

SPECIAL EDITION

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVELLER

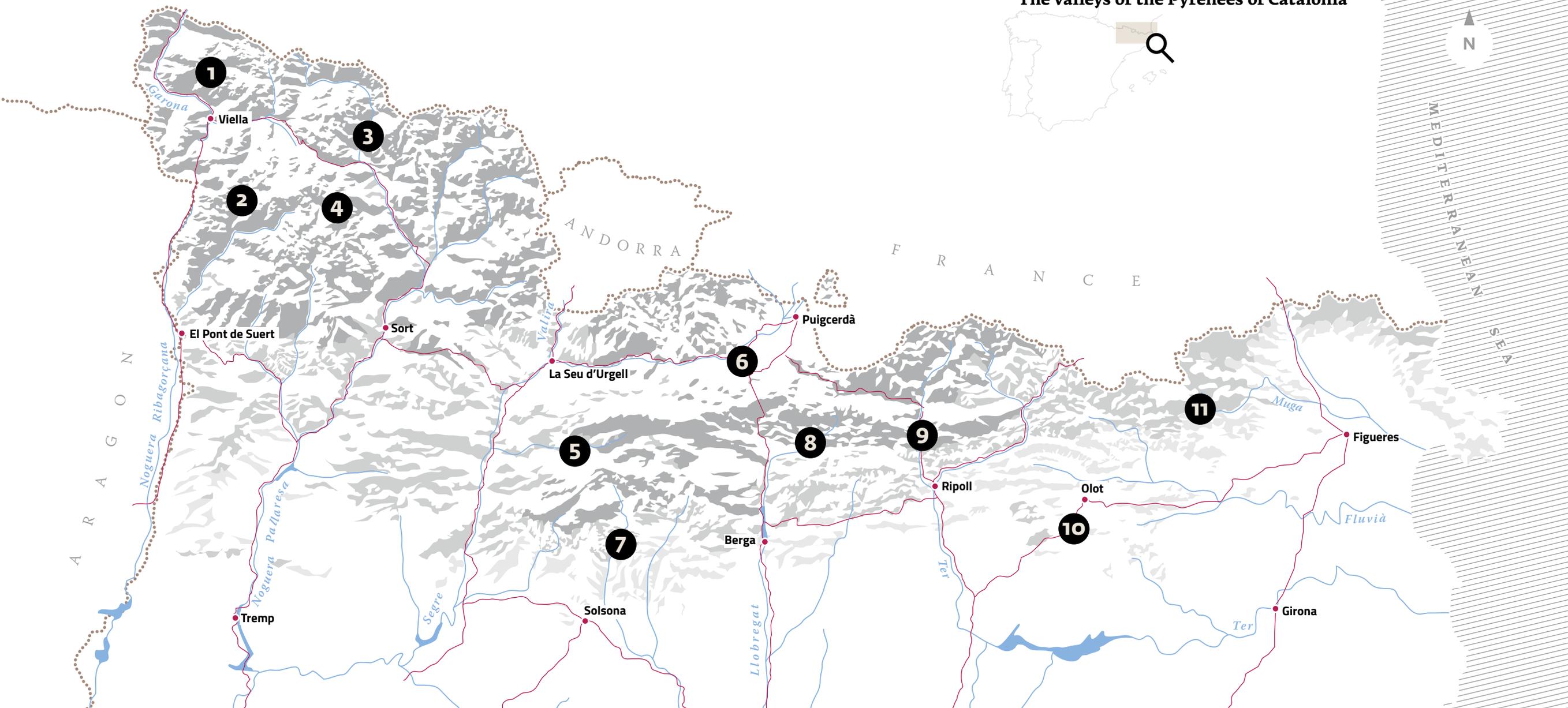
The Pyrenees of Catalonia

A complete guide to an unexplored mountain region

Paid content for the Pyrenees of Catalonia



The valleys of the Pyrenees of Catalonia



Colossal peaks, verdant meadows, medieval settlements and Roman fishing ports — welcome to the Pyrenees of Catalonia, a granite mountain range, located in northeastern Spain, which separates the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of Europe. Home to UNESCO World Heritage sites and the Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park, the region has long lured travellers in search of active and cultural adventures. Outdoor enthusiasts can make a playground of the craggy mountain trails, while historians can explore Romanesque churches and food-lovers can sample hearty Catalan cuisine at traditional taverns.

Whether you combine your visit with trips to nearby cities or dedicate an entire excursion to the region, the Pyrenees of Catalonia is the perfect year-round destination. Here's our guide to exploring its idyllic valleys.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Val d'Aran | 7 Vall de Lord |
| 2 Vall de Boí | 8 Llobregat & its surroundings |
| 3 Valls de l'Alt Pirineu | 9 Vall de Ribes & Vall de Camprodon |
| 4 Vall Fosca | 10 Vall d'en Bas & Vall de Bianya |
| 5 Vall de la Vansa i Tuixent | 11 The Muga river & its surroundings |
| 6 Vall de La Cerdanya | |

1 Val d'Aran

'Vast swathes of pine forest, rippling across infinite mountainsides' attracted the attention of the renowned Catalan journalist and author Josep Pla to Val d'Aran in the late 19th century. These coniferous trees can be seen today, blanketing the mountaintops.

Unlike other valleys in the Pyrenees of Catalonia, which sit in the south and face the Mediterranean, Val d'Aran is located on the Atlantic end of the mountains. This unique location gives the area a distinct cultural identity. Here, locals speak mainly Aranese — which, alongside Catalan and Spanish, is one of Catalonia's principal languages.

Visitors flock to the Val d'Aran for its skiing, adventure sports and rich artistic and cultural heritage. Here are 15 of the best ways to explore the area.



→ 34 miles **Valls de l'Alt Pirineu**
↓ 34 miles **Vall de Boí**



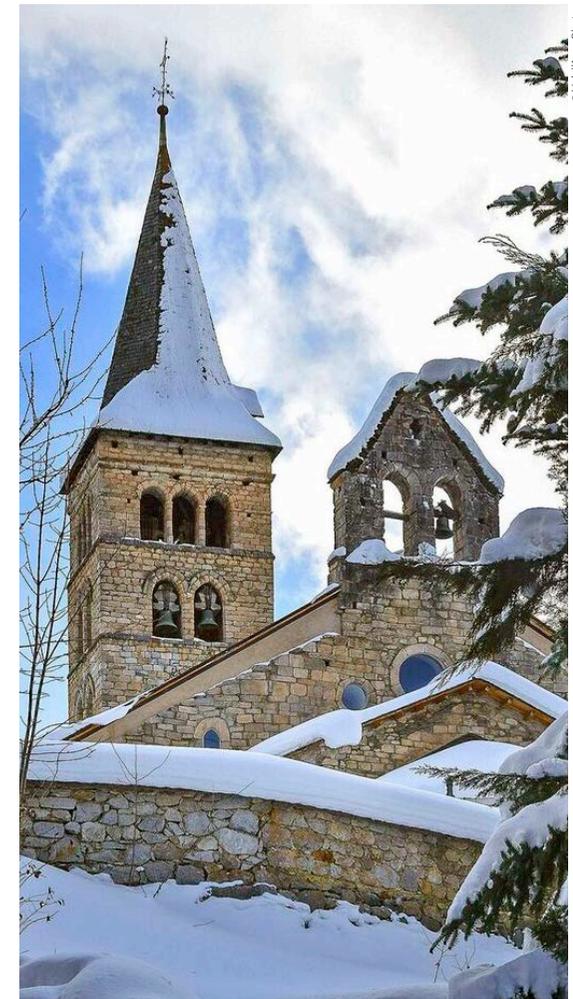
© Val d'Aran Photo



© ACT



© Val d'Aran Photo



© Val d'Aran Photo

Left: The Sanctuary of Montgarri
Clockwise from above: Runners in the streets of Bagergue; the church of Santa Maria d'Arties; a western capercaillie in Aran Park

Camin Reiau

Trek along a Roman road

Running parallel to the Garonne river, the **Camin Reiau** was once the only way to traverse the area. Ninety two miles of the historic route have now been restored to connect all 33 villages throughout the valley. The loop begins in Val d'Aran's capital, Vielha, and ends in the mountainside village of Montgarri, taking in beech, oak and fir forests en route. It's the perfect way to tour the region, whether tackled as a whole or in smaller sections.

Aran Park

Meet the local wildlife

Bears, otters, marmots, vultures, large red deer, Iberian lynxes and two species of wolverine are just some of the native animals you can observe at **Aran Park**. Located on the slopes of the mountain pass Port del Portillón, between Val d'Aran and France's Bagnères de Luchon, this wildlife park offers two-hour guided tours to view endemic mammals and birds in their natural habitats. Don't forget to pack your binoculars!

Architecture

Step back in time

There's something special about the **Romanesque churches** of Val d'Aran. Constructed from the 11th to 15th centuries, these stone-built structures exist in almost every village in the valley. Santa Maria d'Arties, which straddles gothic and Romanesque styles, and the painting-adorned Sant Andreu de Salardú, with its octagonal bell tower and three naves, are two must-visits. To learn more about these landmarks, click [here](#).

Aranese cuisine

Taste a traditional treat

Isolated for many years, the inhabitants of Val d'Aran cultivated many of their own crops and created hearty dishes such as *Òlha Aranesa*, a slow-cooked soup packed with black pudding, meat, potatoes and noodles. Be sure to sample the valley's **premier products**, such as caviar, cheese, beer, honey, yoghurt and cassis, the artisanal best of which bear the **'Productes dera Val d'Aran'** mark of guarantee.

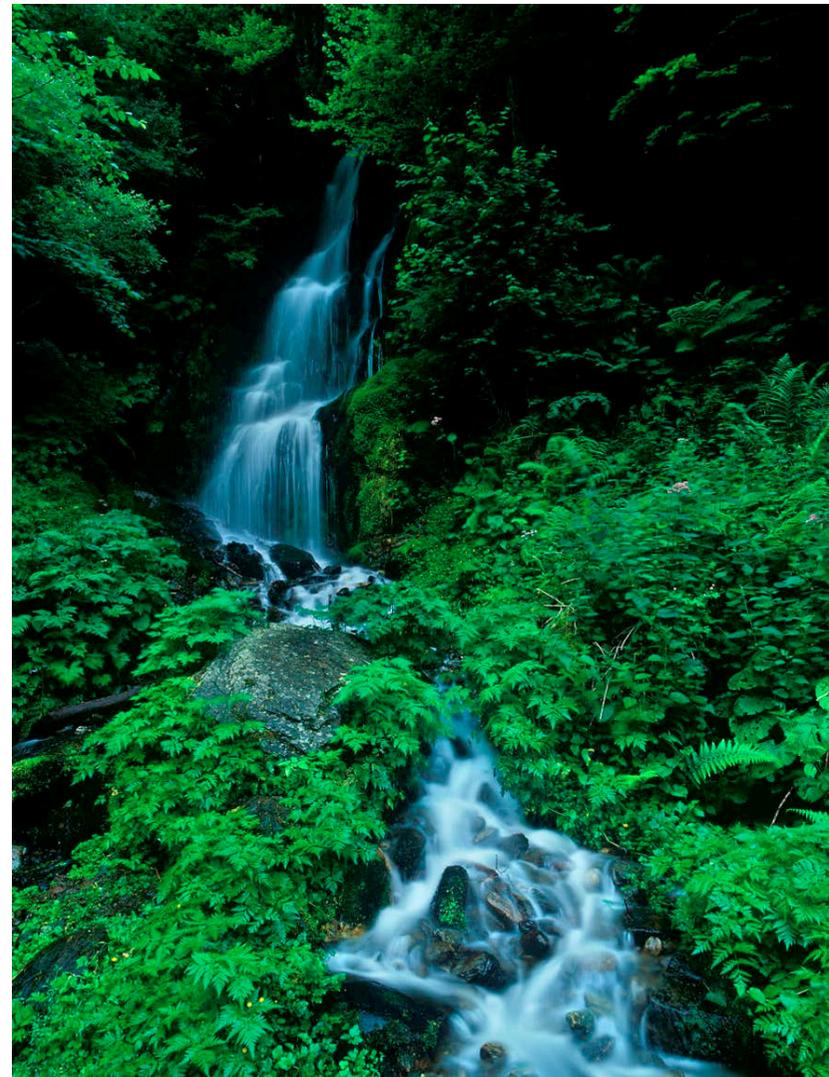


© Val d'Aran/Photo

Clockwise from left: Mountain biking is one of the most popular activities in Val d'Aran; blue cheese from Bagergue; the waterfall in Val de Toran



