

Figueres - Barcelona

The highlights:

- Figueres
- Natural park Cap de Creus, Cadaqués/Portlligat
- Inland medieval villages
- Girona
- Vic
- Natural park Montseny
- Costa Barcelona: modernism and indian villages
- Barcelona

Section 5: Figueres to Barcelona – 525km – 7 stages

- From Figueres to Pals. 128 km
- From Pals to Tossa de Mar. 72 km
- From Tossa de Mar to Hostalets d'en Bas. 90km
- From Hostalets d'en Bas to Viladrau. 82 km
- From Viladrau to Barcelona. 158 km
- Barcelona



From Surrealism to Modernism

The landscapes and works of the great **Salvador Dalí** are the start of a journey during which we will not only enjoy the diverse **Catalan cuisine** but also learn how to prepare some of its most iconic dishes. We will get to know the ancient methods of curing foods, listen to legends, and walk through romantic forests and along the same **Camins de Ronda de la Costa Brava** that were walked by pirates and outlaws. **Modernist architecture** will shape our visit to the towns on the **Maresme coast** and **Barcelona**, a city that has inspired great works of literature.



STAGE 1

DALÍ'S EMPORDÀ

The universe of Dalí in L'Empordà marks the start of a journey that takes us through the evocative landscapes of L'Empordà and natural settings as beautiful as those of Cap de Creus and the Bay of Roses.

Art in Figueres

We hear the bells of the **church of Sant Pere de Figueres**, one of the spaces of Dalí's life, that genius with the incredible moustache. We will spend the morning tracing the key points on the Surrealist painter's path, the **Dalí Triangle** consisting of his hometown, the **Port Lligat house** and the **Castell de Púbol**, making some stops along the way. At the **Dalí Theatre-Museum** we are fascinated by the innumerable details hidden in the artist's optical illusions. At the **Museu del Joguet** we see an exhibition about his younger years, and in the **Dalí-Jewellery** collection we examine a beautiful collection of his jewellery designs. Another interesting visit equally linked to art, in particular local and contemporary art, is the **Museu de l'Empordà**.

Sant Pere de Rodes

We drive through the vineyards of the **Empordà DO**, which stretches from the Pyrenees mountains to the beaches of the Mediterranean, to reach the **Monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes**. The guide tells us entertaining anecdotes about monks growing wine while we visit the church, the two cloisters and the wine cellar. We end the visit at the bar's lookout, with bird's-eye views over Port de la Selva and a taste of that wine shaped by the Tramuntana. On the beautiful roads that cross the **Cap de Creus Natural Park**, we reach the **Dalí house in Portlligat**, nestled between a white-washed hamlet at the foot of a cove where small

fishing boats dock. This house, which Dalí converted into a studio, was a meeting place for many artists and intellectuals of that era, such as his filmmaker friend Buñuel and poet García Lorca. We decide to stop for lunch in **Cadaqués**, one of those perfect postcard villages on the Catalan coast. Its narrow, steep old town is an invitation to enjoy a calm stroll accompanied by the murmur of the sea.

A historic bathroom

The route continues south, along the **Bay of Roses**, part of the **club of the world's most beautiful bays**, and crossing the **Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park**, one of Catalonia's most varied natural areas. We dedicate the afternoon to history because we want to see the **Empúries Ruins**, the location where the Greeks and Romans entered the peninsula. We choose a guided tour specialising in the trade and consumption of wine in the ancient world. The privileged location of the ruins, at the foot of the beach, allows us to do something unusual: swim by the pier where the Greek boats docked twenty-five centuries ago. Just six kilometres south of the archaeological site is **L'Escala**, an official **Marine Village** because of its historic connection to the sea, where we visited the **Anchovy and Salt Museum** to learn about the work of the salt curing factories that brought so much prosperity to the town. And of course, we sample the famous **L'Escala anchovies** in one of the old town's traditional taverns.



STAGE 2

A JOURNEY INTO THE MIDDLE AGES

The morning begins with a tour of the charming medieval towns of Empordanet, where we follow in footsteps of Josep Pla, and Palamós where we put on our aprons and discover the secrets of seafood cuisine.

Medieval villages

We move from the coast to inland **Empordà**. Behind us is the silhouette of the **Montgrí** with its castle, a mountain that divides the Alt and Baix Empordà, and access to **L'Estartit**, the port of departure for a visit to the little **Medes Islands**, one of the most important reserves of marine flora and fauna in the Mediterranean and a must-visit for scuba divers. After arriving at **Peratallada** and enjoying a breakfast of sausages and cheeses from the Empordà districts, we embark on a "burricleta" tour (electric-assisted bicycles) of the **medieval villages of Empordanet**: Peratallada itself, **Ullastret**, **Canapost**, **La Bisbal d'Empordà**, Catalan capital of pottery; and **Pals**, with its unmistakable walled enclosure.

