

La Seu d'Urgell - Figueres

The highlights:

- La Seu d'Urgell
- Pedraforca
- Charming Villages in the Pyrenees
- Volcanoes of La Garrotxa
- Besalú
- Figueres

Section 4: La Seu d'Urgell - Figueres - 357 km - 5 stages

- From La Seu d'Urgell to Bagà. 90 km
- From Bagà to Ripoll. 128 km
- From Ripoll to Olot. 75 km
- From Olot to Banyoles. 30 km
- From Banyoles to Figueres. 34 km



Ode to nature

The village that inspired a genius, **Pablo Picasso**, will be our first stop on this route, which will take us down the **path of the Cathars' exile**, to discover a magical mountain, and to **Ripoll** where we will learn that bibles can also be made of stone. We will walk through enchanted forests that served as refuges for poets and float in balloons over a landscape of dozens of volcanoes. We will visit medieval villas and discover the culinary secrets of the many Catalan recipes that originated here. The route will end in another village that also became a muse, **Figueres**, **Salvador Dalí's home town**.



STAGE 1

VIEWS OF PEDRAFORCA

The route begins at La Seu d'Urgell, visiting Catalonia's only fully Romanesque Cathedral, and explore the lands of Berguedà, where the silhouette of the Pedraforca will accompany us for much of the day.

A Romanesque cathedral

La Seu d'Urgell is a city with an interesting heritage linked to its status as diocese, the greatest example of which is the **Cathedral of Santa María**, the only entirely Romanesque cathedral found in Catalonia. We drive along the panoramic road that connects La Seu d'Urgell with **Gósol**, along a route that snakes between the pine forests that mark the western border of **Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park**. The first rays of sunshine glaze the honey-coloured walls of the villages we pass along the way: **El Ges**, **Adraén**, **Fórnols**, **Cornellana** and **Tuixent** among others, picturesque stone villages whose inhabitants have grown accustomed to living at a high altitude and in relative isolation.

With Picasso in Gósol

The pastoral tranquillity of the Berguedà mountain drew Pablo Picasso to another of these villages. On the back of a mule loaded with his easels, he climbed to the modest town of Gósol to spend the spring of 1906. They say the genius, who stayed at the only local inn, sketched more than one hundred works that marked the beginning of his cubist era in just three months. He painted the houses of the village

and the landscape and kept notes in a travel diary, the *Carnet Catalan*, a reproduction of which is kept at the **Centre Picasso de Gósol**. While part of the group visits this museum and enjoys the local cuisine, the rest of us pull on our hiking boots and take a circular route that will take us around the perimeter of one of the **the most iconic mountains of Catalonia**: the **Pedraforca**. Across 17 kilometres and 790 metres of elevation change, we see the four sides of this rocky colossus, in addition to traversing a stretch of the road that the Cathars walked in the Middle Ages as they fled from France.

Berguedà cuisine

In the afternoon we all meet again and continue on the road to **Bagà**, making a short stop at the **Guardiola de Berguedà** to visit the magnificent Benedictine cenotaph of Sant Llorenç. We end the day with a well deserved selection of local recipes. The table features a parade of *pèsols* (peas) *negres* with pancetta, *patates emmascarades*, potatoes cooked with *botifarra negra* sausages, and the sliced cabbage and potato known here as *trumfos amb col*. After dinner, we take a stroll through the picturesque village of Bagà.



STAGE 2

HIGH-ALTITUDE VILLAGES

In La Cerdanya, we travel through small villages with rustic mountain architecture and taste excellent sausages before continuing to Castellar de N'Hug to see the source of the Llobregat river.

Bécquer's inspiration

Today we head out quickly towards the district of **La Cerdanya**, which features 17 municipalities located more than one thousand metres above sea level. We stop for breakfast in **Bellver de Cerdanya**, which before it was a town was one of the castles in the line of fortifications that controlled movements between Conflent and Urgell counties. Fresh bread with butter and homemade jam give us the energy we need to explore the medieval town centre – including where Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer wrote the legend *The Devil's Cross* – and walk to the nearby Santa María de Talló church, one of the important points on the **Camí de Santiago in Catalonia**.

Views of La Cerdanya

The route passes through **Puigcerdà**, a town by a beautiful lake. In its streets we can follow in the footsteps of the characters from one of Carlos Ruiz Zafón's novels. Just seven kilometres from Puigcerdà, by taking a detour we have the option to visit the **Llívia pharmacy**, one of the oldest in Europe. We continue on local roads to villages with short names and hearty sausages, such as black and

white *bull* and *pà de fetge*. After passing **Urtx**, **Alp** and **Das**, we climb to **Meranges**, a village with perfect rustic mountain architecture and the beautiful lake **Malniu**. From the village's altitude of 1,590 metres, we enjoy views of all La Cerdanya.