© Mikael Heising



© Rafael Lopez Monné

Baqueira Beret

Hit the slopes

The **Baqueira Beret** ski resort is one of the best-known in Spain and one of the largest and most renowned in the Pyrenees of Catalonia. Established in 1964, it encompasses 102 miles of ski runs and more than 100 tracks. These mostly suit intermediate skiers, but there are good beginner zones — notably on the Bosc Plateau above Baqueira and on the edge of Beret — and, for experts, 17 black runs.

Accommodation

Choose opulent or eccentric

Val d'Aran is home to an array of accommodation options, including traditional guesthouses, luxurious spa resorts in extraordinary settings and playful boutique hotels. Accessible only by snowmobile in winter and supplied by a natural hot spring, the spa hotel **Banhs de Tredòs** is an ideal place to get lost in nature and discover the natural heritage of the valley. Meanwhile, Baqueira's **Val de Neu** tops the bill for luxury.

Bagergue

Visit a remote farming village

Located 4,656 ft above sea level, the quaint, rural village of **Bagergue** is the highest inhabited hamlet in Val d'Aran. It's surrounded by beautiful landscapes, vertical mountain walls and excellent pasture lands. To learn about the area's farming history, head to the Eth Corrau museum. Here, you can view more than 2,500 ancient objects, such as carts and cowbells, that evoke centuries of working life.

Angling

Pack your fishing rod

Val d'Aran's mountainous terrain, clear waters and scenic backdrops make for an unforgettable fishing experience. Avid anglers can expect a variety of native and exotic species, including brown and rainbow trout. The public administration of Catalonia controls the sizes and amounts of catches, updates its maps each season, and has expanded the stretches where release fishing is allowed throughout the year.

Artiga de Lin

Hike into the valley's heart

Characterised by beechwoods, fir trees, torrents and streams, **Artiga de Lin** is one of the most idyllic spots in the Catalan Pyrenees. Hikers, climbers and bikers flock to the protected natural area — 4,823 feet above sea level — for its trails, including a 1.2-mile circular loop to a refuge that sits at the foot of the Hòro saddle. Begin the trail at the Uelh's deth Joèu waterfall. To learn more about the region, click [here](#).

E-biking

Enjoy a two-wheeled tour

E-bikes are the perfect option for visitors wanting to explore the valley and combine nature, culture and adventure. The Val d'Aran Bike Park — in the Baricauba forest, about five minutes by car from the capital, Vielha — has a particularly great array of trails, including vast, open, straight sections and slower parts with rocks, tight turns and technical, steep areas. Spring through to autumn provide the best cycling conditions.

Vielha

Head to the culinary capital

Vielha, the capital of Val d'Aran, should top every food lover's wish list. Its restaurants serve everything from the finest haute cuisine to traditional dishes that evoke the scents and flavours of the surrounding mountains, including game stews and hearty soups. You'll also find restaurants and bars specialising in small tasting dishes and *pintxos* — tapas-style snacks on cocktail sticks.

Coasteering

Take the leap

Val d'Aran's volcanic terrain, natural slides and green-tinged lagoons make it a playground for **coasteering**: a thrilling combination of swimming, scrambling and rock-jumping. Bausen canyon, just over half an hour's drive from Vielha, near the town of Les, is a great route for beginners. The descent — which takes around one-and-a-half-hours — includes waterfalls, slides and rope descents, amid lush valley vegetation.

The Festival of Fire

Celebrate with locals

During the midsummer feast of Saint John, the towns of **Les** and **Arties** keep the thousand-year-old fire festivals — dating back to Celtic rituals — alive. In the town square, a log from a fir tree is set alight, around which traditional dances and Aranese songs are performed. These events are part of the summer solstice fire festivals in the Pyrenees, which are inscribed on UNESCO's Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The Val d'Aran Walking Festival

Tackle the trails

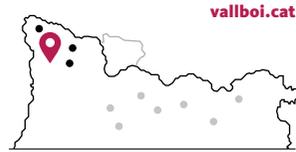
Val d'Aran is a hiking paradise — so, naturally, there's a whole **festival** dedicated to its summits, trails and mountaineering culture. Celebrated for six days in July, the festival includes five hiking activities with different routes and gradients. Other activities include artisan beer and cheese tastings in the villages of Bossòst and Bagergue, and medicinal plant workshops on the flora and fauna throughout the valley.

Mina Victoria

Visit an old mountain mine

In the 19th century, the valley's abundance of sphalerite — the mineral source of zinc — transformed the area into a prosperous mining district. One such development was **Mina Victoria**, which opened to the public in 2004. A visit reveals the inner workings of a mountain mine and the treacherous conditions workers faced. A guided walk takes you through the foreman's house, the workers' house and the Machine Room, now reimagined as a visitors' centre. To learn more about the experience, click [here](#).

2 Vall de Boí



↑ 34 miles Val d'Aran
↑ 70 miles Valls de l'Alt Pirineu
→ 36 miles Vall Fosca

The gateway to the Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park and home to mountains that tower more than 9,800ft in height, Vall de Boí is a true paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. Visitors flock to the region to explore the national park's 200 lakes, dozens of waterfalls and countless hiking, biking and climbing routes.

The municipality also draws legions of history buffs, owing to its plethora of UNESCO World Heritage churches, which have stood the test of time amid extreme alpine environments. This — together with the Caldes de Boí spa, the Boí Taüll ski resort and the local villages' ancestral traditions — makes the valley an enthralling destination. Here are 14 of the best locations and activities.



© Ramon Gabriel

Taüll

Visit a truly charming village

Awarded a 'Charming Village' seal by the Catalan Tourist Board, **Taüll** — with stone houses amid lakes and lush forests — is perhaps one of the fairest spots in the whole of the Pyrenees of Catalonia. It's best known for its two Romanesque churches of Santa Maria and Sant Climent, both built in the 12th century and declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park

Take a scenic family stroll

Vall de Boí is a walker's paradise, with an extensive network of winding trails. It's also the gateway to the Pyrenees' only national park: **Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici**. Here, walkers can enjoy a scenic hike to **Llong Lake**, a three-mile route with views of crystalline waters, lush vegetation and grazing cows in the distance.

Caldes de Boí

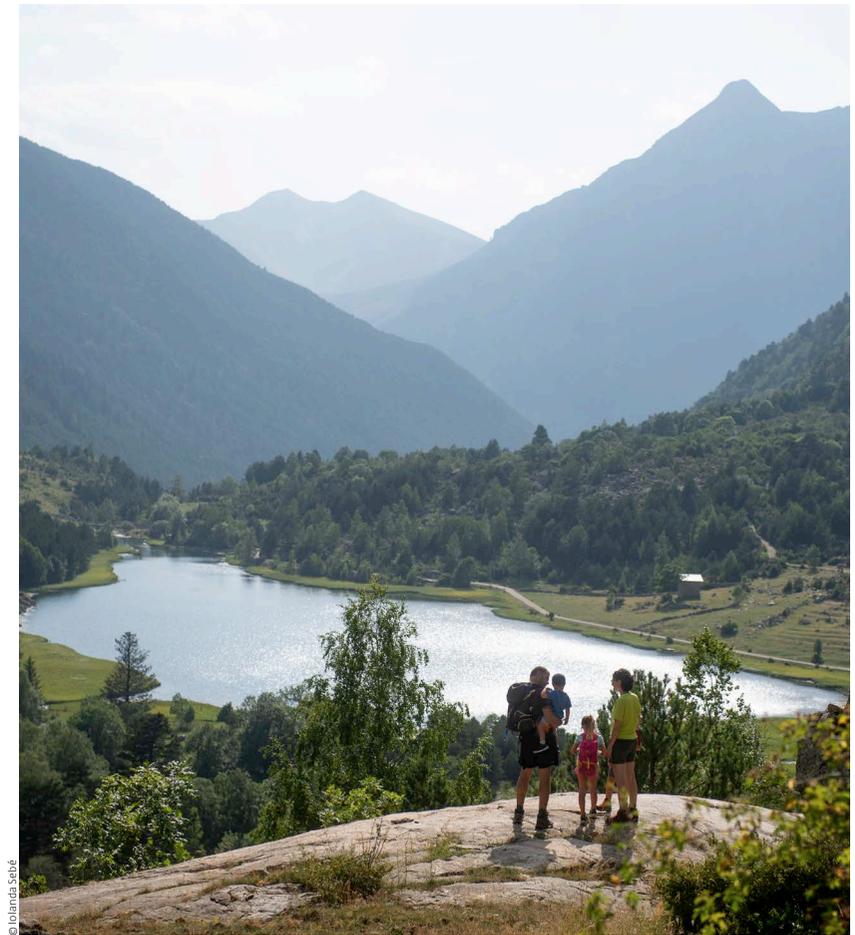
Soak in soothing hot springs

At an altitude of 4,800ft, amid 100 acres of virgin nature, the luxurious spa resort of **Caldes de Boí** is the perfect place to soothe body and mind. Mountain springs gift the spot with 37 thermal waters, varying in mineral composition and with temperatures from four to 56 degrees. Experiences include hydrotherapy, forest bathing and meditation, with the heat, steam and mud offering a variety of therapeutic benefits.

Local wildlife

Meet the marmots

Groundhogs are among the friendliest residents of Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park, many of which have settled in colonies near the dam of Cavallers. It's now possible to view them from a safe distance on various **guided hikes** throughout the park. You'll also learn about the high-mountain landscapes and the area's unique flora and fauna.



© Glòria Sebà



© Balneario Caldes de Boí

Clockwise from left: Sant Climent church with the mountains as a backdrop; Llong Lake, located within Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park; a view of the Caldes de Boí Thermal Resort

Skiing

Hit the slopes at Boi-Taüll

The **Boi-Taüll ski resort** is one of the region's best kept secrets. It has the highest elevation of resorts in the Catalan Pyrenees, reaching heights of 9,000ft. Its northern location, meanwhile, guarantees pristine powder on all 28 miles of the slopes. These include six green, six blue, 15 red and 16 black runs, plus four downhill trails and a toboggan run. There are moguls and jumps for thrill-seekers, too.

