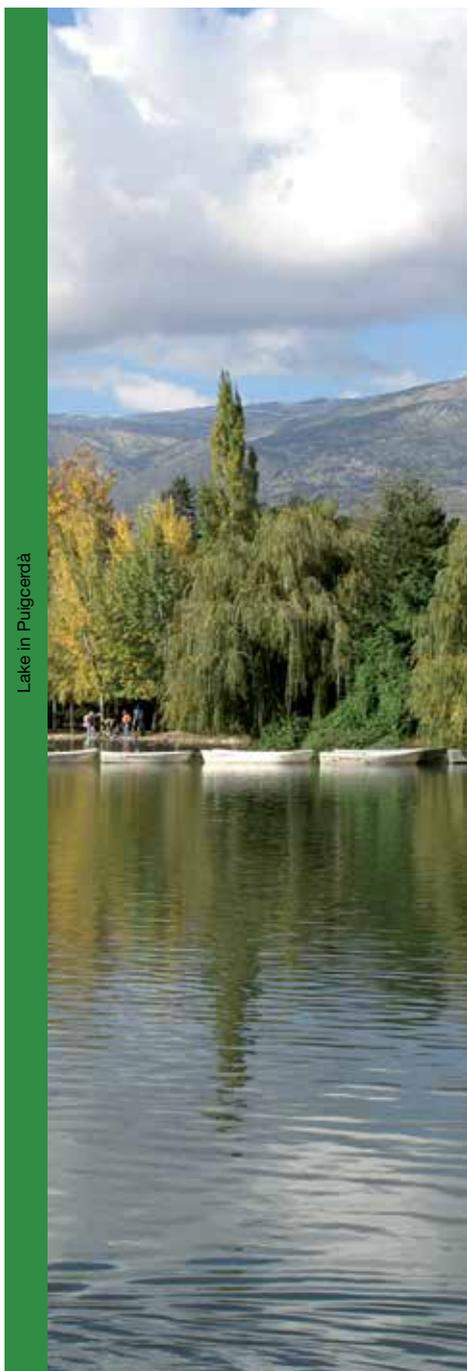


of the Jewish *Call*. There is also a theatre and casino in *Modernista* (Catalan Art Nouveau) style. The town is a magnificent place for daytrips: the Queralt Sanctuary, the bridge, the pre-Romanesque Church of Sant Quirze de Pedret and the Pyrenean landscape of Rasos de Peguera are representative examples of the array of strolls that can be enjoyed from Berga. Any mention of the town must include reference to *La Patum*, a popular festival declared a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

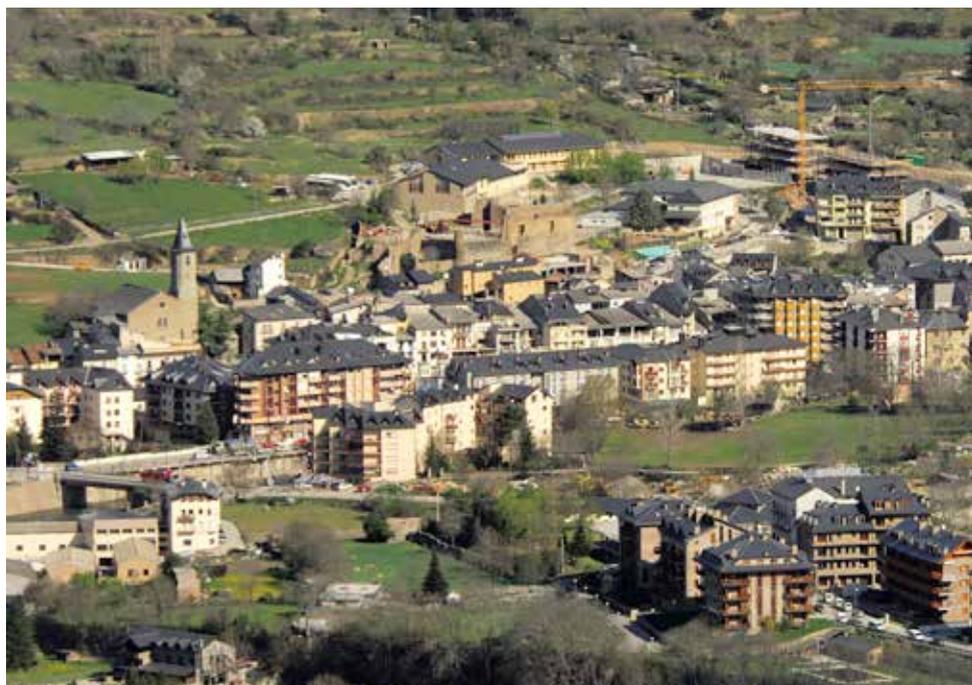
**Sort.** The chief town of Pallars Sobirà is located on the right bank of the Noguera Pallaresa River, just at the foot of its medieval castle. The old part of the town conserves the great round towers, the Gothic façade and the walls of the castle, the inside of which has been remodelled and serves as an all-purpose space for exhibitions and other activities. Sort is also an important place for daytrips and is surrounded by a group of small towns in Vall d'Àssua that have loads of personality, such as Altron, Sorre and Llessui. Whitewater canoeing is practiced in the rapids of the Noguera Pallaresa River, and Sort is a pioneering centre for such activities.

**Tremp.** Three of the original six defence towers on the ramparts are still standing. In addition to the Hospital dels Pobres and the Church of Mare de Déu de Valldeflors, Tremp also features the Sant Jaume bridge of Romanesque origin. However, the limits of the chief town in Pallars Jussà are much larger, the largest in Catalonia, and include La Terreta, home to oak groves, beech woods, yew groves and several hiking trails.

**El Pont de Suert.** The chief town in Alta Ribagorça is situated on the banks of the Noguera Ribagorçana, where the valleys of Barravés, Boí, Castanesa and Viu meet. Of note in the old quarter are the main square, Plaça del Mercadel, the old church and the Abbatial Palace. Among the buildings, the most noteworthy is the new church, dating from 1955.



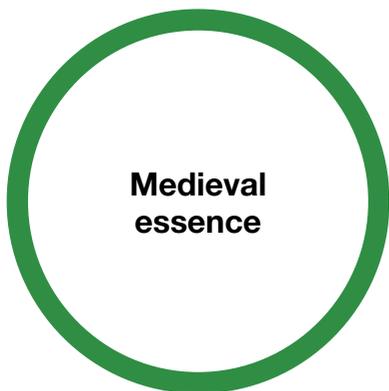
Lake in Puigcerdà



Sort ↑

Berga ↓





## Medieval essence

Catalonia developed with the Pyrenees as its spine. The role played by these mountains as a refuge in the Middle Ages is manifest in the wealth of vestiges bequeathed by this period that have survived to the present day. Medieval art is palpable far and wide: from Romanesque churches and monasteries to civic architecture and small chapels nestled in the most inaccessible settings.

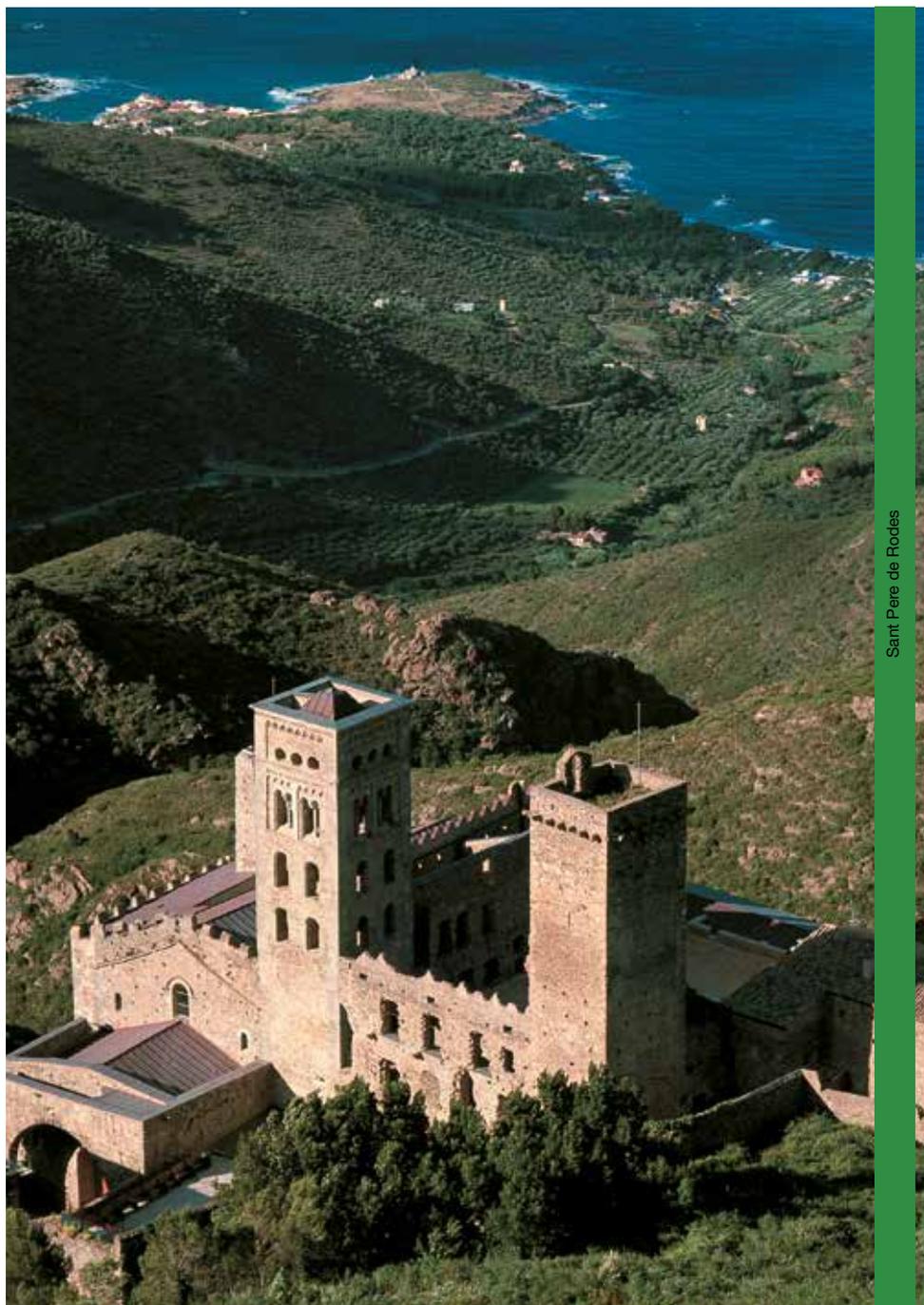
**Sant Pere de Rodes.** Set in a magnificent location overlooking Port de la Selva, legend has it that the reliquaries of Saint Peter and other saints were placed there. The current church almost certainly dates to the 11th century, though it features a number of pre-Romanesque elements. The three soaring naves are separated by pillars and columns standing on high bases with Corinthian capitals featuring zoomorphic and polygonal heads with geometric motifs. The 27-metre bell tower is Lombard in style. A path leads to the remains of Sant Salvador castle, where, at the end of the ridge, it commands panoramic views.

**Monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses.** Founded in the 9th century by Count Wilfred the Hairy, it contains a magnificent collection of

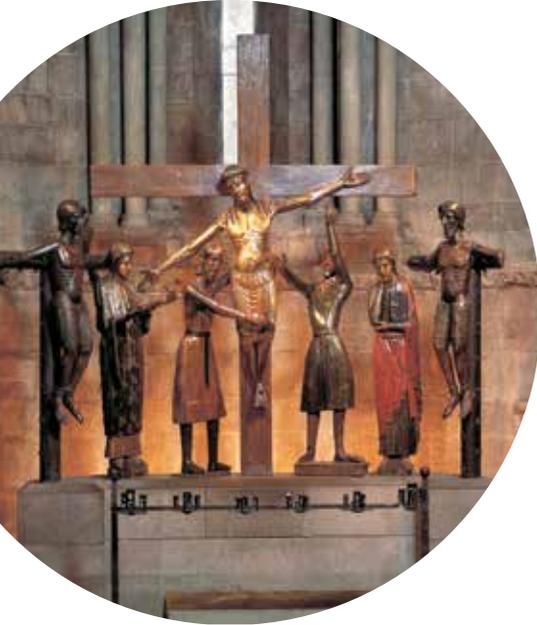
13th-century sculptures known as the *Santíssim Misteri*, depicting the Descent from the Cross. Other interesting features include the Gothic Saint Augustine and White Virgin altarpieces, as well as the Gothic sepulchre of Blessed Miró; the Gothic cloister with the Romanesque window on one of the chapter room walls; the Baroque Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows and a beautiful contemporary sculpture of the Piety.

**Sant Quirze de Colera.** At the foot of the Albera mountains, this small Benedictine abbey was restored around 1123. It is built of stones superimposed in the form of a fish bone. The monastery features three naves and three Lombard-type apses, the remains of a former church, the cloister and other fortifications. Nearby is the 12th-century Church of Santa Maria de Colera, a small edifice with a nave and apse.

**Monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll.** Originally founded in Visigothic times, it was restored by Count Wilfred the Hairy at the end of the 9th century. Under his aegis, the monastery grew in affluence until it had one of the most important monastic libraries of the time. From the 10th



Sant Pere de Rodés



The *Santíssim Misteri* in Sant Joan de les Abadesses

century, Bishop Oliba instigated the Romanesque style of the edifice. Santa Maria de Ripoll has the finest sculpted Romanesque work in Catalonia in its 12th-century great door. The remains of Count Wilfred were laid to rest in the pantheon of counts.

**Sant Jaume de Frontanyà.** Once an Augustine canonry, it constitutes a fine example of 11th-century Lombard Romanesque architecture, featuring a floor plan in the shape of a Latin cross, three apses and an austere façade. Inside, the majestic twelve-sided dome resting on squinches is unique in Catalonia and was used as a model for the restoration of the Monastery of Ripoll.

**Santa Maria de Gerri.** This former abbey lies in proximity to the Noguera Pallaresa River. The characteristic stamp of this building is its façade crowned with a three-storey bell tower. The building with three naves is more spacious than it seems from the outside.

**Sant Serni de Tavèrnoles.** This abbey was founded in the early 9th century and came to have dominions from Berguedà to Andorra, from

Sant Jaume de Frontanyà



Cerdanya to Isona and Pallars, as well as in Aragon and Castile. The abbey's church was consecrated in 1040 and only the chevet has remained intact. The cloister capitals and antependium are on display at the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC). Some of the records, particularly the abbey's cartulary, have survived and are housed in La Seu d'Urgell.

**Small churches.** Myriad jewels of religious architecture are scattered throughout the Pyrenees. Such is the case of the **Church of Sant Cristòfor de Beget** (Ripollès), which contains a two-metre wooden carving featuring Christ dressed in a long-sleeved tunic. Near Cercs (Berguedà) stands the **Church of Sant Quirze de Pedret**, built between the 9th and 10th centuries with Romanesque elements and important 10th- and 12th-century mural paintings. The **Church of Santa Maria de Talló** (Cerdanya) is a large building with peculiar exterior buttresses, which are unusual in Catalan Romanesque architecture, and anthropomorphic graves outside. The **Church of Sant Esteve d'Abella de la Conca** (Pallars Jussà)

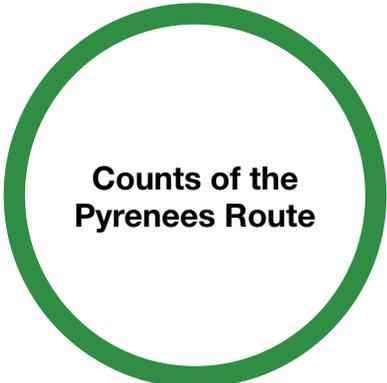
has dominated the upper end of the town since the 11th century; the remains of 12th- to 13th-century mural paintings are found inside. Of note in this church is the Gothic altarpiece which depicts scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary, today housed in the Diocesan Museum of Urgell. The south façade of the **Church of Sant Joan d'Isil** (Pallars Sobirà), built in the vicinity of the Noguera Pallaresa River, is extraordinarily decorated with arcades and human and zoomorphic motifs. Two low reliefs depict Adam and Eve before and after the Fall.

**Civic architecture.** In the realm of civic architecture, mention should be given to a number of **bridges**. The Pont Vell (Old Bridge) in Besalú is the gateway to arcaded streets, Romanesque and Gothic houses and the town's unique Jewish baths. In Sant Joan de les Abadesses stands another Pont Vell, Gothic in style, the base of which dates back to 1138 when construction of the Romanesque bridge was

completed. Damaged by the earthquake in 1428, it was rebuilt in Gothic style with a slender arcade, making it the longest-spanning Gothic bridge on the Iberian Peninsula. The 13th-century Pont Nou (New Bridge) over the Ter River in the heart of the town of Camprodon has a single large arch built with irregular ashlar. To the east stands the Cerdanya gate, one of the entrances to the town when there were ramparts. Other examples of civic medieval architecture include **castles**, noteworthy among which is Mur castle, a compact building with a tower which once belonged to the counts of Pallars. The fortress stands in close proximity to the Church of Santa Maria on the same esplanade as the castle, dominating the entire Tremp basin.

Santa Maria de Gerri de la Sal





## Counts of the Pyrenees Route



The Counts of the Pyrenees Route beckons visitors to journey back to the beginnings of Catalonia. This route combines the splendour of the Pyrenees with the austere beauty of Romanesque churches and monasteries, where the faint reverberations of the footsteps of great historic figures such as Bishop Oliba and Count Wilfred the Hairy can still be felt.

**From Empordà to Ribagorça**, against a backdrop of high mountains, the route traverses magnificent landscapes, the birthplace of historic figures and the scene of historic deeds, traditions, myths and legends. This is a natural and populated environment sprinkled with monasteries, churches and castles that perpetuate the memory of that era, which also marked the beginnings of Europe, feudalism, the Crusades and Romanesque art.