Castellar de N'Hug

We have a free afternoon, so it is time to walk a little bit. We travel towards **Castellar de N'Hug**, one of the official Charming Villages and the point of arrival of the **Cement Train**. The town is known for its spectacular natural setting, its Romanesque architecture, and its enormous croissants. It is also famous because it is home to the source of the river that forms the backbone of the entire province of Barcelona, from the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean: the **Llobregat**. The path to its source is short and well-established, with wooden ladders and handrails. As we get to the end, we see the spectacular waterfall bursting straight from several cracks in the rock wall. Before it gets dark, with a couple of croissants weighing a kilo each in hand, we reach **Ripoll** where we spend the night.



STAGE 3

ACTIVE TOURISM IN NÚRIA

Ripoll's stunning Santa María portico is a prelude to a visit to the natural setting of the Núria sanctuary. With a box of Camprodon biscuits under our arm, we pass through such lovely villages as Beget and Castellfollit de la Roca.

Stone Bible

Today we get up in the mood for a mountain. For an energetic start we opt for an *esmorzar de forquilla* (breakfast), where some choose to enjoy *botifarra amb seques* and others go for a game meat stew which you absolutely must soak up with a thick slice of bread. After breakfast we head to the **Santa María de Ripoll Monastery** for an up-close view of this magnificent symbol of medieval Catalonia, founded in the year 879. Its monumental portico, covered in a mural of geometric motifs, plant shapes and characters carved in stone –they call it the stone bible– deserves careful contemplation.

Vall de Núria

From Ripoll we climb to the town of **Ribes de Freser** where we exchange the car for a rack railway which, after a thousand metres of elevation gain, drops us at the head of the **Vall de Núria**. The vista from here is worthy of an oil painting: trees, green meadows and a sanctuary that looks tiny against the backdrop of the Pyrenean peaks. From the sanctuary of Núria there are several simple routes where it is easy to

encounter chamois and marmots. Part of the group goes for a small guided excursion and the heads out on a horseback ride to the **Verge forest**. Some other visit, when we have more time, we could take on the challenge of climbing to **Puigmal**, an iconic peak with an altitude of 2,913 metres that acts as a natural border with France.

Camprodon Biscuits

We return to Ribes de Freser on the rack railway and take the route back to **Camprodon**, where we cross its medieval bridge and purchase several boxes of its famous artisanal biscuits. Between Camprodon and Olot, the road passes through beautiful villages, each well worth a stop if you have the time: **Beget**, a Charming Village, **Sant Joan les Fonts** with its medieval bridge, and **Castellfollit de la Roca**, perched on a basalt cliff that emerges from the landscape like the bow of a ship. After a very full day we head towards one of the many classic Catalan farmhouses that have been turned into accommodation, which can be found around Olot.



STAGE 4

SOARING OVER VOLCANOES

The thrill of flying over the ancient volcanoes of La Garrotxa kicks off a day that continues with a stroll through the shops of Olot, a taste of Santa Pau's *mongetes* and ends with a night under the stars.

La Garrotxa in a balloon

The alarm wakes us up before dawn. The early morning is more than justified because we have booked a flight in a hot-air balloon over the **La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park**, a unique place on the peninsula, featuring a landscape of exceptional value and dense forests of beeches, oak trees and holm oaks. Part of the group decides to explore the volcanoes from the ground and will cycle one of the stretches of the **Carrilet Greenway Olot**. Those of us who are going to fly in the balloon travel just five kilometres to the south of Olot. The experience begins with assembling the instruments and inflating the balloon. The first rays of sunshine kick off this adventure, which is for the most part silent and contemplative. At our feet are the **Volcano of Santa Margarida and el Croscat**; in the distance we see the fog-covered Pyrenees. It is impossible to capture this kind of beauty in the frame of a photograph, it has to be experienced. While you can also explore them on foot, nothing matches the view you get from the sky.