Accommodation

Relax at a rustic inn

Vall de Boi offers **accommodation options** to suit all budgets and preferences. These range from sleek, boutique hotels, rural apartments and traditional farmhouses to well-equipped campsites and hostels. Visitors looking for a luxurious option should opt for the **Aparthotel Siente Boi & Spa**, a four-star establishment that merges traditional mountain materials with a modern design.

The Vall de Boí Trek Festival

Enjoy an autumnal stroll

This annual **event** — the 2024 instalment of which runs 11-13 October — enables visitors to explore the valley's Romanesque UNESCO World Heritage churches amid the bronze and crimson hues of autumn. A walking route is mapped and, at night, astronomical observation reveals why these skies have been designated a UNESCO Starlight Reserve.

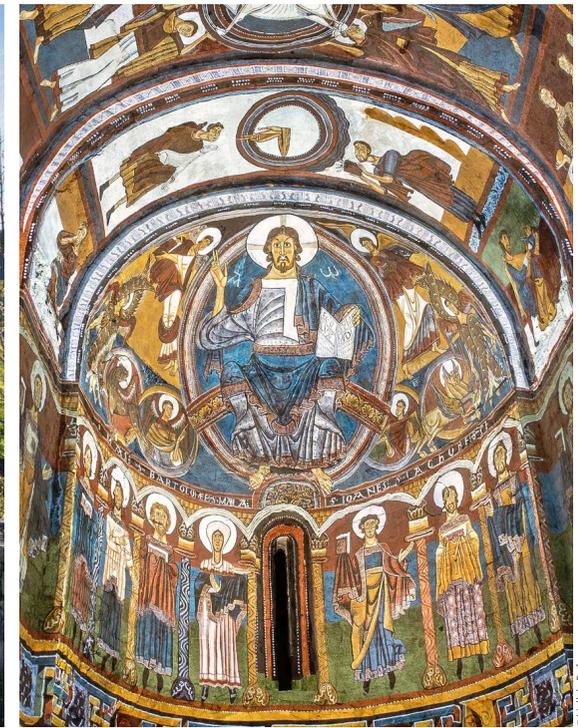
The Garmin Mountain Festival

Take to the trails

Vall de Boí has established itself as a leading destination for mountain races, including hillclimbing, marathons and ultra marathons. Appropriately, the valley now has its own **festival** dedicated to the sport. It's held every summer — 2024's event runs 28-30 June — and includes a host of activities and hikes to make the most of the mountains and valleys.



Clockwise from top: Biking during Buff Mountain Festival; a rural hotel; the slopes of Boi-Taüll ski resort



From left: The town of Eril la Vall; the Pantocrator mural within Sant Climent de Taüll church

Stargazing

Look up at the stars

Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park holds UNESCO Starlight Reserve certification, recognising its role as a protected natural area, committed to protecting the quality of the night sky and access to starlight. It's regarded as one of Europe's best stargazing locations. Sant Quir de Durro, a viewpoint eight miles southwest of Taüll, has an **astronomical table** to help astrophiles identify constellations.

Festivals of fire

Immerse in the local culture

The 'falles' festivals are ancestral ceremonies that mark the summer solstice. In the past, they celebrated the passage from childhood to adulthood and have now been added to UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list. **Vall de Boi** will host six ceremonies this June and July in the villages of Durro, Boi, Barruera, Erill la Vall, Taüll and Pla de l'Ermita.

Sant Climent de Taüll

Revel in Romanesque art

Vall de Boi's isolation helped conserve its nine resplendent churches, declared World Heritage sites in 2000. **Sant Climent de Taüll** — original home of the *Apse of Sant Climent* fresco — is perhaps the most renowned. While the original mural can be found at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona, the painting can still be enjoyed thanks to clever video mapping that restores it to the apse.

Gastronomy

Taste the valley

In Vall de Boi, the power and abundance of the natural world has birthed a culinary scene that blends ancient traditions with sustainable practices. Dishes typically use potatoes, vegetables, lamb, pork, beef, mushrooms and river trout, which are all locally sourced and cultivated. Head to Taüll for some of the valley's leading restaurants and click [here](#) to learn more.

Myths and legends

Indulge in ancient folklore

It's said that Vall de Boi is full of enchantments. Mysterious fairies, or water women, are believed to have lived along the valley's riverbanks and in ponds, which had the power to regenerate nature. Aranese folklore also holds that every mountain has a spirit, called the great *Ome Granizo*. Discover the magic that lies behind these landscapes on any of the small excursions and **guided tours** available throughout the valley.

Biking

Explore on two wheels

Natural drama and a rich culture collide to spectacular effect in Vall de Boi. Explore on two wheels following signposted routes that range from accessible paths along the riverbanks to technical trails, high in the alpine meadows and black pine forests. There are also guided e-bike routes and a fun pumptrack for families to enjoy. For more information, click [here](#).

3 Valls de l'Alt Pirineu



← 34 miles Val d'Aran
↙ 55 miles Vall de Boí
↓ 25 miles Vall Fosca

The least populated region of Catalonia, the Alt Pirineu offers scenery and serenity in abundance. The area is made up of five distinct valleys — Valls d'Àneu, Vall de Cardós, Vallferrera, Vall d'Àssua and Vall de Siarb — linked by the Noguera Pallaresa river, which runs in dramatic fashion from north to south.

The region is dotted with small, traditional towns, from which you can discover some of the most spectacular landscapes of the Catalan Pyrenees. These include high peaks, glacial lakes and deep underground caverns. Here are 15 of the best ways to explore the area.



© Oriol Clavera / PTDL



© Oriol Clavera / PTDL

Clockwise from left: Views of Vall de Cardós; cultural tourism in the Ecomuseu de les Valls d'Àneu; rafting on the Noguera Pallaresa



© Oscar Rodbag / Parque Natural de l'Alt Pirineu

Alt Pirineu Natural Park

Visit Catalonia's largest natural park

Comprising almost 270sq miles, the **Alt Pirineu Natural Park** is a vast playground for nature lovers. As you climb in altitude, you'll see the landscapes evolve from valleys cloaked in spectacular forests to flower-speckled alpine meadows. Binoculars are a must to spot the various birds and potentially catch a glimpse of the elusive bears that live at these heights.

Rafting

Ride the rapids

With more than 25 miles of navigable river, including multiple channels and waterfalls, the **Noguera Pallaresa** is the rafting hotspot of the Pyrenees of Catalonia. Various excursions are adapted according to ability and led by experienced local guides. The only quality you need is a willingness to get into the water.

Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park

Venture into the wild

Between the municipalities of Espot (in the county of Pallars Sobirà) and Boí (in Alta Ribagorça) lies the **Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park**, famed for its rugged beauty. Within it, the El Portarró d'Espot is where the two municipalities meet. It's a mountain pass sitting at an altitude of 8,000ft, and promises panoramic views and invigorating hikes. To learn more about the park, click [here](#).

Biking

Push yourself on pedals

A **mountain bike** descent is one of the best experiences you can have in the Alt Pirineu: sport, strength and scenery come together in an exhilarating triad. The 135-mile Pedals de Foc route is one of the most accessible and idyllic trails to try. Running from the mouth of the Noguera Pallaresa river, it takes between three and five days.

Wine routes

Embark on a grape escape

Stone paths were once the only routes between the Alt Pirineu's towns and valleys. Many remain today and provide the perfect way to hike through the region, threading between vast vineyards and meadows filled with grazing sheep. The **'Biu' hiking trail** runs from the town of Sort into the surrounding vineyards before finishing at the Tros de Sort cheese factory, where you can sample Catalan wine and cheese.

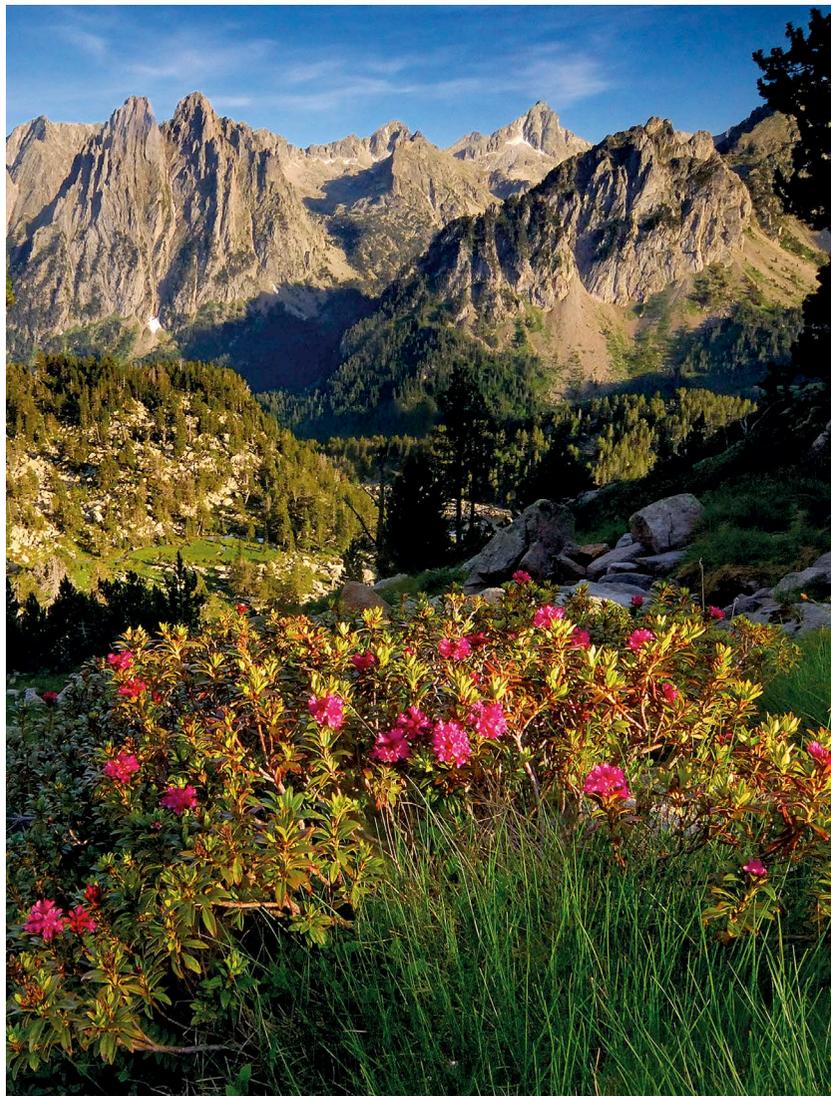
Pallars

Hit the ski slopes

Snow is an inextricable part of winter in the Alt Pirineu, meaning that so too are snowsports. During those months, thousands of skiers visit the valley to experience the mountains at their powder-covered best. With the **Skipallars** pass, you can enjoy renowned resorts such as Port Ainé, Espot, Tavascan and Virós Vallferrera.



© Oriol Riera



© PDDL

Clockwise from above:
The Festival of Fire in Alós d'Isil; a local shepherd from Gavàs, Valls d'Àneu, herding his flock; landscapes of the Alt Pirineu Natural Park

Architecture

Step back in time

A glance at the horizon is enough to realise that **Romanesque architecture** triumphed throughout the valleys of the Alt Pirineu. Among the region's mountains are endless churches, hermitages and monasteries, such as the magnificent monastic complex of Santa Maria de Gerri (in the village Gerri de la Sal) and the church of Sant Iscle i Santa Victòria de Surp (in Surp), with its imposing Lombard-style bell tower.