Girona apples

Since we are in the lands of **Apples of Girona (PGI)**, we continue to **Palau Sator** to visit a cider shop where we buy different products made from those apples. Not just the most obvious, cider, but also juices, jams and vinegar. The route approaches the coastline to the **Begur coves**, another of the towns on the list of Marine Districts and Villages. No one

has captured the Empordà districts better than the writer **Josep Pla**. If we are interested in his literature and his landscapes, we should head to **Palafrugell**, where the Josep Pla Foundation is located, and **Calella de Palafrugell**, Charming Village, to explore the writer's childhood landscapes, as he spent his summers at the family home on **Canadell Beach**.

Cooking workshop

We continue to **Palamós** as we have signed up to one of the cooking workshops at the **Espai del Peix**. In this dining room, we take a historical and cultural tour of fish consumption and learn how to cook several dishes from what is known as "boat cooking", created by fishermen. One of the dishes we prepare must include **Pals rice** and **Palamós shrimp**. With boats coming in to port to take their catch to the market, which you can also visit to follow the bidding live, we head to the Brugarol bodega near Palamós, which stands out for its architecture in addition to its wines, as it was designed by the **RCR studio** in the town of Olot, winners of the prestigious Pritzker Prize.



STAGE 3

ALONG THE COSTA BRAVA

Tossa de Mar and a section of the Camins de Ronda of Costa Brava occupy our morning. The day continues with the monumental gardens of Lloret de Mar, the flavours of Girona and the arrival in the sweet town of Hostalets d'en Bas in La Garrotxa.

Tossa de Mar

We drive along the coast to our next stop, **Tossa de Mar**, leaving the **Gavarres mountain range** to the north, whose holm oak and cork oak woodlands produce considerable amounts of cork stoppers. We have our first coffee of the day enjoying the views from the walls of Tossa de Mar. Walking by the fishermen's district of Sa Roqueta we reach el Portal, the access point for **Vila Vella** where we head out on a guided tour that include the entrance to the **Municipal Museum** to see a work by **Marc Chagall**. After walking through the oldest part of this fortified town, we decide to follow the stretch of the **Camí de Ronda** as far as Cala Giverola to enjoy the view from the Sant Jaume lookout, a balcony with a spectacular perspective on the cliffs and the village with its castle.

Flavours of Girona

Without leaving the coast, we take a short detour along the way to reach **Lloret de Mar** and visit the **Santa Clotilde Gardens**, planted on an impressive bluff overlooking the sea. Landscaper and architect Nicolau Rudó was inspired by the Italian Renaissance when he designed this beautiful space. On the seafront staircase flanked by statues of sirens, we cannot stop taking photos to post on social media. In **Blanes** we find **Marimurtra** which is another important garden. This botanical garden, where

important scientific studies are carried out, was founded by the German Carl Faust. The temple overlooking the cove of Sa Farconera is one of the most photographed places on the Costa Brava. We head inland and to the north towards **Girona**, an official **City with Character**. We choose to explore the city through its flavours, taking a gastronomic tour. As well as strolling through its architectural heritage, such as the Cathedral, the Jewish Quarter and the **colourful houses on the River Onyar**, we taste the **xuixo de crema**, the **brunyols**, regional cheeses with **pa amb tomàquet** and olive oil, **fideuà** and ice cream made by one of the **Roca brothers**, among other delicious snacks. Our favourite part is that we are visiting places that the locals love.

The road to La Garrotxa

For golf lovers, there is the option of visiting the **PGA Catalunya Resort**, with a golf course in a beautiful landscape, but instead we choose to drive along the roads that take us to **La Garrotxa** in the south, a district marked by its volcanoes and lava-covered landscapes. We spend the afternoon at **Hostalets d'en Bas**, one of the beautiful villages of the **Vall d'En Bas**. This municipality, which comprises several small towns, cradles the **Fluvià River**, the mouth of which we crossed a couple of days before when we passed through the Bay of Roses.



STAGE 4

HIKING IN MONTSENY

The profile of the Collsacabra marks the first kilometres of a day during which we will follow the River Ter to see Manlleu's industrial heritage, to try Vic sausages and to stroll through the lush forests of Montseny.

The towns of Collsacabra

There are so many options to get to know La Garrotxa, from the air in a balloon, on foot or by bike through the volcanoes, always with good local products on the table. We promise to return as we head towards the province of Barcelona. The first stop of the day is in one of the Charming Towns, **Rupit**, with its cosy stone cottages in the middle of the **Collsacabra**, a natural landscape of mountains with dizzying cliffs, streams, and waterfalls. At the Rupit tourism office, we hire a guide to explain us the story of this town in the shelter of an enormous rock, where there was once a castle.