Shopping in Olot

We all meet again in **Olot**. A guided tour of the city centre's century-old market and shops helps us get acquainted with the district's famous delights: beans we buy in bulk, sausages, chocolates and *ratafia*, one of the most beloved Catalan liqueurs. We arrange for lunch time to coincide with a visit to **Santa Pau**, another Charming Village, to try the most famous *mongetes* or *fesols* in Catalonia. If you're looking to get in touch with nature, a good option is to go for a walk in the **Fageda d'en Jordà**, a beech forest that grew over the lava fields of the Croscat volcano and can be traversed on foot or in a horse-drawn carriage. Joan Maragall dedicated a poem to this beautiful setting: *Li agafa un dolç oblit de tot lo món, en el silenci d'aquell lloc profund* (A deep oblivion to the whole world emerges, in the silence of that deep place).

Sleeping under the stars

We drive to nearby Banyoles, where there are various camping options around the lake. We opt for glamping. We sleep in clear bubbles in the heart of nature that allow us to see the starry sky from our beds.



STAGE 5

TOWARDS THE CRADLE OF DALÍ

After watching the sunrise over the Lake of Banyoles, we enjoy kayaking and swimming in its waters. We continue to Besalú to learn about its Jewish legacy and end our journey in Figueres to retrace Dalí's first steps.

Sunrise in Banyoles

The **Lake of Banyoles**, located halfway between the peaks of the Pyrenees and the wide plains of the Empordà, wishes us good morning with the hypnotic pink tones of a sunrise over its waters. At this early hour it is just us and the bird watchers who have come to photograph some of the species protected by the Natura Network and the RAMSAR convention, which designates this wetland as a Wetland of International Importance.

Kayaking on the lake

We continue our morning with a leisurely kayak on this aquifer, formed more than 250,000 years ago. The silence of our paddles allows us to travel without scaring the herons, storks and ducks who go about their business without seeming to care about our presence. After our boat trip we approach one of the fishing shelters that are scattered along the banks of the pond. These picturesque constructions from the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries served as storage areas for fishing tools and as beach cabins for wealthy locals. To emulate those elegant ladies and gentlemen we take the opportunity to go for a dip in one of the areas set up for this purpose.

The Jewish Legacy

From Banyoles, the road passes through pine forests to the noble town of **Besalú**, where we see the magnificent Romanesque bridge over the river Fluvià, iconic symbols of medieval Catalonia. The historic centre and the **Call Jueu**, the Sephardic quarter from the thirteenth century, today retains its extraordinarily well-preserved synagogue and mikvah. In the afternoon, we continue our journey to **Figueres**, the home town of genius Salvador Dalí. We dine on one of the terraces of La Rambla, where the teenage Dalí spent long hours drawing in cafés. In one, the café Emporium, the surrealist painter and his friend Luís Buñuel wrote the screenplay for the short film *Un Chien Andalou*.



FIND OUT +

IF YOU HAVE TIME, YOU CAN ALSO VISIT ...

INDUSTRIAL LEGACY

In the early nineteenth century, large textile industries shaped the cultural and human landscape along the Llobregat river. They were organized around textile colonies, industrial communities that consisted of a factory and an area where working families lived, with corresponding school, church, and common areas. The first **textile colony in Berguedà** was that of Cal Rosal, founded in 1858, followed by others, such as the **Colony Vidal de Puig-Reig**, which is now a museum.

Other industrial tourism destinations in the district include the **Cement Train**, which runs along the route between **La Pobla de Lillet** —featuring the **Jardins Artigas, designed by Gaudí**— and the former Asland cement factory in **Castellar de N'Hug**, located in a spectacular modernist complex which now houses the *Museu del Cement*.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CATHARS

The GR107 or the ***Cami dels Bons Homes*** is a trans-Pyrenean route that runs along the paths followed by the Cathars in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, during their flight from the crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. Critics of the Catholic church and the feudal system of the era, they were considered heretics and persecuted under the rule of the king of France.

Their complete itinerary, measuring 189 kilometres, starts at the **Santuari de Queralt in Berga** and ends at the castle of Montsegur in the French region of Ariège. In the village of Bagà you can visit the Cathar Interpretive Centre, which tells the history of this religious community of men and women based in the historic region of Occitania.

HIGH-ALTITUDE EXPERIENCES

By the beginning of the twentieth century people were already skiing in **La Molina**, but the arrival of the railway in 1922 really accelerated the arrival of skiers at this modest Pyrenean resort in the town of Alp in La Cerdanya. The first T-bar lift in Spain was installed here in 1943, and shortly afterwards in 1946 La Molina was



again a pioneer of lift installation with the commissioning of the Turó de la Perdiu chairlift. Today, in addition to its 68 trails and 71 kilometres of ski area, La Molina offers two high-altitude experiences that combine sport and gastronomy.