Mountain campsites

Sleep under the stars

Pitching your tent at the foot of the valley's 9,800ft peaks or sleeping among trees, like the Avet del Pla de la Selva fir, offers a unique experience and encourages an enhanced connection with nature. The region is home to a wide variety of high-altitude **campsites**, from outdoor spots to cosy cabins with additional amenities.

Night hiking

Consider a dark-sky descent

The Vall de Siarb mountain refuge, located in the town of Llagunes, is the beginning and end of one of the area's most spectacular **hiking routes**. The daytime ascent passes through fascinating places such as the legendary Turbó mountain, where bearded vultures and — according to local legend — witches fly over. Once dusk arrives, your headlamps guide the trail as the mountain strikes up its special night-time performance.

Michelin-star dining

Indulge in haute cuisine

The essence of the Pyrenees is in its landscapes, but also on its plates. This cuisine is best experienced at enclaves like **El Fogony** in the town of Sort. This family-run restaurant — which holds a Michelin star and its Spanish counterpart, a Repsol Sun — uses local ingredients, such as Torre d'Erbull chicken, Tavascán trout and Bruneta veal.

Wildlife

Listen to nature's soundtrack

After a summer grazing peacefully at the highest altitudes, the region's stags begin their descent in early autumn. As they do, they emit the deep bellows of the rut. This sound — designed to attract females to mate — is repeated by the echo of the mountain and can be heard across the vast valleys of Alt Pirineu. Join one of the various excursions or photography tours to view this **unique phenomenon** from a respectful distance.

Off-road adventures

Explore in a 4WD

The territory of the Alt Pirineu is known for the depth of its valleys, the height of its peaks and the ruggedness of its trails. Here, nature is ripe for exploring in an off-road vehicle and, thankfully, many companies offer 4WD excursions. There's no better place to start than the Gran Travessa: one of the most idyllic, extensive panoramic routes in the Pallars Sobirà region.

Centennial traditions

Become a shepherd for the day

Grazing livestock are an integral part of the territory's identity, and tending them is a skill that takes years of practice and a lot of patience. To learn more about the shepherds of Catalonia and how their roles have shifted over the past century, take on the position yourself with **Jesús**, a shepherd from Gavàs in Valls d'Àneu.

Stargazing

Seek stars and constellations

When night falls in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu, a show of stars and constellations begins above the glistening peaks, dotting the sky with flickering lights. This spectacle is magnified when viewing the stars through a telescope during a dark-sky **astronomy session** at the foot of the Cabanyes river.

The Bonfire Festival of Isil

Celebrate summer solstice

In the small town of Alt Àneu, the **Bonfire Festival of Isil** has been held for more than a century and has remained practically unchanged since it began. Much like other 'falles' festivals throughout the Pyrenees of Catalonia, it's a celebration that revolves around fire and the summer solstice. The ancestral ceremony, held in June, is followed by traditional dances, such as the *ball de bastons* (stick dance) and the *marxa dels fallaires* (march of the fallaires), to name a few.

4 Vall Fosca

In the north of the Pallars Jussà county, Vall Fosca is an idyllic section of the Catalan Pyrenees, renowned for its rugged beauty. Its name — which means ‘dark valley’ in Catalan — derives from its unique geography and lack of direct sunlight: the high cliffs are known to cast shadows over the valley floor, creating an environment that’s darker and more shaded than neighbouring areas.

Nonetheless, the valley is anything but bleak. Lush forests, diverse wildlife, cascading waterfalls and historic hamlets abound, with the Flamisell river flowing through them all. Here are eight of the best places and activities to enjoy.



← 36 miles Valls de l'Alt Pirineu
← 44 miles Vall de Boí

Clockwise from right:
The Vall Fosca Cable Car;
sweeping views of the
Fifth Lake walking trail



The Vall Fosca Walking Festival

Tackle the trails

The annual **Vall Fosca Walking Festival** — one of 12 such festivals across the Catalan Pyrenees — is celebrating its ninth edition this year. Held every summer, the festival invites visitors to explore the unsung corners of the valley with knowledgeable locals and experienced mountain guides. The programme also features a variety of workshops to learn about the area’s cultural, natural and gastronomic heritage.

The Fifth Lake

Grab your walking boots

The **Fifth Lake** is a 65-mile, circular hiking trail that traverses some of the lesser-known areas of the Pyrenees of Catalonia, such as the Pla de Corts plain, the valleys of Vall Fosca and Vall de Manyanet and the Montcortès lake, also known as the Fifth Lake. Glimpsed from different summits along the route, the lake is only revealed in full at the final section of the hike.

Pobleta de Bellvei

Attend a traditional livestock fair

Pobleta de Bellvei is a livestock fair that once set the prices for all Catalan cattle markets. It’s held on the first weekend of October, and is the perfect place to sample local cuisine, enjoy cultural performances and pick up artisanal souvenirs. While here, make time to visit the town’s flat-roofed parish church, Sant Feliu.

Hydroelectric Museum

Learn about the land of lakes

In the early 20th century, the network of lakes in the Vall Fosca watershed were successfully harnessed to generate energy. This power station at Capdella was Catalonia’s first hydroelectric plant and proved vital for the development of the Pyrenean valleys. To learn more about its history and impact, visit the **Capdella Hydroelectric Museum**.

The Vall Fosca Cable Car

Have a high-flying adventure

Built in 1989 to aid construction of the Sallente power station, the **Vall Fosca Cable Car** is an enthralling adventure that reaches heights over 7,000ft in the Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park. From the top, there are numerous excursions to embark on, from summiting the 9,843ft peaks of Peguera and Montsent de Pallars, to more relaxed hikes exploring the park’s 32 glacial lakes. Check online for the full list of trails.

Mountain viewpoints

Scout out eight of the best

Sometimes you need to put in work to see a place clearly. Thankfully, Vall Fosca has eight fantastic **viewpoints** to take in the region’s beauty. The highest — Colomina — stands at well over 6,560ft, and can be reached via the Vall Fosca Cable Car or on foot from Lake Gento. There’s even a shelter at the top to relax and refuel before the descent.

Mountain lodgings

From the quirky to the cosy

True luxury lies not in the number of stars on a hotel’s door, but in the details and the location. Such is the case with the **accommodation options** throughout Vall Fosca. Throughout the region, lodgings range from sleek, luxurious hotels to renovated guesthouses, well-equipped campgrounds and boutique hostels that fit seamlessly into the natural surrounds.

The Carrilet Greenway

Hike along an old railway line

This old **railway line** was once the main means of transporting materials and workers across the valley. It’s now been converted into a perfect site for family hiking. The best area in which to view the old tracks begins at Lake Gento, at 7,200ft. Here, you can walk through four tunnels and across three miles of greenway, with spectacular views of pastures and fields.



5 Vall de la Vansa i Tuixent

This lesser-known valley in the Pyrenees offers opportunities to enjoy challenging activities amid serene, untouched landscapes.

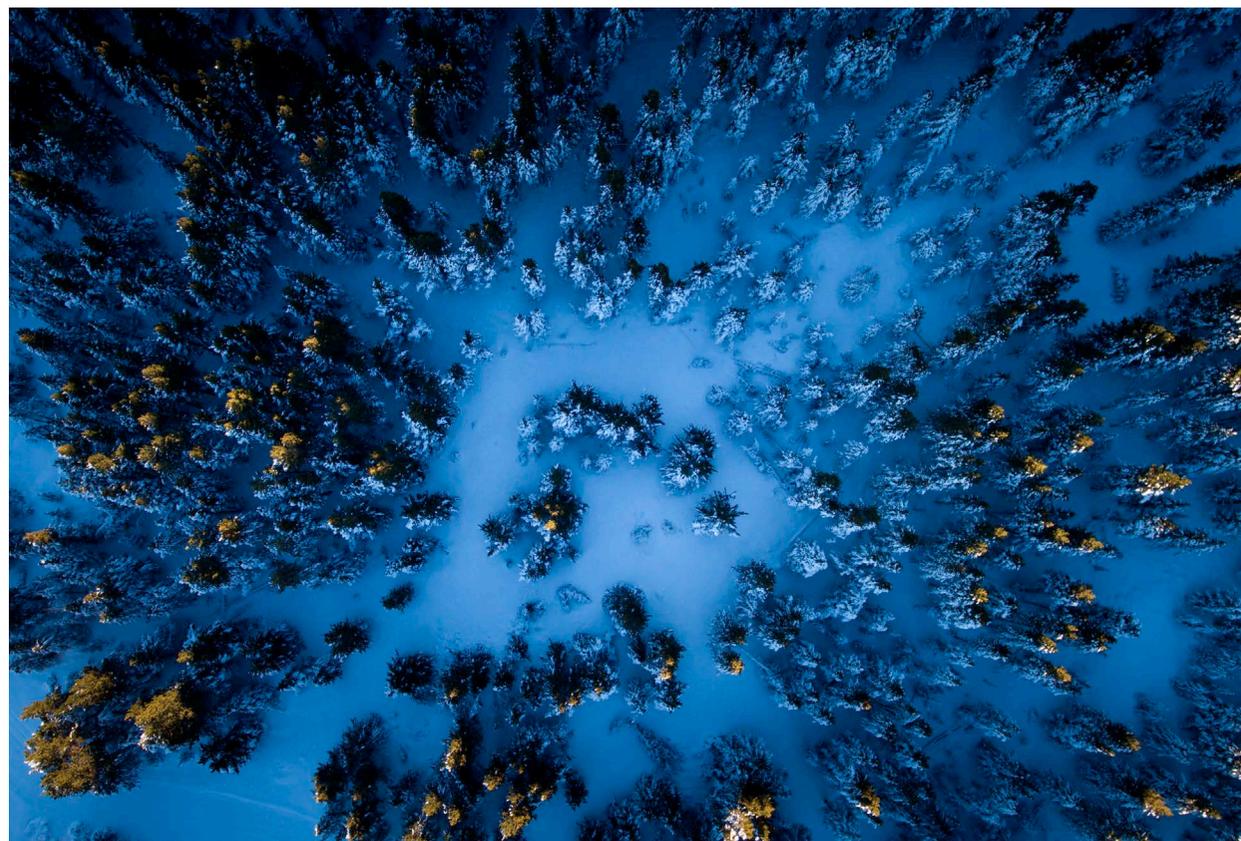
In the heart of the Alt Urgell county — between the Pedraforca mountain, the Serra del Cadí mountain range and the Port del Comte ski resort — this valley keeps the secrets of the Trementinaires: wise women well-versed in the healing remedies of the mountains. Their legacy is rooted in a land whose small towns, artisan crafts and wild natural beauty are sure to enchant travellers. Here are eight ways to experience it.



tuixent-lavansa.com

→ 45 miles Vall de La Cerdanya
↓ 22 miles Vall de Lord

Clockwise from left:
An aerial views of the valley's coniferous trees;
a craft store in Ossera



Trementinaires Museum

Secrets of the sage women

The Trementinaires were itinerant vendors who sold medicinal herbs and remedies throughout Catalonia. Their role has receded with the advent of modern medicine, but they remain a significant part of Catalan cultural history. Visit the **Trementinaires Museum** in Tuixent to learn about the ointments they dispensed and how they organised their routes from the Vansa and Tuixent valleys to the interior and coast of Catalonia.

Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park

Tackle some trails

One of the largest, most stunning natural spaces in Catalonia is where the two mountain ranges of Cadí and Moixeró meet. With its steep cliffs and green meadows, the Pedraforca Mountain is the park's crowning jewel, particularly for hikers. To best prepare for your trip, visit the **information centre**, located in Tuixent, Alt Urgell.

Ossera

Browse artisanal crafts

At 4,100ft above sea level, the town of **Ossera** has one of the most beautiful panoramas in the valley. A single street surrounds a cluster of stone houses that have served as refuges for artists and craftsmen since the late 1970s. These residents — from Barcelona and from abroad — prevented the town being abandoned when its original population left during the 20th century. Pay Ossera a visit to peruse its eclectic array of artisanal workshops and wares.

Accommodation

Check into rural lodgings

Vall de la Vansa i Tuixent is home to a plethora of unique **accommodation options** to suit every taste and budget. Options range from rustic farmhouses amid serene nature to cosy townhouses with wooden fires, sleek hotels, mountain refuges at almost 6,560ft altitude and well-equipped camping sites located along the banks of the river.

Horticulture

Sample plant-based products

Flowers are so much more than decoration in the Pyrenees of Catalonia. Working in the tradition of the ancient Trementinaires, the **Herboristeria Nogué** herbalists make soaps, honeys and other natural products that they sell in their Ossera shop. They also run a series of workshops, such as cooking with plants and creating natural cosmetics. While here, visit **Cal Casal**, for high quality local jams and jellies made without preservatives or additives.

Hiking

Lace up your walking boots

The valley is a hiker's paradise with **marked routes** for all levels, from the family-friendly paths of Sorribes, in Sant Julià de Garrics, and the botanical routes of Ossera, to the more challenging summit climb of Arp mountain. There's also the journey from Fòrnols to La Seu d'Urgell along the GR-7 route, a footpath that traverses Spain, Andorra and France.

Canis Rando

Hike with a four-legged friend

Dog-mushing and hiking are deep-rooted practices throughout the Pyrenees of Catalonia, and various companies offer such activities. At the Nordic-style ski retreat of Tuixent-La Vansa — on the north face of the Port del Comte resort — is **Cau de Llops**, which offers year-round tours with specially trained dogs that pull you along the paths and up the mountainous slopes. They find the huskies that best suit you and whisk you away for an hour or two.

Nordic skiing

Hit the slopes

On the north face of the Port del Comte, the Tuixent-La Vansa resort is ideal for a first taste of Nordic **skiing**. More gentle than its alpine counterpart, this activity takes place on flatter routes, making it a great option for a family day in the snow. The resort has 19 miles of circuits, which include different levels for cross-country skiing and even snowshoeing.

6 Vall de La Cerdanya

'A sensation of width, elevation and luminosity' is how renowned Spanish author and journalist Josep Pla described the captivating effect that the landscapes of La Cerdanya have on those who view them. The sensation he describes springs from the area's geographical location: La Cerdanya stretches east to west, between the valleys of the Pyrenees of Catalonia.

This singular orientation affords the valley many hours of sunlight per day, despite it being surrounded by mountains. And it's this abundant sunshine that captured the attention of the Barcelona bourgeoisie in the 19th century, resulting in the area becoming a sought-after holiday destination. Wealthy families were drawn to La Cerdanya, finding it an ideal place to relax and unwind amid spectacular scenery. Here are 16 of the best ways to explore the valley.



cerdanya.org

↙ 45 miles Vall de la Vansa i Tuixent
↓ 50 miles Vall de Lord
→ 25 miles The surroundings of the Llobregat



© Patronat Comarcaldel Turisme de la Cerdanya



© Archivo la Molina



© Archivo la Molina

Clockwise from left: The town of Travesseres with Cadí in the background; the Molina bike park; a snowshoe excursion

Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park

Hike in an impressive park

To the south of the valley, the Cadí and Moixeró mountain ranges form a wall that extends more than 18 miles between La Cerdanya and the rest of Spain. Designated as a **natural park** in 1983, this area is home to many endemic species, such as roe deer and chamois. The mountains themselves host many magnificent viewpoints, coniferous forests and more than 248 miles of marked trails.

High-altitude wines

Visit a mountain winery

High-altitude viticulture is now a trend in the valley, as more winemakers have begun taking advantage of the abundant sun and clean mountain air. **Llivins Winery**, 4,000ft above sea level in the town of Llívia, was the first to be formally registered in La Cerdanya, in 2017. Book a tasting tour to find out why these well balanced wines are so special, while learning more about the production process and Llivins' passion for the mountains.

Lles de Cerdanya

Enjoy a family adventure

The picturesque Pyrenean village of **Lles de Cerdanya** is an excellent base for cycling thanks to its beautiful nature and mountains, such as Monturull. There are also accessible hiking options close to the village, with trails that lead through alpine meadows and black pine forests — some once followed by smugglers travelling to and from Andorra. During the winter, the area is also an ideal base for skiers seeking a lesser-known escape.

Esteve Pharmacy

Europe's oldest apothecary

The **Esteve Pharmacy** in Llívia is one of the oldest in Europe and allows visitors to learn how medicines were produced as far back as the 15th century. Owned by one family for 23 generations, the pharmacy is now part of the town's Municipal Museum, where its collection of ceramic jars, preserved equipment and medical books are stored. There's also audiovisual and digital resources to provide context.

Rocaviva

A museum between mountains

Uniquely located between the mountains in the tiny hamlet of Músser, **Rocaviva** is home to more than 600 granite rocks sculpted into creatures by artist Climent Olm. This extensive, magical labyrinth was created 30 years ago as a place to meditate and to reflect on nature and art. Visitors can book guided tours (appointments are essential), for further insight into Olm's work.

Architecture

Step back in time

Tour the region's churches via the '**keys to the churches of La Cerdanya region**' project. Three routes are available to book, each including visits to four churches. The tours are led by knowledgeable local guides in Catalan heritage and cost €12 (£10) per person. Santa Maria de Talló — known as the 'cathedral of La Cerdanya' — is perhaps the fairest of them all.

E-biking

Cycle through the valley

La Cerdanya — home to one of the largest, widest valleys in the Catalan Pyrenees — is an adventure playground. The area is home to breathtaking landscapes and countless places to explore. An electric bike is an excellent way of travelling long distances through the region, allowing visitors to enjoy the fresh mountain air and tackle steep climbs. To help plan a memorable trip, there are many **cycling and e-biking routes**, ideal for families and experts alike.

© Oliver, Trips-Catalonia-Motorsports/ACT



Bike-friendly hotels

The ultimate two-wheeled tour

Quaint towns, quiet roads and breathtaking scenery are just some of the elements that make this area a motorcycling must-visit. What's more, there are specialised accommodation options that cater to motorcyclists travelling through the region. These stops range from apartments to sleek hotels, such as the **Cerdanya EcoResort**, who offer much-needed services such as massages and delicious meals.

© Patronat Comarcal de Turisme de la Cerdanya



Snowshoeing

Venture out after dark

Enjoy a unique evening by taking the last cable car of the day from La Molina station up 7,550ft to begin a guided **shoeshowing tour**. As the sun sets, you'll be led along snowy trails on the mountain to the Niu de l'Àliga cabin, which is located at 8,323ft. Once there, you'll enjoy exceptional, panoramic views and a cosy dinner around the fire.

© Mairia Groll, Pilar Planaguma / PTCBG



Anes Cave

Venture into a Pyrenean cave

Visitors can emulate the adventures that Jules Verne imagines in his well-loved *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* with a visit to **Anes Cave**. The site, located between the towns of Bellver de Cerdanya and Prullans in Puigcerdà, has various guided tours available where you can venture deep into the calcareous cave to view stalactites, stalagmites and other geological wonders.



© Inmedia Solutions/ACT

Clockwise from above: Puigcerdà lake; a traditional plate of 'trinxat'; the Llívia pharmacy; motorcyclists on one of the valley's winding roads

Night skiing

Hit the slopes in Masella

Looking for a thrilling experience? Head to **Masella**, the night skiing capital of the Pyrenees of Catalonia. The resort has six chair lifts and 13 low and medium-altitude slopes that cover more than six miles. Night skiing opens at 6.30pm on weekends and special lighting guarantees good visibility. There is also a ski and snowboard school. For a memorable après-ski experience, enjoy traditional mountain cuisine and superlative vistas at the Pla de Masella restaurant.

Spa and wellness

Unwind, reset and rejuvenate

From time to time, it makes sense to slow down and recoup. Thankfully, La Cerdanya is home to hot springs, spas and meditation retreats, as well as healthy restaurants for visitors looking for wellness experiences. The **Roman baths of the Dorres municipality** and the **Bains de Llo** are excellent options for those looking to relax after a challenging day of hiking or skiing: their thermal waters are ideal for soothing muscles.

The 'trinxat' from La Cerdanya

Savour traditional cuisine

Trinxat is one of the dishes most associated with La Cerdanya. It's made from boiled potatoes and cabbage, which are mashed together with bacon and butter, then sautéed. This calorie-dense meal is very common during the winter months when the cabbage is at its best. La Cerdanya's capital Puigcerdà even has its own *Trinxat* festival, celebrated at the end of February, at which this dish can be enjoyed while live music plays.

Golf

Enjoy a picturesque round

La Cerdanya has some of Europe's most outstanding golf courses, surrounded by striking scenery. Examples include Puigcerdà's **Real Club De Golf De La Cerdanya**, renowned for its traditional reputation, and the high-end Fontanals Golf Club beside the Segre river. Combine your golfing trip with a stay at one of the region's luxury hotels, such as Torre del Remei, a five-star establishment in the picturesque village of Bolvir.

Shopping

Browse to your heart's content

At the beginning of the 19th century, the area around Estany de Puigcerdà was nothing more than marshland. Eventually, the wealthy Barcelona bourgeoisie saw the area's potential and began to build grand summer houses around it. Soon after, illustrious businesses began to fill the area and now, more than 250 shops line the capital's historic streets as does the **Puigcerdà Cerdanya Shopping Centre**, making it a rewarding place for retail therapy.

Martinet i Montellà Bunker Park

Visit a World War II bunker

At the end of the Second World War, the Spanish military leader Francisco Franco ordered a defence line of 10,000 bunkers to be erected in the Pyrenees of Catalonia, from Cap de Creus to the Basque Country. Many were built in La Cerdanya, which was considered a strategic defence point. A visit to the **Martinet i Montellà Bunker Park** reveals eight different bunkers and their history.

7 Vall de Lord



← 19 miles **Vall de la Vansa**
→ 45 miles **Vall de La Cerdanya**
→ 39 miles **The surroundings of the Llobregat**

In Vall de Lord, a morning mist often covers the crest of the mountains, creating landscapes that would be worthy of any gallery wall. But stay a while to watch the mist clear and you'll be greeted by a totally different territory. The valley's summits aren't especially high, yet they create a dramatic, pointed horizon, with steep mountainsides that end abruptly on the banks of the Cardener, one of the two main rivers that irrigate the valley. Here are seven of its best-kept secrets.