In the Counts of the Pyrenees Route, tourist attractions cater for all needs, from small hotel establishments to country houses and a wide range of campsites across the region covered by this itinerary. The flavours characterising Catalan mountain cuisine can be savoured far and wide. What's more, a broad spectrum of quality products, from dry-cured sausages (*llonganissa* and *xolis*, from Vic and Pallars respectively) to all kinds of farmhouse cheeses, can be purchased.

Behind every curve on this route, which takes in secondary roads, lie picturesque landscapes

and layer upon layer of history. Visitors can peel back these layers to unravel the history of Catalonia, from its beginnings through the legacy bequeathed by the Romans and Visigoths to the assertion of its own identity between the 9th and 12th centuries. The latter found expression in its architectural style, Romanesque art, the Catalan language and the name of the land: Catalonia.

The route takes in the length and breath of the eleven former earldoms, which visitors can explore either in one fell swoop or little by little, county by county. From east to west, the route affords visitors the opportunity to peruse a careful selection of medieval sites, monuments and museums that immerse visitors in the atmosphere of Old Catalonia and the times of Count Wilfred the Hairy, Bishop Oliba, Sir Arnau Mir de Tost, Countess Ermensinde and Count Bernat Tallaferró.

Chronologically speaking, the Counts of the Pyrenees Route covers the little-known period from the 9th century, when Count Wilfred the Hairy laid the foundations for the independence of the Catalan earldoms, to the 15th century, when King Martin the Humane died without surviving descendants, thereby putting an end to the House of Barcelona which had governed Catalonia for more than five hundred years.



Church of the Monastery in Ripoll

What follows is a brief county-by-county description of what visitors shall come upon in the course of the Counts of the Pyrenees Route.

**Countship of Berga: In the shadow of Pedraforca.**

Beneath the majestic peaks of Pedraforca, the land of Berguedà was the meeting place for fascinating historic figures such as the Baron of Pinós and the troubadour Guillem de Berguedà from the 10th to 14th centuries. The region also bears the indelible stamp of the Cathars. In these exceptional natural surroundings, small towns and hamlets such as Gósol, Saldes and Maçaners are interspersed with old Romanesque edifices such as the churches of Sant Llorenç prop Bagà, Santa Maria de Lillet, Sant Vicenç de Rus, Sant Jaume de Frontanyà, Sant Sadurní de Rotgers, Sant Quirze de Pedret and Sant Vicenç d'Obiols. Within the walls of this set of monuments, which remain virtually intact, visitors can capture the essence of Catalonia's medieval past. The magic of traditional festivals such as the *Fia-faia* in Bagà and *La Patum* in Berga, the quintessential popular Catalan festival declared World Heritage by UNESCO, will also transport visitors to Old Catalonia.

**Countship of Besalú:** The Court of Tallafarro. The former county of Besalú roughly corresponds to the county of Garrotxa today. Here visitors can enjoy two distinctive features of the Garrotxa region: the luxuriance of its woodlands and crops and the beauty of its volcanic landscape, such as the basalt promontory of Castellfollit de la Roca. The former earldom of Besalú and, particularly, its chief town, is ideal for delving into the medieval past bequeathed by the dynasty of counts in the form of the town's architectural heritage, from the impressive bridge over the Fluvià River to its Jewish legacy. Santa Pau, set amidst the Garrotxa mountains, exemplifies one of the most beautifully preserved medieval precincts in Catalonia: a veritable treasure trove of Catalan popular architecture.

**Viscount of Cardona:** Kings without a crown. The sight of the impregnable villa and fortress of Cardona, perched on a steep hill overlooking the town and surrounded by the Cardener River, accentuates the importance of the Cardona lineage in the dynasty of counts. The appellation "lords of salt" by which they were known explains the economic significance of the Cardona salt mines – the "Salí de Cardona" – and the power of the



Bridge over the Fluvià River in Besalú.

viscount. The Cardonas constituted one of the most influential lineages in Catalan politics in the Middle Ages, and they were true “kings without a crown”. To the west and located amidst the high plateau dividing the Llobregat and Segre rivers, the Baroque city of Solsona provided a necessary counterbalance for the medieval image of Cardona. To the east of Manresa, the Monastery of Sant Benet de Bages bears testimony to the development of repopulation at the time of the dynasty of counts.

**Countship of Empúries: The independent earldom.** Basking amid the idyllic setting of Empordà, a county submerged in more than two thousand years of history, Castelló d’Empúries and the Monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes lay at the heart of the earldom of Empúries and continue to be key points of reference in Catalonia’s architectural heritage. In Castelló d’Empúries, visitors can delve into the monumental heritage that has survived to the present day in the former capital of the Empordà earldom. Beyond lies the Monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes rising majestically on a hillside overlooking Cap de Creus peninsula – a veritable Catalan *finis terrae* – which affords an insight into the influence exerted by the Benedictine order on

the advent of Catalan Romanesque art; a place of pilgrimage which is as venerable as Santiago de Compostela. The area is also home to the monasteries of Sant Quirze de Colera and Santa Maria de Vilabertran, Requesens castle and the medieval site of Peralada.

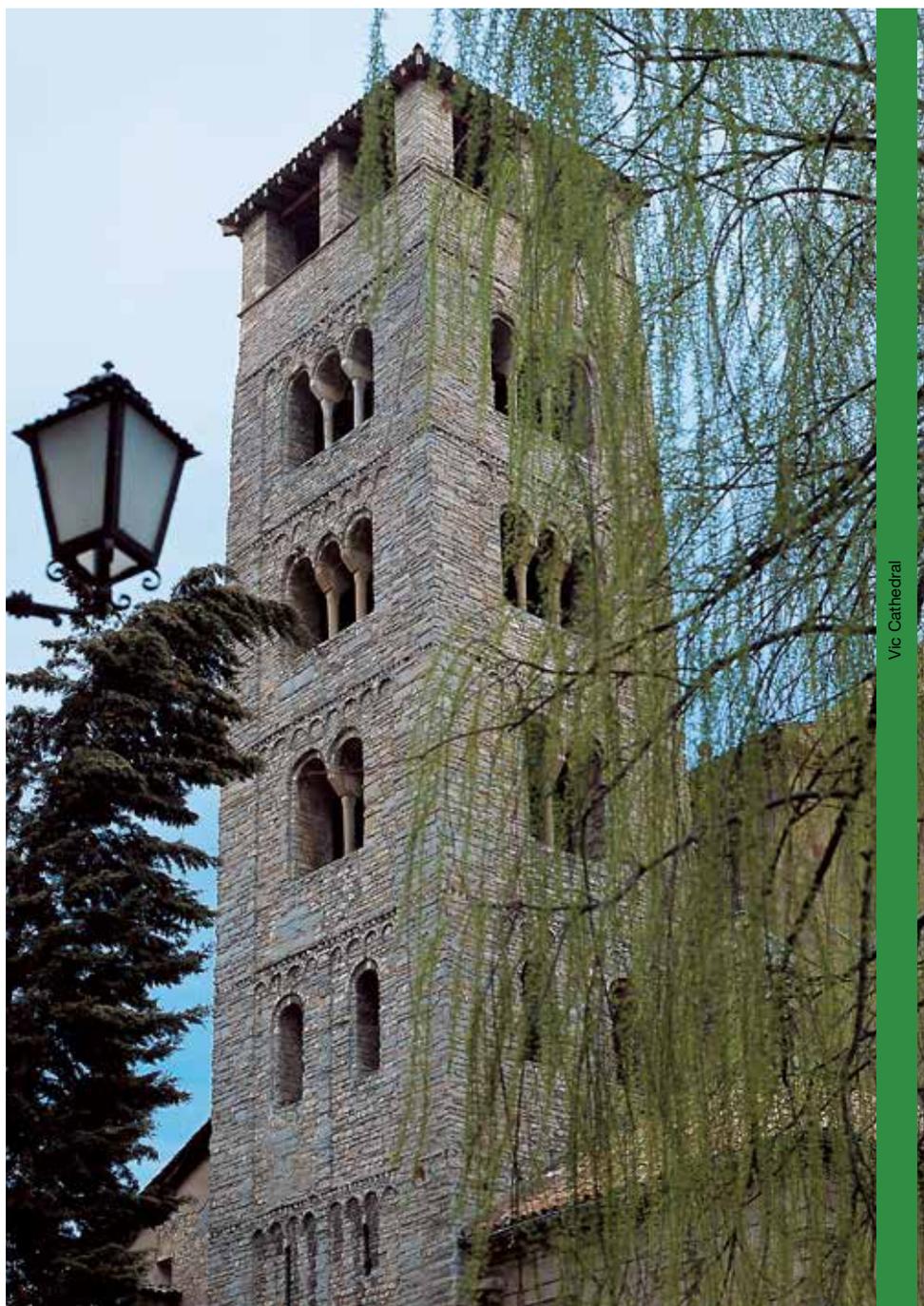
**Countship of Girona: Boundary of the Carolingian Empire.** The monumental nature of Girona’s ancient streets, located on the right bank of the Onyar River and skirting Montjuïc in the first spurs of the Gavarres massif, explains how any visitor with an ounce of sensitivity can capture the spirit of bygone times when the earldoms of Catalonia came into being. It concerns the period in which the history of Girona was intertwined with Charlemagne and the Jews bequeathed a rich legacy on the city of the Ter. This legacy finds its maximum expression in the magnificent and monumental *Call* (Jewish quarter), which was home to such illustrious figures as Isaac the Blind. At one end of the county of Girona, La Bisbal and its castle are key to understanding the leading role of the Church and the power of the Bishop of Girona in Catalan politics during the Middle Ages. Also particularly noteworthy are the towns of Pals and

Castellfollit de la Roca



Charlemagne's Tower in the cloister of Girona Cathedral





Vico Cathedral



Covet

Peratallada. Their medieval architecture exemplifies the characteristic urban layout at the time of the earldoms of Catalonia.