The first is dinner at the Niu de l'Àliga lodge with an elevation 2,520, featuring access by cable car, sunset views, a special mountain dinner and a moonlight descent on skis. The second option is to have a drink and dinner at the chilled-out Costa Rasa, at an altitude of 2,000 metres. The end of the festive season also includes a night skiing down the Volta Muntanya Sagrada track.

THE GREEN WAY OF IRON AND COAL

Green ways are old disused railway infrastructure that has been converted into paths suitable for walking, cycling or horse riding. There are eight in Catalonia, three in the province of Barcelona (Llobregat, del Nicolau, del Vallès), four in Girona (Carrilet I and II, del Ferro i del Carbo, del Tren Pinxo) and one in Tarragona that connects with Teruel (Val de Zafan).

One of them, the **del Ferro and el Carbó route**, restores the route formerly used by trains connecting Ripoll to the old Ogassa mines, which closed in 1967. The route is fifteen kilometres and passes through **Sant Joan de les Abadesses**, where we can visit a spectacular ninth-century Benedictine monastery. This route can be linked to the Green Way of Carrilet I and II, linking Olot and Sant Feliu de Guíxols on the Costa Brava, via the city of Girona.

IN THE KINGDOM OF SEPHARAD

During the Middle Ages, **Besalú** was home to a Jewish community that lived in their own neighbourhood, separate from the rest of the city. In the year 1264, King Jaume I the Conqueror allowed this prosperous community, mostly made up of doctors and shopkeepers, to build their own places of worship. In Besalú, we can visit a **mikvah**, the sacred space where spiritual purification rituals involving total immersion in water were performed, in accordance with Jewish law.

There are other cities in Catalonia that retain a rich Sephardic heritage: in **Girona**, the Call district, with its narrow, labyrinthine streets, is one of the city's greatest tourist attractions. The **Girona Museum of Jewish History** invites us to explore the culture and history of Jewish communities in Catalonia during the medieval

period. Every year in September, the city of Girona participates in the **European Days of Jewish Culture**, holding various events and exhibitions to showcase the legacy of this important community.

In **Castelló d'Empúries** they have preserved the name of the *Carrer dels Jueus* in the location where the *call* (Jewish Quarter) that was home to the first synagogue in town was located.

In the city of **Barcelona**, you can stroll through the twelfth-century Jewish Quarter on the streets adjacent to the cathedral, Santa Eulàlia, Banys Nous and Call.

The best example in the Tarragona area is found in **Tortosa**, which has two Jewish Quarters, Call Vell and Call Nou.

DALÍ AND L'EMPORDÀ

The **Dalí Triangle** consists of the **Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres**, the **Castell Gala Dalí Museum in Púbol** and the **Salvador Dalí Museum-House in Portlligat**. "In this privileged place the real and the sublime almost touch. My mystical paradise begins on the plains of el Empordà, surrounded by the hills of Les Alberes, and comes into its own in the bay of Cadaqués. This country is my permanent inspiration." These are the words of Salvador Dalí, surrealist genius.

The **landscapes of L'Empordà**, the white-washed houses, the Mediterranean sky, the rock formations and the Tramuntana mountains form part of a territory that is an integral part of the painter's pictorial universe. In Figueres there are several locations connected to his life. On the 11th of May, 1904, in a modernist building on *carrer Monturiol* in **Figueres**, Salvador Dalí was born; the **church of Sant Pere** played a leading role in several essential stages of the artist's life: his baptism, first communion and funeral. At the **Museu del Joguet de Catalunya** we can see an exhibition about Dalí's youth, featuring objects such as his toys or photo albums, and the **Dalí Jewels collection** contains thirty-seven items of jewellery and more than twenty drawings of the designs the artist produced over three decades.

At the **Dalí Theatre-Museum** they present a wide collection of the painter's works. While the building's original exterior remains a true reflection of the artist's life and work, the interior is a temple of surrealism. The Castell de Púbol was a gift from the painter to his wife and muse Gala. Highlights include an old kitchen converted into a bathroom, the piano room, the garden pool, and Gala's mausoleum.

Cadaqués was a kind of creative haven for Dalí. Eventually he ended up buying a set of fishermen's houses on the local beach of **Portlligat**, which he turned into his home and workshop. That Portlligat house was a meeting place for many artists and intellectuals of the era, such as his filmmaker friend Luis Buñuel and poet Federico García Lorca.