© Archivo Hotel Monegal



© Oriol Clavera

Clockwise from left: Panoramic view of Sant Llorenç de Morunys; autumn gastronomy; the Llosa del Cavall Reservoir



© Oriol Clavera

Sant Llorenç de Morunys

Visit the valley's capital

Despite its strong, pentagonal perimeter walls, the historic capital of the valley, **Sant Llorenç de Morunys**, was not spared from looting during the 1930s civil war. The town has, however, managed to maintain much of its beauty thanks to the large catalogue of historic monuments that remain. This includes the Romanesque church of Sant Llorenç and the mountaintop Santuari de Lord located nearby.

Serra de Busa

Trek to a panoramic plateau

Catalonia's turbulent wartime past is evident in every corner of Vall de Lord, but is arguably most felt on the **Serra de Busa** plateau. This massif, where up to a thousand soldiers were held as prisoners during the Napoleonic Wars, is now a spectacular, panoramic viewpoint, surrounded by ravines and the extravagant, jagged shapes of the Serra dels Bastets.

Biking

Venture out on two wheels

Whether you're seeking historic architecture, nature, adrenaline or gastronomy, Sant Llorenç de Morunys is also the ideal spot to start various **cycling adventures** around the valley. Most of the routes that head out from the main town towards the outskirts of the valley offer a sample of these attractions, providing options for every taste and ability, from easy two-mile routes to enthralling 40-mile journeys.

Santuari de Lord

Learn about local history

During the Carlist Wars in the 1830s, the **Santuari de Lord** church had its religious functions set aside and was instead used as a hospital and then barracks for the soldiers. It was destroyed in the conflict but, thanks to its reconstruction in the 19th century, the sanctuary still stands today at the top of Mola de Lord, at 3,900ft high, within the Sant Llorenç de Morunys area.

Llosa del Cavall Reservoir

Take to the water on a kayak

In times gone by, the Cardener River was fed by rare streams running past remote farmhouses dotted across the mountainsides. In 1989, plans for the Llosa del Cavall reservoir were approved to increase the water resources of the region. Today, it provides the valley with a welcome splash of blue, and visitors can admire the wide-ranging views from the water on various **kayak excursions**.

Pont Quebradís

Hike amid bucolic nature

The meandering course of the Valls River makes for many exceptional moments. The most unique part is the **Pont Quebradís**, where a natural bridge of travertine rock has been shaped by the water. The result is a small arch hidden between gorges, through which turquoise water rushes. It's accessible only on foot, reached by a well-signposted hiking path.

Solsonès

Forage for mushrooms

As the autumn rains bring humidity to the valley, thousands of mushrooms begin to grow. **Solsonès**, located in the centre of the Catalan Central Depression, has become a particularly popular mycological destination, thanks to the vast quantities and diversity of endemic mushrooms that grow here. If you're interested in foraging, it's best to travel with a knowledgeable guide who will identify which species are safe.

Wildlife

Enjoy a family day out

Located near the town of Odèn, two hours drive north of Barcelona, the **Zoo of the Pyrenees** allows visitors to view and connect with Indigenous wildlife, from the elusive Iberian lynx to the graceful Pyrenean chamois. What's more, the non-profit organisation rescues and rehabilitates wild animals, and offers many educational workshops. Don't miss the birds of prey show!

8 Llobregat Valley

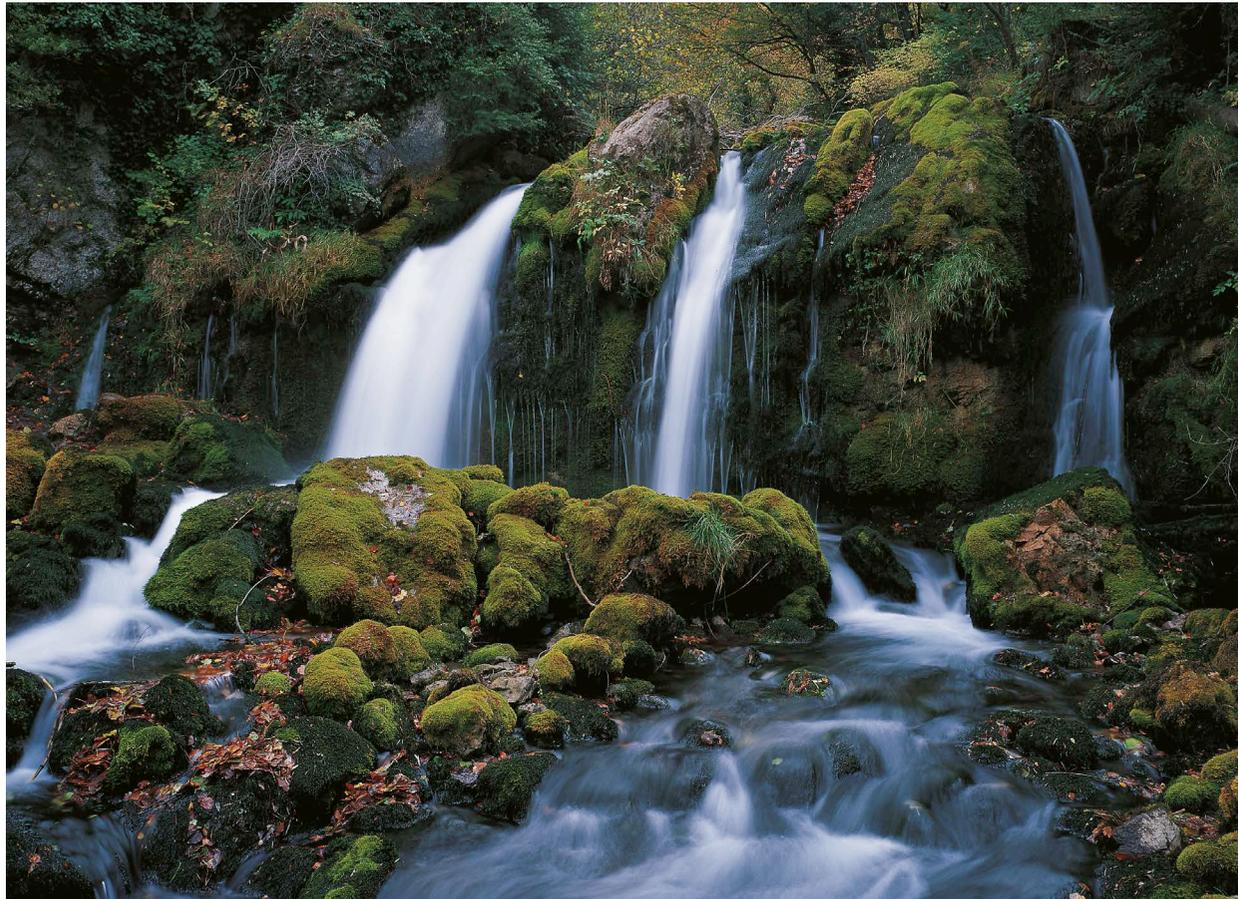


elbergueda.cat

→ 19 miles Vall de La Cerdanya
→ 21 miles Vall de Ribes and Vall de Camprodon

In the northernmost neighbourhoods of Barcelona, the Llobregat River, Catalonia's second longest after the Ter, is just one of the many natural treasures that travellers can expect to find. The beautiful county of Berguedà, which is in the upper basin of the river and the mountains of the Pyrenees and Pre-Pyrenees, is home to stunning natural landscapes and a rich historical heritage. Here, buildings dating back to the Romanesque era are joined by examples of modernism and remains of the area's prosperous industrial past.

Below: The Llobregat Springs make a great family-friendly day out in Berguedà



© Archivo Turismo del Berguedà



© Jordi Bastard/ACT



© Jordi Bastard/ACT



© Ollaur/ACT

From top: The cement train in La Pobla de Lillet; the Asland Cement Factory; the International Catalan Sheepdog Competition

Llobregat Springs

Visit the 'Nile of Catalonia'

The source of the Llobregat River, the **Llobregat Springs**, starts in Castellar de n'Hug, a highland town less than two hours' drive from Barcelona. Accessible via a short, cobbled path, the springs are one of the valley's most idyllic natural spectacles and make for a great family excursion. Those looking for more of a challenge can hike the **Pas de l'Os** route.

Els Casals

Sample country cuisine

Fresh vegetables and quality meat take centre stage at Michelin-starred restaurant **Els Casals** located in Berguedà. All dishes are made using seasonal produce, most of which are sourced from the family farm. Guests can also pair their meal with an overnight stay at the rustic, 18th-century farmhouse. There are various **culinary packages** available.

Textile colonies

Step back in time

The Llobregat River was an integral part of Catalan industrialisation; there were over 30 **textile colonies** here in the late 18th century. Today, around 15 of these former colonies remain along the banks of the river. Travellers can follow a circuit to view the sites or visit the Colònia Vidal Museum to learn about this fascinating history.

The Asland Cement Factory

Visit an industrial complex

Built by industrialist Eusebi Güell, this marvel of modern engineering operated from 1904 until 1975 in Castellar de n'Hug. Today, it's a cement museum and a locale for understanding the country's industrial history. Climb aboard the **cement train** in La Pobla de Lillet for the full experience.

The International Sheepdog Contest

Indulge in local traditions

The **International Catalan Sheepdog Competition** has been held in Castellar de n'Hug since 1962 and preserves the pastime of sheepdog herding. Participants are required to wear traditional shepherd's clothing and compete in different categories that assess skills such as obedience and control. The exciting, colourful event draws thousands of visitors to the town every August.

Mirador de la Figuerassa

Dine under the stars

Mythology, mountain views and mouthwatering food — expect all this and more on this unique **stargazing experience** at the top of the Mirador de la Figuerassa viewpoint. It starts at 9pm with an explanation about the cosmos, followed by an observation with telescopes, laser recognition of the constellations and finger-food served by El Castell.

Berguedà

Plan a family getaway

Organising the perfect holiday is not easy, especially when travelling alone with children. This **four-day tour** for single parent families encapsulates the best of the Berguedà area and includes three nights in a rural hotel on a half-board basis. Highlights include the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park, the Llobregat Fountains, the Artigas Gardens and the Cement Museum.

Cal Rosal Greenway

Hike or bike along an old railway line

Built at the end of the 19th century, the railway line from Manresa to Berga and Guardiola became the main transport route between the countryside and the city. After being abandoned for years, it's now been restored as a 6.2-mile **greenway**. The linear route between Cal Rosal and Pedret is well preserved and perfect for hiking and cycling.

9 Vall de Ribes & Vall de Camprodon

Located in the oldest part of the Catalan Pyrenees, the Ribes and Camprodon valleys are connected almost in parallel by the Ter River. Their landscapes date back millions of years, when Iberia collided with the rest of Europe. This resulted in the formation of many imposing peaks, such as the 9,380ft-high Pic de l'Infern. Both valleys are home to some of the most idyllic landscapes of the Pyrenees, as well as charming villages like Beget.



← 19 miles The surroundings of the Llobregat
→ 25 miles Vall d'en Bas and Vall de Bianya

Vall de Ribes

Trail running

Take a high-altitude challenge

Vall de Ribes is a **trail-running heaven**, with countless routes that crisscross through dense forests, climb up sharp mountains and wind peacefully along river paths. Those looking for a challenge should try the Puigmal trail — it's more 18 miles long and has an altitude of 9,842ft.