#### **Countship of Osona: Keystone in Old Catalonia.**

Osona is one of the counties with the most character in Catalonia. Its name is derived from the Ausetans, an Iberian tribe, and their capital, the Iberian and Roman Ausa, which was an Episcopal See from the 5th century and is cited in Roman chronicles as far back as the 2nd century BC. Set in a strategic location in the cradle of the Pyrenean earldoms and Barcelona (“Cap i Casal”, the traditional name given to the city of Barcelona in the Principality of Catalonia), the re-established county and bishopric of Osona was to become a keystone in Old Catalonia. The land was repopulated by Count Wilfred the Hairy and subsequently consolidated on account of the significant work of Bishop Oliba, who extended the bishopric to the west beyond Segarra. The hand of Oliba can still be recognised in the slender bell tower of Vic Cathedral, built on his initiative. Further away, isolated on a rocky promontory overlooking the Ter River, the austere Monastery of Sant Pere de Casserres brings visitors back to the beginning of the dynasty of counts. The monasteries of Maria de Lluçà and Santa Maria de l’Estany, as well as the medieval site of L’Esquerda,

strategically situated on a meander of the Ter River, round off the county’s treasures.

#### **Countship of Pallars Jussà: Lords of the mountains.**

Surrounded by mountains on all sides, the former countship of Pallars Jussà occupied the land between the Collegats gorge and the Montsec mountains, a veritable geographical wall defended at the time of the dynasty of counts by a plethora of castles and border fortresses such as the imposing castles of Mur, Llordà and Sant Gervàs, which still preserve the memory of Sir Arnau Mir de Tost. Within the bounds of this geostrategic territory lies the town of Àger, which has wholly retained its medieval charm. At the heart of this land, irrigated by the Noguera Pallaresa River, is the Tremp River Basin, a fertile land set amidst the Pyrenees where the three revered crops of the Mediterranean thrive: wheat, grapevines and olives. Such agricultural wealth made Pallars Jussà the primary target of expansion for the lords of the mountains; the base for preparing the conquest of the Lleida plains. In this context, the small Romanesque church of Santa Maria de Covet becomes a real hidden jewel just waiting to be discovered.

#### **Countship of Pallars Sobirà: Romanesque architecture amid the mountains.**

Pallars Sobirà

occupies the upper basin of the Noguera Pallaresa River from the highest peaks in the Pyrenees, such as Pica d'Estats, the ceiling of Catalonia (3,145 m) to the Collegats gorge, a natural boundary with Pallars Jussà. In this high mountain landscape, brimming with small hamlets scattered in the most isolated nooks and crannies of secondary valleys, visitors can behold the Romanesque art of Vall d'Àneu. It features noteworthy examples of Catalan Romanesque architecture such as the churches of Santa Maria d'Àneu, Sant Pere de Sorpe and Sant Pere del Burgal. The latter features wall paintings that almost certainly depict Countess Llúcia de la Marca, which is a testament to the social and political status of women in the earldoms of Catalonia. Sort has the remains of its castle and Esterri d'Àneu plays host to an exhibition on Count Hug Roger III. From Espot to Àneu and Tabescan, each town and village conceals treasures awaiting discovery: a castle here, a Romanesque church there, upriver an old forge or the old mill of a manor house. A splendid landscape far and wide awaits you.

**Countship of Ribagorça: The luminosity of images.** The former Pyrenean county of Ribagorça spanned the area that today is divided between Catalonia and Aragon, the boundary of which is marked by the course of the Noguera Ribagorçana River. The body of land unfurls between the imposing Mont-rebei gorge and the high ridge separating the Aran and the Ribagorça valleys. Upriver from El Pont de Suert, the course of the Noguera de Tor River marks the path of Vall de Boí, unreachable by road until the second half of the 20th century and a true treasure in the Catalan Pyrenees. On account of the area's secular isolation, the most exceptional group of Romanesque churches in Catalonia, designated World Heritage by UNESCO in recognition of their artistic value, have survived to the present day. The churches of Durro, Erill la Vall, Sant Joan de Boí, Sant Feliu de Barruera, Assumpció de Còll, Santa Maria de Cardet and, particularly, Sant Climent de Taüll and Santa Maria de Taüll have become true icons of Catalan Romanesque architecture as have their wall paintings, which include the magnificent Pantocrator (Christ in Majesty) in Taüll.



Capital in Ripoll ↑

Capital in La Seu d'Urgell ↓





Episcopal Museum of Vic. Frontispiece of the 13th-century Monastery of Lluçà

### Countship of Ripoll: Land of Counts and Bishops.

Resting on the southern spurs of the eastern Pyrenees and strategically located at the confluence of the Ter and Freser rivers, the town of Ripoll is considered the cradle of Catalonia. Here the Monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll, founded by Count Wilfred the Hairy, was to become one of the first cultural linchpins in Western Christianity, where Gerbert d'Aurillac was to become Pope Sylvester II in the year 1000. The Monastery of Ripoll, where Oliba was bishop, is the ideal setting for visitors to absorb the atmosphere of the beginnings of Catalonia. In its vicinity stands the idyllic town of Beget, home to the Church of Sant Cristòfol. Its small scale does not detract from its monumental nature. The heroic Count Wilfred the Hairy found his counterpart in the lands of Ripoll in the legendary figure of Count Arnau, who dominated the territory from Mataplana castle and Montgrony summit. Legend has it that a secret path joined Montgrony and the Monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses, notorious for the unspeakable sins committed there.

### Countship of Urgell: A cathedral of saints and heretics.

The city of *Orgellia*, Episcopal See and countship, is documented as far back as the 5th century. The exact date of the re-establishment of the bishopric and county of Urgell is unknown, although early on, in the mid-9th century, La Seu d'Urgell became one of the first foci of political power in the earldoms of Catalonia. As the *Reconquista* advanced, the bishopric and county spread from its Pyrenean cradle to the Lleida plains to which it would give its name. A land of counts and bishops, saints and heretics, La Seu d'Urgell has preserved its magnificent Romanesque cathedral to the present day, which houses the legacy of Saint Armengol, the great Bishop of Urgell. Downriver in Organyà, the *Homilies of Organyà*, notes written for a Sunday sermon by the town's humble parish priest, constitute the first known literary prose in Catalan in this cradle of the Pyrenees.



## Mountain life

Despite the difficulties presented by the geographic relief, the alpine settings of Catalonia have never been isolated and self-sufficient places, but rather just the opposite. People lived from the exploitation of immense natural resources such as timber, iron and coal, which they exported to lower altitudes, while the summer pastures of the high mountains fed thousands of heads of cattle. These were times in which rafters pushed timber downriver and the waters drove mills and traditional saws. Later on, at the beginning of the 20th century, hydroelectric plants were built which made a second industrial age in Catalonia possible. Today, an extensive network of museums provides an insight into the nature of mountain life until recent times.