The Rack Railway

Ride the rails to Vall de Núria

The easiest way to reach Vall de Núria is via the **Vall de Núria Rack Railway**, one of only two operating in Spain — the other is the Montserrat Rack Railway. Enjoy the majestic Pyrenean landscapes on the eight-mile journey from Ribes to Núria, with an altitude of more than 6,445ft. Hiking is also an option, ascending from the Camí Vell de Queralbs.

Architecture

Tour Romanesque treasures

Romanesque architecture is abundant throughout the Catalan Pyrenees and the Vall de Ribes. Some beautiful examples of this style can be found in places such as the church of Sant Jaume de Queralbs, which stands out for its exquisite porch with six arches that rest on five blue marble columns.

La Roca de la Creu

Scale a mountain

Via ferratas are bolted climbing routes made up of steel safety cables, rungs and ladders to arrest the effect of any fall. This is to allow climbers to summit difficult peaks. **La Roca de la Creu** is great for those starting out as it features several beginner-friendly sections. The route runs between a Nepalese and a Tibetan bridge, and is surrounded by mountains.

Gastronomy

Try the valley's defining dishes

Traditional recipes, made up of fresh mountain produce, provide the area with its distinctly delicious **cuisine**. From sausages and game to various cheeses and wild mushrooms, there's a whole range of flavours to try. **Canamillana** (a traditional cabbage and potato dish) is just one local favourite.

Hiking

Visit the valley's natural park

Declared a natural park in 2015 for its natural and intangible heritage, the **Capçaleres del Ter and Freser Natural Park** is the cradle of Catalan hiking, with flowering alpine meadows, black pine forests, high mountain pastures and deep ravines. The renowned GR-11 hiking trail runs through the region, connecting the Cantabrian Sea with the Mediterranean.



From left: The Santuari de Núria is a pilgrimage site around 6,560 feet above sea level



© Getty

Vall de Camprodon

Camprodon

Explore the medieval capital

Camprodon, the capital and commercial centre of the valley, stands out for its medieval beauty — most notably, its magnificent historical bridge, Pont Nou. Listen to the gentle trickle of the Ritort River as it joins the Ter River and flows past Camprodon's quaint, cobbled streets.

Ruta de la Retirada

Cycle along a historic path

During the Spanish Civil War, around 90,000 people used the paths of the Camprodon Valley as a route to France. Today, the 62-mile **Ruta de la Retirada** ('retreat route') follows the same path, offering visitors the chance to mountain bike the historic trail over two days. The route always ends in Camprodon.

Beget

Travel back in time

One of the most beautiful, historic villages in the Catalan Pyrenees, **Beget** combines nature and local charm. Situated between mountains, in the lowest part of the valley, a stream runs through the centre while the forest extends into Beget, which is home to around 30 people.

Volta Catalunya

Push yourself on pedals

Surrounded by prominent peaks, the **Vallter 2000** is the highest road in the Catalan Pyrenees and has hosted the finish of several stages in the Volta Catalunya. This extreme hill climb extends more than seven miles from the town of Setcases to the ski resort, with an incline of around 2,950ft.

Clockwise from above:
The Pont Nou bridge in Camprodon; the cobbled town of Beget; autumn in Camprodon; mountain biking in Volta Catalunya

Tria de Mulats

Visit an authentic craft fair

Originally a fair for buying and selling horses, the **Tria de Mulats** now draws in legions of visitors to the town of Espinavell for its artisanal crafts. Held every year on 13 October, the event begins with the descent of the horses from the mountains to Espinavell, where the main market is held.

Isaac Albéniz Music Festival

Listen to baroque sounds

Music has played a key role in Camprodon's culture for more than 35 years, particularly between the months of July and August when the Sant Pere Monastery hosts the **Isaac Albéniz Music Festival**. The popular event, which celebrates the illustrious composer, attracts international artists as well as upcoming musical talent.

Accommodation

Sleep in an 'igloo'

A varied selection of **accommodation options** can be found throughout the valley. Experience sleeping in a contemporary 'igloo' — a cosy, comfortable wooden cabin, which can sleep up to three people. There's also a wide range of **hotels** offering spectacular views and a welcoming atmosphere. As soon as you draw open the curtains, the striking mountains that skirt the horizon come into view.

Hiking

Head for the hills

There are various hiking trails in Vall de Camprodon which combine culture, nature and history. This **route**, which traverses the high-mountain terrain and lush woodland areas of Vallespir, la Garrotxa, and l'Empordà, does just that, connecting the high valleys of the Eastern Pyrenees with the Mediterranean sea.



© Getty



© Getty



© Archivio 917

10 Vall d'en Bas & Vall de Bianya

Found between the Ripollès and La Garrotxa regions, the two valleys of Vall d'en Bas and Vall de Bianya are predominantly home to farming communities and are made up of small, sparsely inhabited towns and vast, rolling hills. Framing the mountain range of Puigsacalm and the ancient volcanoes and lush forests of beech and oak below, both valleys offer numerous adventures and activities for all the family, where culture and tradition take centre stage.



← 41 miles **Vall de Ribes and Vall de Camprodon**
→ 42 miles **The surroundings of the Muga River**



Clockwise from left: a cobbled street in Hostalets d'en Bas; the agricultural landscapes across the two valleys

Vall d'en Bas

The Carrilet Greenway

Explore on two wheels

Starting in La Garrotxa Volcanic Area, the **Carrilet Greenway** invites cyclists to speed through fields and waterways. One for a more seasoned cyclist, the 34-mile route across the Vall d'en Bas is considered challenging, but rewards with magnificent views of the Girona province. Cyclists can pedal along the banks of the Ter, Brugent and Fluvià rivers, before heading along a former train line that linked Olot and Girona. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Characterful towns

Discover seven of the best

The region's seven small **towns** all have their own unique charms. Wander through the capital, Sant Esteve d'en Bas, known for its infamous battle in 1695 or its more-recent annual celebration, Night of Fear. Also make time to explore the town of Mallol, next to the River Gurn, where you can find the ruins of the medieval castle once owned by the viscounts of Bas.

Agriculture

Spend the day on a farm

An integral component of the valley's landscape, farms provide travellers with key insights into everyday life in the region. Get to know the locals by spending a day at **Mas la Coromina**, a dairy farm at the foot of the Puigsacalm mountain. Fun for all ages, Mas la Coromina provides an enthralling, educational experience, allowing guests to see the inner workings of the farm, how the animals are cared for and the chance to sample some fresh milk.

Mountain hikes

Climb to the top of Puigsacalm

Puigsacalm, the highest mountain in the Catalan Transversal Range, reaches a staggering 4,970ft at its highest point and is one of the most popular **treks** in the Pyrenees of Catalonia. Ascend the mountain at dusk, when the golden light floods the valleys below, and you'll be treated to outstanding views of La Garrotxa, Montserrat, Collsacabra, and Pedraforca, among others.

La Xiquella

Enjoy some local cheeses

To discover the most-authentic artisanal cheeses in the region, visit **La Xiquella** cheese factory, located at the foot of the Olot-Girona greenway in an 18th-century farmhouse. The factory makes cheese from the milk of cows and sheep grazing in the Vall d'en Bas throughout the year. Guided tours of the factory include traditional cheese-tastings at the end, including the award-winning Manyac, a soft cheese that's made with raw cow's milk.

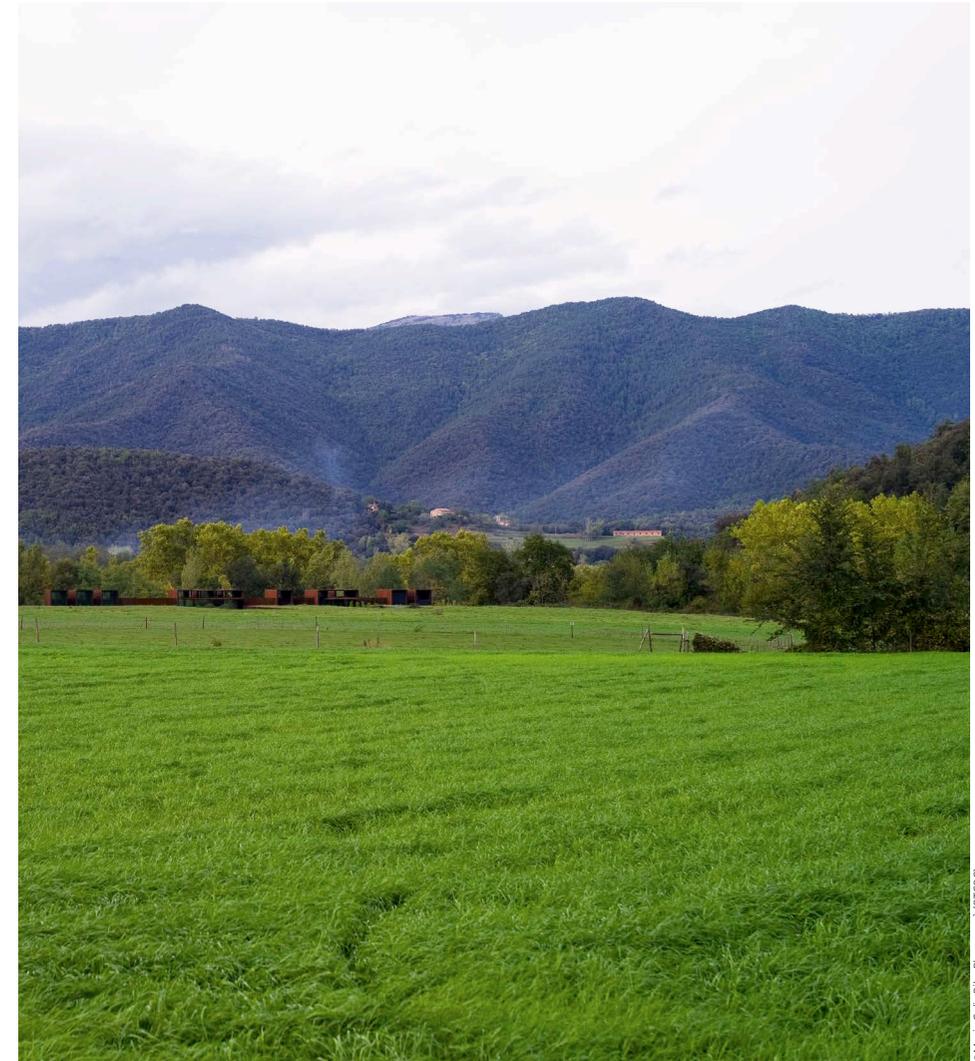
La Garrotxa

Go on a gastronomic tour

From La Xiquella's award-winning cheeses to the fresh produce of Olot's weekly market, the region of **La Garrotxa** is bursting with delicacies to try and quaint restaurants to visit. There's also an abundance of picnic spots and food tours throughout the province, offering a great way to explore the area and its culinary offerings.



© Pep Sau - Ajuntament de Santa Pau



© Maria Cell - Pilar Managueta (PTCBG)

From above: The green meadows of Vall de Bianya; the Fageda d'en Jordà in spring

Vall de Bianya

Volcanic Zone Natural Park

Venture into the volcanic zone

Around 600,000 years ago, fire and lava shaped the landscape that now occupies **La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park**. A 45-minute drive from Girona, the natural reserve is home to around 40 to 50 hills formed from volcanic eruption pile-ups, called volcanic cones. The park can be explored on foot on one of the many trails thanks to the park's Itinerànnia trail network; one of which is the popular route into the Fageda d'en Jordà, a forest of beech trees.