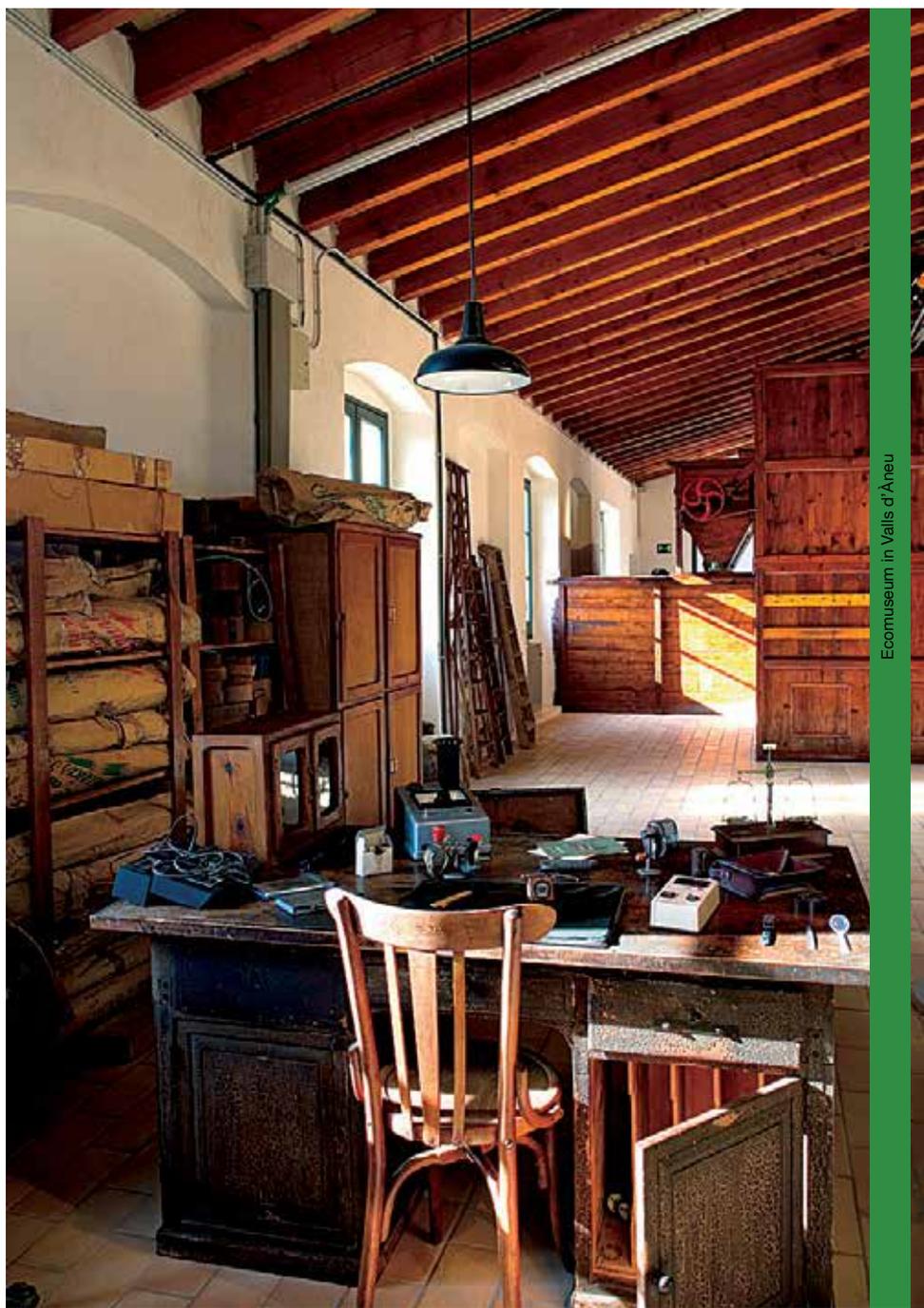
**Flour mill in Castelló d'Empúries.** Machinery dating from the end of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century and an exhibition unveil the secrets of flour production. Wheat cultivation and the production process following harvesting are outlined. The mill was driven by hydraulic power; the water entered the Rec del Molí, a water channel of medieval origin, to feed the Francis turbine which dates from 1905.

**Palau Ironworks in Ripoll.** Established as an ironworks in the 17th century, activity here continued

until 1978. On display are two hammers with an elm handle and steel mallet as well as water jet pumps, a coal bunker, kiln and hearth. Outside, the waters from the Freser River were stored and fell on the hydraulic wheel to generate wind, the main characteristic feature of the method employed in Catalan forges. The **Ethnography Museum** is also found in Ripoll.

**Cercs Mining Museum.** The colony of Sant Corneli was established in the 19th century to accommodate coal mine workers. A description is provided of the characteristics of lignite – the type of coal extracted from the Fígols mine – and its uses, in addition to the working, family and social lives of the miners. The most emblematic space is a restored former gallery, which is accessed by railway.

**Can Trincheria House-Museum in Olot.** One of the most important manor houses in the town, it was built in the first half of the 18th century and was later extended and restored. Part of the building has been refurbished as a house-museum. Visitors can explore the main floor and gain an insight into how a bourgeois family lived. The original wall paintings continue to hang in various rooms, noteworthy among which is the “general’s bedchamber” designed by Joan Carles Panyó. Special mention should also be given to the immense crib begun by Ignasi de Trincheria in the 18th century.



Ecomuseum in Valls d'Aneu



**Pharmacy in Llívia.** It dates back to 1415 and the first written records are from 1594. The Esteve family owned the pharmacy over seven generations, until the middle of the last century when it closed its doors. The Municipal Museum in Llívia contains its remnants. Noteworthy among the pieces on display are a world map indicating the origin of products, Renaissance boxes, blue ceramic jars and a Baroque medicine cabinet, polychrome on gilded wood.

**Asland Cement Museum in Castellar de n'Hug.**

At the end of the 19th century, Eusebi Güell commissioned the construction of the first Portland cement factory in Catalonia, known as Clot del Moro in the municipality of Castellar de n'Hug. Rafael Guastavino, the architect, used Catalan vaults in its construction, which were subsequently exported to the United States. Today the factory describes the history, manufacturing process and use of cement, as well as the lives of the men and women who worked there. A stone's throw from the museum are the **Artigas Gardens**, designed by Antoni Gaudí, in La Pobla de Lillet.

**Herbal Remedies Museum in Tuixent.** Many local women in the county used to collect medicinal plants and herbal remedies in these valleys and travelled around the region selling them throughout the winter. The history of these women, the trails followed on foot, the traces they left behind and the products they carried are described.

**Wool Factory in Arsèguel.** This family-run business, passed down from one generation to the next, produces socks for the Pyrenean winter, mufflers and shepherd's blankets. The machinery is operated by means of hydraulic power. Noteworthy among the machinery is the *diable*, a machine which separates the wool making it softer, and the mule jenny, a spinning machine designed in the 18th century. Arsèguel is also home to the **Accordion Museum**.

**Ecomuseum in Valls d'Àneu.** This brings together a number of facilities. The 18th-century Casa Gassia, in the old quarter of Esterri d'Àneu, provides a glimpse of life in the domestic farmstead. It retains the original layout and shows the function

of each room. At the sawmill in Alòs d'Isil, the timber process is shown from when it is cut until it is transformed into planks. The set of monuments in Son are testament to religious beliefs and rites including the Romanesque bell tower, the Gothic altarpiece, the cemetery and clock tower to exorcise the storms. The set is completed with the Monastery of Sant Pere del Burgal, in the town of Escaló, which explains monastic life during the Middle Ages.

#### **Çò de Joanchiquet Ecomuseum in Vilamòs.**

Already documented in the 17th century, Çò de Joanchiquet was one of the most affluent houses in Baix Aran. Restoration has been undertaken respecting the atmosphere, furnishings and layout at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition, it has three stables and

a pigeon loft surrounding an enclosed courtyard. Val d'Aran is also home to the **Fabrica dera Lan**, **Victoria d'Arres Mine**, **Salardú Mill** and **Val d'Aran Museum**.



Pharmacy in Llívia



## Active tourism

**For adventure sports lovers, the Pyrenees present a whole host of possibilities.** Whether for individuals, groups or families, the valleys of the Pyrenees offer a broad spectrum of activities for day excursions, weekends or longer breaks.

**Hiking.** Most of the valleys in the Pyrenees boast signposted paths and trails of varying length and difficulty. Various mountain crossings make the most of the network of paths and mountain refuges in the Pyrenees. Such is the case of the Carros de Foc Route in Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park; La Porta del Cel, which takes in the transborder circuits in the north of the county of Pallars Sobirà; and Cavalls del Vent in Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park. One of the most renowned trails is the Route of the Good Men, which reconstructs the route the Cathars followed from Berga to the Occitan castle of Montségur.

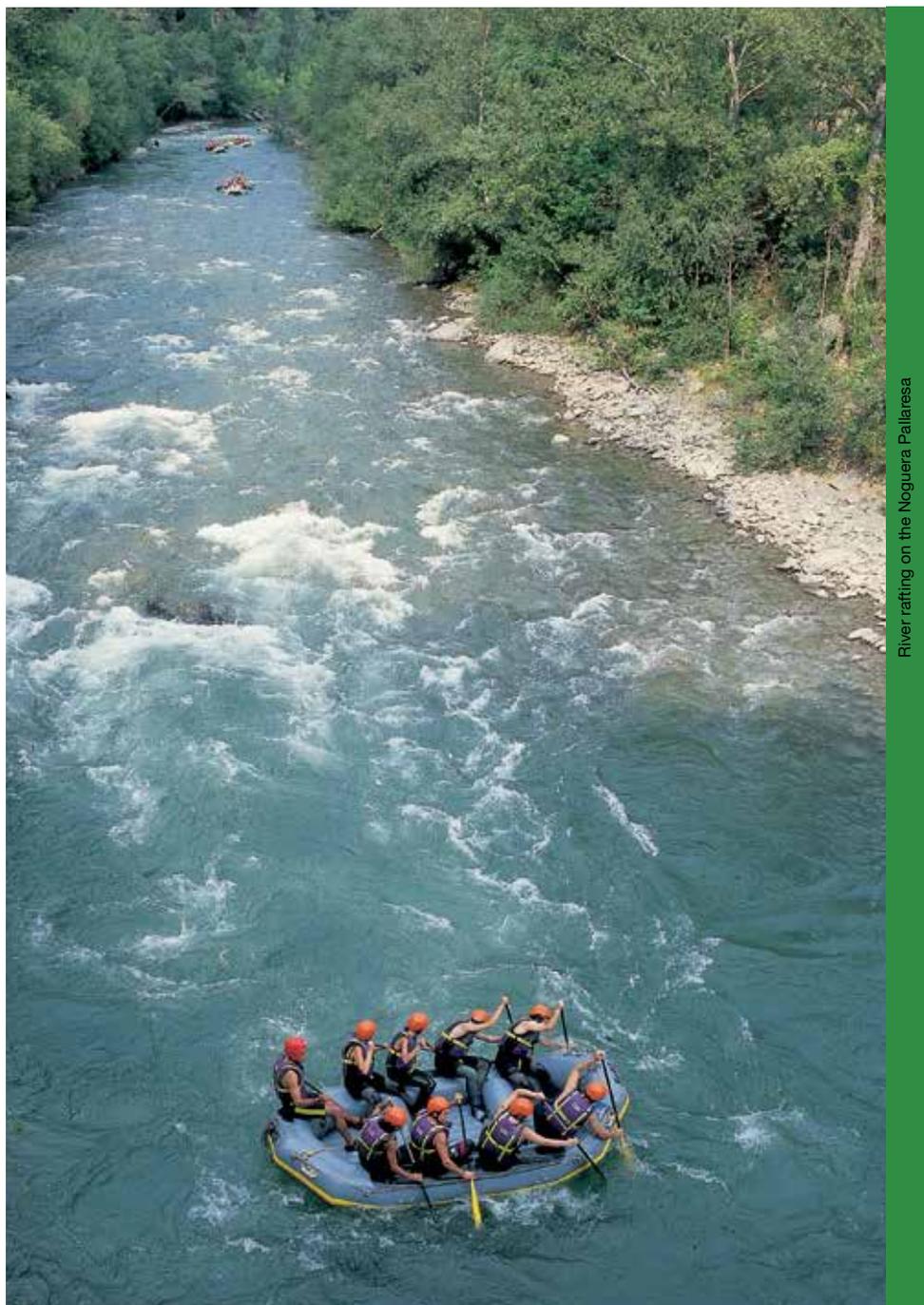
**Skiing.** The Catalan Pyrenees are home to eleven Alpine skiing resorts and six Nordic skiing resorts. A superb network enables visitors to engage in all manner of winter sports. Besides skiing, other