Gastronomy

Dine at Ca l'Enric & Les Cols

Vall de Bianya is full of traditional restaurants using seasonal produce. There are a few, however, that are paving the way for culinary excellence. **Ca l'Enric**, which began life as a hostel in 1882, gained a Michelin star in 2002 thanks to the formidable Juncà brothers' innovative creations, said to have a touch of the avant-garde. Just a few miles away in Olot, two-Michelin-starred **Les Cols** is run by chef Fina Puigdevall Nogareda, whose seasonal menu takes inspiration from the rural landscape.

Ecotourism

Stay in a responsible hotel

La Garrotxa is highly committed to sustainable accommodation and has adhered to the recommendations of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism since 2001. Although there are many to choose from, Hotel La Perla stands out for its commitment to being a responsible hotel and helping to protect the environment. Located in La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park, Hotel La Perla prides itself on supporting local development and conservation of cultural heritage.

Sant Miquel del Mont

Trek to a historic church

Sant Miquel del Mont was once believed to be the site of a Roman watchtower. Today, it's home to a Romanesque church. To visit, take a circular three-hour route starting in l'Hostalnou de Bianya, a quaint hamlet 1,200 feet above sea level. Along the way, hikers can enjoy spectacular views of the Alta Garrotxa and the Pyrenees, passing between monumental oak, beech and fir forests. Those who make it to the top are rewarded with panoramic views.

Family biking

Cycle along an old railway line

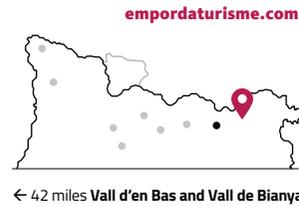
Catalonia's greenways are made up of old railway trails that are no longer in use and make for a perfect family cycling outing due to their simple, flat routes. As bikers' speed along the gravel paths, they'll also be treated to incredible views of rolling fields and pastures. The two-mile **route** from l'Hostalnou de Bianya to Llocalou is one of the most exciting sections and is also suitable for handcycles. It's a relatively easy route, which takes less than three hours if you're travelling via handcycle.

Guided hiking tours

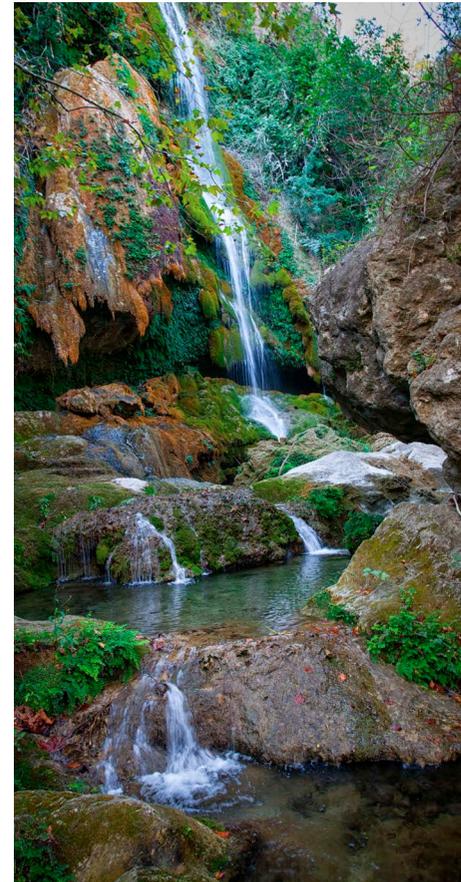
Step back in time

Vall de Bianya is rich in history and peppered with Romanesque churches and chapels. To scout out 15 of the valley's iconic structures, join this half-day **tour** that begins and ends in the village of La Canya. Tour guides teach visitors about each of the chapels and churches hidden from civilisation, and the wooded areas and green meadows are the ideal pit stop for a picnic with local delicacies. Afterwards, head to Besalú to scout out where various scenes of *Game of Thrones* were filmed.

11 The Muga River & its surroundings



From the high mountain forests of the Eastern Pyrenees to the coves and caves of the Costa Brava, the Muga River has defined the landscapes through which it flows. This cross-border river has led to the development of a traditionally agrarian culture throughout the Alt Empordà region, its waters used to irrigate fields and orchards, power flour mills and create ice in small wells located along its banks. Walk along its course and you'll discover the essence of the region. Here are eight highlights.



© Shutterstock



© Getty

Clockwise from left: The riverbanks of the Muga River; the Caula waterfalls; a building in the town of Sant Llorenç de la Muga

The Caula waterfall

Dine by cascading falls

At the top of the travertine cliffs near the village of Les Escaules, you'll find the **Torrent de la Caula**, a river that thunders almost 100ft into the abyss to create a series of waterfalls. Stop at the restaurant just by the falls, where the large deck is perfect for lunch with a view. As the river continues downstream, it joins the Muga to wind through bucolic landscapes towards the sea.

Mountain biking

Set out on two wheels

The Muga River and its surrounds are home to countless **cycling trails**, from gentle routes passing through dense Pyrenean forests to coastal tracks amid rugged landscapes. Most popular is the **River Muga Nature Trail**, which follows the river's blue line on the map from Sant Llorenç de la Muga to Empuriabrava in the Bay of Roses.

Stargazing

Scout out constellations

Appreciate the Pyrenean dark skies at the **Albanyà Astronomical Observatory** in Alt Empordà. The observatory organises open-air evenings where visitors can 'travel through space' guided by the teachings of resident astronomers. The experience combines stargazing with a telescope with insights about the universe from the guides.

Watersports

Kayak at Boadella Reservoir

The sandy shores of the Boadella Reservoir make for a unique 'beach' in the mountains, one surrounded by unspoiled alpine landscapes. Its waters invite visitors to try a number of **activities**, such as kayaking and canoeing. Here, paddlers can follow the course of the Muga River to see the ruins of Sant Llorenç, which were buried under the reservoir.

Sant Llorenç de la Muga

Explore the past

Built on an Ancient Roman settlement, most of this town's streets are the same as they were seven centuries ago. Located in Empordà — which is little-visited by tourists — **Sant Llorenç de la Muga** has a legacy that's apparent in both its roads and its monuments, which will turn your visit into a journey through time.

Santa Maria de Lladó

Visit a canonical complex

Declared an Asset of Cultural Interest in 2019, this **site** comprises a set of Romanesque buildings, with highlights including the priory house, the monastery, the Chapter House and, of course, the church. The latter is a prime example of 12th-century architecture in Catalonia.

Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park

Bring your binoculars

The **Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park** is one of Catalonia's most important wetlands. Here, lagoons cover an area of around 12,355 acres, and provide refuge for a variety of birds, such as flamingos, storks and herons. Choose from one of nine walking itineraries to explore the park.

Camping

Commune with nature

Along the Muga River, the Mediterranean climate merges with the Pyrenean landscape, making for a pleasant camping experience. The area has a number of picturesque **campsites**, such as Bassegoda Park in Albanyà, La Fradera in Sant Llorenç and the Maçanet de Cabrenys campsite, among others.

Local tour operators

The list featured here includes the most renowned travel agencies across the Pyrenees of Catalonia.

These operators are experts on the destination and specialise in a whole host of areas, including the best accommodation options, local producers and restaurants, hiking routes and the variety of cultural activities on offer. Many can organise tailor-made trips according to personal preference, including overnight stays combined with activities of all kinds – with or without a guide.

Make your getaway stress-free by hiring their services. They can help you coordinate all the details that will make your trip a success and provide exceptional support during your stay, whenever you need it.

The Catalan Tourist Board is committed to the fight against climate change and acknowledges the current drought emergency throughout the Pyrenees of Catalonia. The listed tourist services operate responsibly in the region and urge visitors to apply the same environmental practices.

This interactive eBook has been commissioned by the Pyrenees of Catalonia.



visitpirineus.com
[#visitpirineus](https://twitter.com/visitpirineus)

aralleida.cat
costabrava.org
barcelonaesmoltmes.cat
visitvaldaran.com
turismefgc.cat

Assua

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu
+34 973 620 668
+34 610 788 522
anna@assuaviatges.com
assuaviatges.net

Altitud Extrem

Specialising in Vall de La Cerdanya and Berguedà
+34 616 554 039
info@altitudextrem.com
altitudextrem.com

A Pas d'Isard

Specialising in Vall de Camprodon and Vall de Ribes
+34 628 088 112
info@apasdisard.com
apasdisard.com

Discover Pyrenees

Specialising in Vall de La Cerdanya
+34 973 510 965
info@discoverpyrenees.com
discoverpyrenees.com

Camins

Specialising in Val d'Aran, the National Park and Vall de Boí
+34 973 642 444
camins@camins.net
camins.net

Contrast Trip

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu
+34 649 346 998
info@contrasttrip.com
contrasttrip.com

Exciting Pyrenees

Specialising in Val d'Aran, the valleys of the Alt Pirineu and the National Park
+34 973 643 325
reservas@excitingevents.es
excitingevents.es

Intercerdanya

Specialising in Vall de La Cerdanya
+34 972 146 336
+34 972 897 007
intercerdanya@intercerdanya.com
intercerdanya.com

Naut Viajes / Aran Experience

Specialising in Val d'Aran
+34 973 640 087
reservas@nautviajes.com
nautviajes.com
aranexperience.com

Nit i vol

Specialising in La Garrotxa and Alt Empordà
+34 972 680 255
+34 689 471 872
info@voldecoloms.com
voldecoloms.cat

Oci Pirineus

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu
ocipirineus.com

Oxineu

Specialising in Vall de Ribes and Vall de Camprodon
+34 633 534 503
info@oxineu.com
oxineu.com

Outdoor Adventour

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu
+34 973 045 887
info@outdooradventour.com
outdooradventour.com

Paddle in Spain

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu
+34 682 173 225
paddleinspain.com

Pedratour

Specialising in Berguedà (the surroundings of the Llobregat river) and La Cerdanya
+34 938 215 111
info@pedratour.com
pedratour.com

Pirineu Emoció

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu, Vall Fosca, Vall de Boí and Val d'Aran
+34 973 681 518
info@pirineuemocio.com
pirineuemocio.com

Pura Vall

Specialising in Ripollès and Vall de Ribes
+ 34 685 940 370 /
685 940 375
info@puravall.com
puravall.com

Rutes Pirineus

Specialising in hiking and mountain routes throughout the Pyrenees of Catalonia
+34 691 772 966
info@rutespirineus.cat
rutespirineus.cat

Rutes Silvia Rovira

Specialising in hiking routes throughout the Pyrenees of Catalonia
+34 636 257 282
silvirovi@gmail.com
rutesilviarovira.com

Skim Incoming

Specialising in Vall de La Cerdanya
+34 972 892 193
info@skimincoming.com
skimincoming.com

The Best Pyrenees

Specialising in the valleys of the Alt Pirineu and Vall Fosca
+34 680 239 423
hola@thebestpyrenees.com
thebestpyrenees.com

Trescalia

Specialising in the area of La Garrotxa
info@trescalia.com
trescalia.com

Viajes Baqueira

viajes@baqueira.es
viajes.baqueira.es