possibilities include night-time snowmobiling descents, dog sleighing, snowshoeing, snow cycling lessons, heliskiing, horseback riding in the snow and igloo building.

**Water sports.** The whitewaters of the Pyrenean rivers are ideal for hydrospeed, bus-bob and the more popular. The European Freestyle Kayak Championship is held in Sort at the beginning of July. La Seu d'Urgell also plays host to international competitions, in this case in Segre Olympic Park.

**Mountain biking.** The Catalan Pyrenees boast various mountain biking centres with hundreds of signposted trails, which are accessible free of charge for mountain biking enthusiasts. The trails set out from a point of departure which features tourist information and bicycle facilities. The mountain biking crossing known as Pedals de Foc skirts the perimeter of Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park at different stages.

**Flying sports.** Hot air balloon rides, flying an ultralight aircraft or paragliding (with the utmost



River rafting on the Noguera Pallaresa



Paragliding

safety) are experiences that will be forever etched on your memory. Cerdanya and Berguedà offer a whole host of flying options. Àger, at the foot of Montsec, is an unrivalled setting for free flight in extraordinary natural conditions. Crossings can also be made over the Garrotxa volcanic zone or over the Pyrenees, setting out from Cerdanya.

**Mountaineering and climbing.** Towering peaks, a profusion of scarps and rock walls and various accommodation options allow mountaineering and climbing enthusiasts to give free rein to their passion in both winter and summer alike. Numerous mountaineering bodies and small guide companies can help arrange ascents and climbs throughout the Pyrenees.

**Horseback riding.** Various horseback riding routes cross the Pyrenees. Alt Urgell, Pallars and Vall d'Aran have routes of varying difficulty. The Cadí valleys are home to many equestrian centres, two of which are found in La Seu d'Urgell. From

Prullans, visitors can follow the Route of the Good Men and other trails that cross the mountains on horseback. Camprodon has an equestrian centre and equestrian sports centre. From Sant Jaume de Llierca, horseback riding trips are arranged to Cap de Creus or to the mouth of the Ter River.

**Golf.** Courses in the Pyrenees generally have golf schools as well as all the necessary facilities to spend the day there such as restaurants, hotels, bars and shops. Some courses have additional sporting facilities such as tennis, padel tennis, heated swimming pools and saunas.





Horseback riding



Baqueira-Beret



## The culture of fire. A year brimming with feasts and festivals

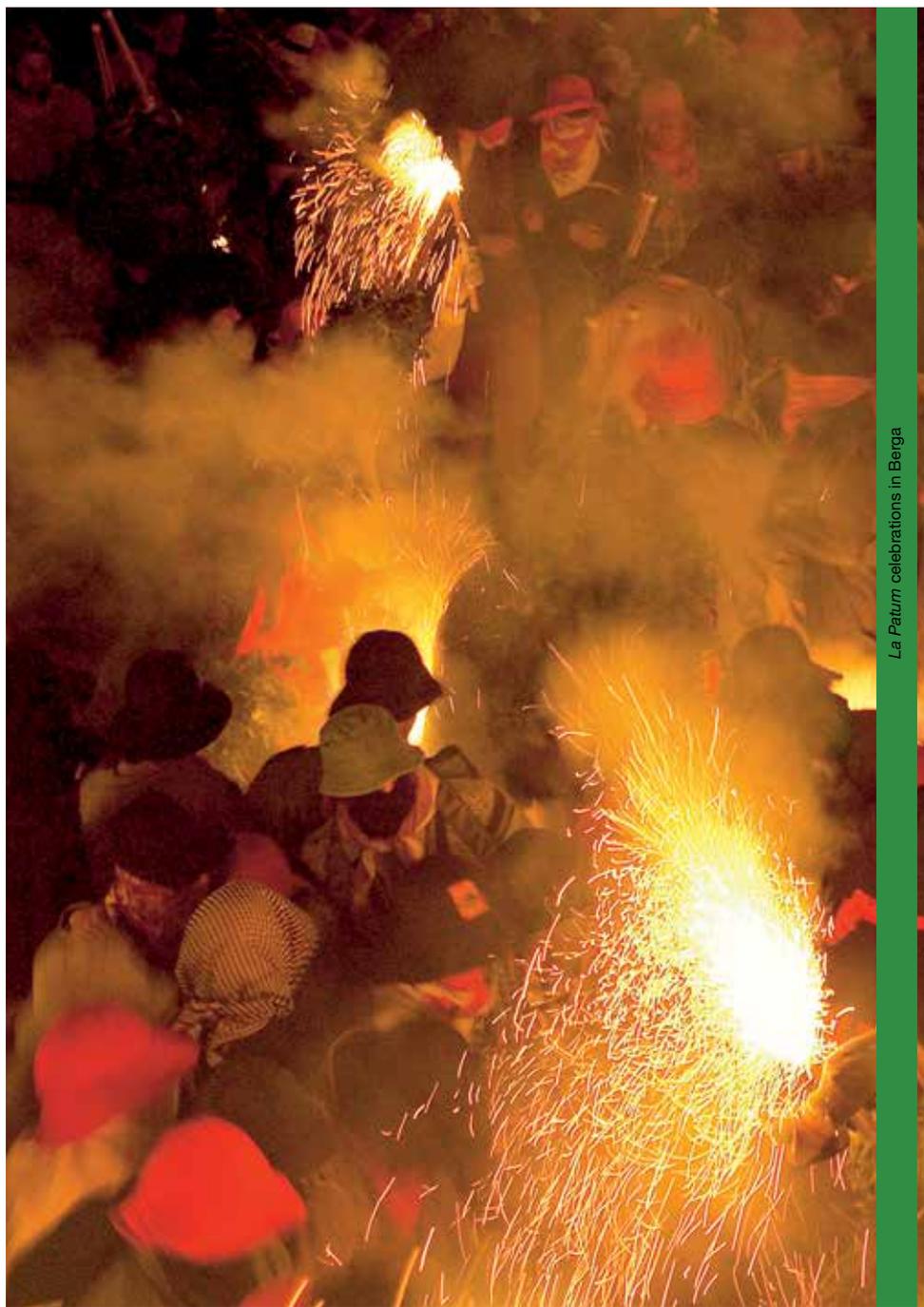


Celebrations punctuate the passing of the months: from Carnival to Holy Week, Corpus Christi and the summer solstice on the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, local festivals and fairs, the feasts of various shrines, the harvest, the arrival of the winter solstice and Christmas. Some festivals and feasts were instigated by farmers, while others are rooted in the Church or come from so far back that their origin is unknown. To these can be added new feasts and festivals, which may be new to the scene but have taken deep root – yet another facet of the thousand faces of these mountains.

**Carnival in Solsona.** “Per Carnaval tot s’hi val” (“Anything goes at Carnival time”), as the saying goes. Characterised by fancy dress and a laid-back atmosphere, the day the Carnival King arrives in Solsona a fake donkey is hoisted by the neck up the town clock tower. Legend has it that the donkey was hoisted to eat the grass that had grown on the clock tower. It is not the only animal star of the festival; a cow, an owl, a dragon and creepy crawlies also figure. The Gegants Bojos (Mad Giants) dance to the beat of the *paso doble*. The festival lasts a week and a half until Ash Wednesday, when the donkey is taken down. The Carnival in Roses is also popular, featuring a parade of one hundred floats and a rice lunch.

**Wool and Country Wedding Festival in Ripoll.** *Mid-May.* In spring, sheep shed their winter coat. This festival commemorates the sheep shearing tradition and also features a country wedding. It includes a folklore exhibition, a market selling farmhouse produce and a flea market. The **Herbal Remedies Festival** is also held in May in Tuixent (Alt Urgell).

**La Patum de Berga.** *Corpus Christi.* Spring’s festive calendar is established by Easter, a moveable feast which sets the date for the previous feasts such as Carnival and Palm Sunday and subsequent feasts such as Pentecost or Second Easter. On Pentecost Sunday the pilgrimage festival **Aplec dels Francesos** is held in Sant Aniol d’Aguja (Garrotxa) and the following day the **Falgars Dance** takes place in La Pobla de Lillet (Berguedà). The main festival takes place on Corpus, a fortnight after Pentecost. It is held in Solsona and Bossòst (Val d’Aran). The streets are decorated with garlands in Sant Llorenç de Morunys (Solsonès). However, the most resonant festival takes place in Berga, *La Patum*. Designated a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage by UNESCO, it takes place in the town’s Plaça de Sant Pere. On the eve of Corpus Christi, a pageant of giants parade through the town at midday and again in the evening, incorporating other folk characters such as Les



*La Patum celebrations in Berga*

Guites and Les Maces. But *La Patum* really takes off on the Thursday of Corpus Christi. The festival gets underway at midday with a *Patum de lluiment*, and reaches its ecstatic conclusion at dusk as the streets become a deluge of fire with the *salt de plens*, a dance of devils brandishing firecrackers. The Ball de Tirabol dance is the grande finale. On Friday there is a children's Patum, a *Patum de lluiment* at midday and a fiery conclusion at night. On Sunday *La Patum* is replicated with a *Patum de lluiment* at midday, and it reaches its pinnacle that night.

**Crema deth Haro in Les (Val d'Aran).** 23 June. Fire is the main protagonist of summer solstice celebrations. In various locations throughout the Pyrenees, the streets are ablaze with **torches**. The earliest are those in Durro lit one week beforehand. On the eve of Sant Joan, they are also lit in Isil (Pallars Sobirà) and Taüll (Alta Ribagorça). In **Les**, a 12-metre tree trunk is erected in the square and set alight; young people light *eshalhes*, the bark of cherry trees. Dancing ensues and *vin caud*, or mulled wine, is drunk. Also in Val d'Aran, in **Arties**, the most beautiful *taro*, trunk of a fir tree, is set alight; once it has been burning for a while, it is knocked to the ground and dragged through the streets.

**Rafters' Day in La Pobla de Segur (Pallars Jussà).** *First weekend in July.* Reminiscent of a former trade when tree trunks were driven downriver on improvised log rafts, the festival commences with the building of rafts underneath the Llànïa dam. After lunch, the rafts take off. The journey ends at Pont de Claverol six kilometres downstream, and is followed by a rice lunch. Also in July, *The Myth of Count Arnau* is performed in **Sant Joan de les Abadesses** (Ripollès), and **Bagà** (Berguedà) is transformed into a medieval town for an entire week. On 16 July, the Feast of La Mare de Déu del Carme, fishermen's festivals are held where the Pyrenees touch the sea in **Cadaqués** and **Llançà**.

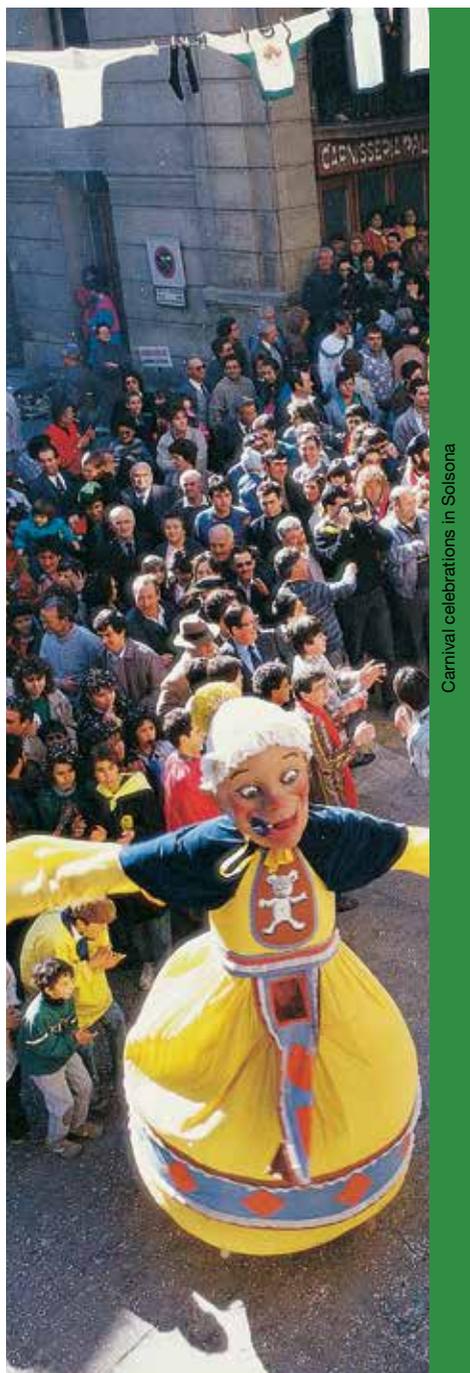
**Pyrenees Accordionists Gathering in Arsèguel (Alt Urgell).** *Last weekend in July.* The diatonic accordion takes centre stage alongside world music and an audience of hundreds in this town at the foot of Cadí. Concert performances begin on Friday night and continue until Sunday morning. The festival includes a luthier fair and should be complemented by a visit to the Accordion Museum, also in Arsèguel.

**International Sheepdog Trial in Castellar de n'Hug (Berguedà).** *Last weekend in August.*

Crema deth Haro in Les

Country wedding in Ripoll





Carnival celebrations in Solsona

The contest has been running for forty years since a group of shepherds in the county came together to compete. Two trials are held in which all the sheepdogs must compete. The first entails following a circuit marked with flags, and the second involves herding a flock of sheep through a gateway. Sheepdog trials are also held in Bellver (Cerdanya), Llavorsí (Pallars Sobirà) and Ribes de Freser (Ripollès).

#### **Selection of Young Horses in Espinavell-Molló (Ripollès).**

*13 October.* As the cold weather sets in, the animals descend from the mountains. In Molló, the festival begins with the descent of the horses, which have grazed in the mountains throughout the summer all the way to the Espinavell plains. Mares, horses and young mules – foals – arrive at eleven in the morning and deals ensue between owners and buyers. Prizes are awarded to the best specimens and, in the afternoon, the mares and mules are separated. Horses and mares later ascend the mountain once again until the first snow falls when they return to the farmsteads of their owners. Around this time, **livestock fairs** are held in Fontalba, Queralbs (Ripollès), Barruera (Alta Ribagorça), Bellver (Cerdanya) and Esterri d'Àneu (Pallars Sobirà).

#### **Fia-faia Festival in Bagà (Berguedà).**

*24 December.* Christmas rounds off the calendar of feasts and festivals. At nightfall on Christmas Eve, in Bagà and the neighbouring town of Sant Julià de Cerdanyola, a bonfire is lit on a mountain crag overlooking the sunset and two flaming torches are carried down to the town centre. Upon arrival at the square, the lights are switched off and the torches are lit. When the torches are almost burnt to their ends, a bonfire is made with the remains, which kids jump over. The coals are used to toast bread, which is spread with quince aioli and washed down with pitchers of wine. Bonfires are also made in **Les** (Val d'Aran), where the Soca de Nadau (Christmas tree stump) is lit opposite the church. After Midnight Mass, songs are sung around the stump and the town hall supplies complimentary hot chocolate, cake and muscatel.



## Cuisine. A burst of ancestral flavours

Pyrenean cuisine includes thousand-year-old recipes, dishes requiring patience and simmering and the finest mountain ingredients, combining intense flavours and rich aromas that conceal centuries of history to make *freginat* (sautéed port liver with white beans), *trinxat* (savory potato and cabbage cake), sweet and sour dishes and sumptuous *paupiettes*.

**Local produce** is brought into play to prepare veritable culinary works of art: *fesols* (beans) from Santa Pau; potatoes *emmascarades* from Berguedà (blend of potatoes with black *botifarra de perol*, port tripe sausage); *trinxat* from Cerdanya; *olla aranesa* (rich meat and vegetable stew); *caulets* (cabbage leaves with a minced meat filling), also from Val d'Aran; the famous *col negra* (black cabbage burned by the snow) with potatoes and fried streaked bacon; and the popular *escudella de blat de moro escairat* (a type of stew made with yellow corn). Some Pyrenean recipes are designed to be preserved for times of year when ingredients are less prolific, such as pork confit. Other relished dishes include lamb or veal broiled on a slab of stone and river trout accompanied with a slice of bacon. Cheeses and desserts explore a symphony of flavours, a mountain of delights for the palate.

**Mushrooms.** Varieties of mushroom sprout in woodlands and meadows all year round. In spring, the first morels and fairy ring mushrooms (*Marasmius oreades*) rear their head, which are a fine accompaniment to meat, omelettes and rice dishes. The St George's mushroom (*Calocybe gambosa*) also appears at this time of year, which is usually cooked in stews. At the end of the summer, the first mushrooms of mountain pine forests shoot up such as chanterelles (*Cantharellus cibarius*) and bloody milk caps (*Lactarius sanguifluus*), which are cooked on a slab and with streaked bacon and a hint of garlic, as well as the popular ceps that can be eaten raw or cooked and give great flavour to stews and creamed soups. In the midst of autumn, other varieties are found such as *Hygrophorus eburneus*, Caesar's mushroom (*Amanita caesarea*), *Tricholoma terreum*, *Cantharellus lutescens*, *Tricholoma russula* and black trumpets (*Craterellus cornucopioides*). In Berguedà, festivals and fairs take place in which mushrooms take centre stage. Cerdanya is home to various establishments where visitors can sample and purchase mushrooms, and in Pallars they are preserved upon collection and often feature in salads.



Selection of cheeses in Alt Urgell



Wild mushrooms ↑

Xolis ↓





Castelló de Tor

**Pyrenean veal.** Cows and calves are bred outdoors, feed on fodder and graze in pastures. Specimens can be seen at the Livestock Fair in Bellver de Cerdanya in October and at the Livestock and Red Pyrenean Veal Fair in Ribes de Freser on the second Saturday in October, among others. The result is succulent meat for stewing, frying, broiling over hot coals, on a griddle or on a hot slab of stone. The eastern part of the Pyrenees is home to the autochthonous breed of the Albera cow, which is smaller, and the Pallars breed is found further west.

**Lamb.** For centuries, lamb figured alongside pork as the meat reserve in the Pyrenees. Each and every part of the animal is used. The leg is used to make the traditional dish *palpís* (a grilled and stuffed leg of lamb); the ribs to prepare the famous *costelles a la brasa* (ribs barbecued on an open fire); the entrails to make *girella*, a type of haggis from Pallars stuffed with rice and delicious served warm, which is fried and accompanied by *capipota* (stewed head). *Carn de bèstia viva* is made from the tail of a one-year old lamb, and *freginat* from blood and liver cooked in a sweet and sour sauce made with honey and vinegar. Two of the most well-known breeds in the

region are the *xisqueta*, a small but strong breed, and the Ripollès sheep, which has highly prized meat. The best accompaniment to charcoal-grilled meat is the exquisite *alloli de codony* or *alloli de pera* (quince or pear aioli), which is found in many restaurants throughout the Pyrenees.

**Pork.** The dry-cured sausage *llonganissa* is the quintessential cold meat and is cooked over hot coals. *Secallona* is the best piece of pork meat stuffed in the small intestines to make a thin sausage that is left to dry; and *xolís*, one of the most select gastronomic delights of the Pallars Pyrenees, is also made with the best piece of meat stuffing the large intestine to make a wider sausage and also hung to dry. Botifarra sausages, made from minced pork and seasoning, are many and varied: *bull de la llengua*, *botifarra blanca*, *traïdora*, *bringuera*, *botifarra negra*. It should be noted that the names change from one valley to the next.

**Fish.** River trout finds its preferred habitat in the waters of the Pyrenees in the Segre, Noguera Ribagorçana and Noguera Pallaresa rivers, their tributaries and uppermost lakes. Brown common trout is fished in the rivers. It is slender and

elongated in shape with red and black spotting, and a soft flesh that melts in the mouth. In any case, the delicious trout served in restaurants in the Pyrenees generally comes from fish farms in the area. They are mostly served stuffed with streaked bacon and fried or grilled. Sturgeon caviar from the fish farm in Les in Val d'Aran can also be eaten in some locations in the Pyrenees.

**Game.** Game stews made with deer, izard, wild boar or hare constitute an authentic cuisine. Game is always stewed, prepared with all kinds of ingredients, and left to simmer for hours on end. Other scrumptious dishes are made with poultry, such as partridge with stuffed cabbage leaves typical of the Àneu valleys.

**Cheeses.** Made from goat's, cow's and sheep's milk, many varieties are found throughout the Pyrenees: cheese preserved in olive oil, blue cheese, curd cheese, soft mild cheese, Garrotxa cheese (pressed cheese made from non-pasteurised goat's milk), aged and soft cheese. One of the most typical cheeses is *tupí*, made with spirits, and *formatge serrat*, a hard-paste cured variety made with sheep's milk. There are also producers making yoghurts and the popular *mató*, curd cheese that should be eaten with local honey or the famous butter from Cadí.

**And desserts...** Many varieties of *coca*, a flat and oval-shaped pastry, are baked throughout the Pyrenees. Fresh out of the oven, sweetened and dipped in anise, they are a feast for the senses. In Pallars, *redorts* are made using the same pastry as the *coca* but with a hole in the middle, cut in a cross and with each piece folded on top. Other typical desserts in the Pyrenees include plums macerated in brandy, candied walnuts, *mostillo* made with must, flour and walnuts, *crespèths* (a type of doughnut) from Val d'Aran and pears from Cerdanya. *Mató* with honey and walnuts, *braç de gitano* (a type of Swiss roll) and creams of custard can round off a meal. A veritable culinary feast!





*Trinxat amb rosta*



Trout



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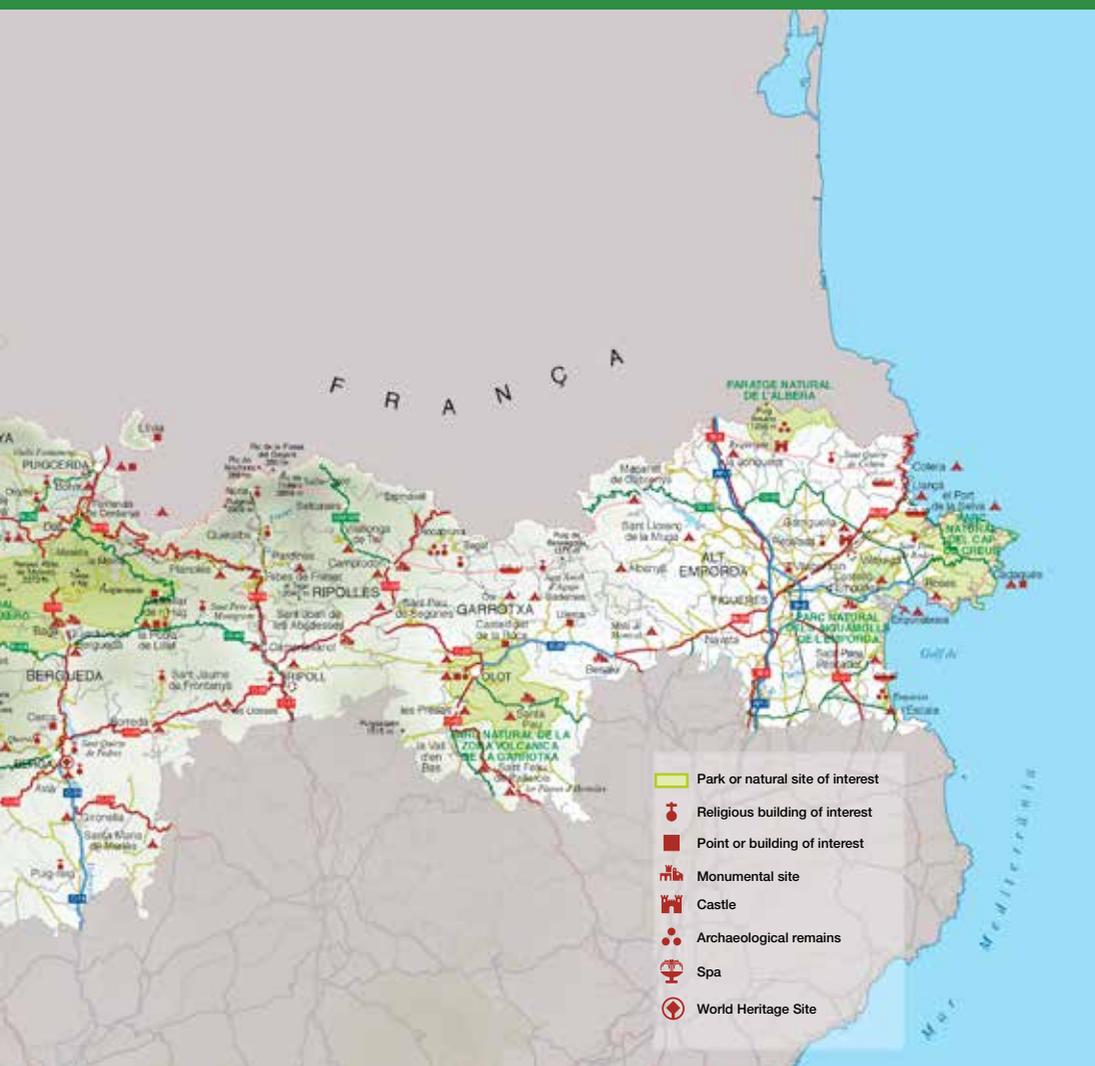
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# Map of Pyrenees





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