The capital of the River Ter

The road between Rupit and Manlleu crosses the Collsacabra, and taking a detour of just ten kilometres we reach **Tavertet**, where an easy hike brings us spectacular views of the cliffs from which the village takes its name and the **Sau reservoir**, fed by the **Ter River**, at the foot of the **Guilleries mountain range** and surrounded by forests of exotic pines and fir trees. In **Manlleu**, a city shaped by the River Ter both in terms of its terrain and its industrial past, we enjoy a very interesting dramatized tour. Assumpta, one of the "**Spirits of the Ter**", tells us about the importance of the industrial colonies that were established along the river for the development of Catalonia, mainly related

to the work of processing cotton into yarn to serve the textile industries.

Vic Sausages

Our next stop is **Vic**. Its Plaça Major is one of the most iconic of the Catalan districts, a monumental porticoed square that is always busy during the weekly market. After the guided tour of the city, where we see an outstanding **Roman Temple**, the cathedral and the streets that formed part of the Jewish Quarter, we entered a century-old drier to try out the famous **Vic sausages**, the **llonganissa** and the **fuet**. We spend the afternoon getting to know the legends of witches and outlaws at the **Espai Montseny de Viladrau**, an interpretive centre for the **Montseny Natural Park**, and hiking along a circular route that runs through the heart of the mountain range. This **Biosphere Reserve** offers landscapes featuring beech, fir and oak forests; we can encounter **sequoias** like those of **Can Casades**, or see the riverbank flora alongside the rivers that cross the park. The views from any of Montseny's iconic peaks are well worth a visit if you have the time to make the climb. We certainly need to return in autumn when the leaves form a beautiful tapestry in the undergrowth and **Viladrau** holds the **Chestnut Fair**.



STAGE 5

MODERNIST MARESME

The modernist heritage of the coastal towns of Maresme precedes our arrival in Barcelona, but not before we stop at Alella to sample some of the wines that were spoken of as early as Roman times.

To the coast

Today we descend from the mountains through the Eastern Vallès district to the **sandy beaches of the Maresme coastline**. Jutting out into the sea, from **Calella's lighthouse** we see a part of that coast that we are going to travel today. We start at one of the district's two Marine Villages, **Sant Pol de Mar**, walking through its streets to the **Les Escaletes urban beach**, where we sit in the sand and let time pass while gazing peacefully out at the water.

Modernism in the Maresme

We continue to the **Domènech i Montaner House-Museum**, former home of one of the great modernist architects, in **Canet de Mar**. It is wonderful to see the models for some of his most iconic works, such as the Palau de la Música or the Hospital de Sant Pau. In one of the village cafés, we try "**vidrieres modernistes**", or "stained glass", a type of unusual tea biscuit born of the initiative of local pastry makers. We continue to **Arenys de Mar**, the other Marine Village of the Maresme coast. In its fishing port, one of Catalonia's most important, a picturesque auction is held every afternoon where we can see the prized prawns that will later be on the menus of major restaurants. At Arenys de Mar we see a curious kind of modernism, at the **Sinera cemetery**, a place **Salvador Espriu** immortalised in his poetry. If you are looking for another view of the town, the port starts off with boats that offer guided tours through the natural environment to enjoy the landscape, the seabed, and the

pelagic birds. There is also the chance to do some night boating, watch the stars and hear mythological stories.

The tale of the entrepreneurs who made their fortune in the textile industry, as we saw on the visit to the **Ter colonies**, is reflected in houses like the **Coll i Regàs in Mataró**, our next stop. In the district capital, we also visit the **Nau Gaudí**, the architect's first work which has now been converted into a contemporary art museum. We spend part of the afternoon shopping, not forgetting a few boxes of **neules**, a crunchy dessert typically eaten at Christmas, both plain and filled with Catalan cream and *catanies* chocolate almonds.

Alella Wines

Before we head to Barcelona, where we plan to spend the night, we stop at **Alella** for a visit to a wine cellar, where we open a **natural pink Cava** that pairs perfectly with the **Vallalta strawberries**. The wines of Alella, mentioned by Pliny the Elder as "Laletanum wines" in Roman times, come from small vineyards overlooking the sea. Two other interesting attractions in the area are the **Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya**, which offers various experiences related high speed racing and hosts one of the world's most important motorbike events, and **La Roca Village**, with more than 140 open-air boutiques of national and international luxury brands with savings of up to 60% on the original price, throughout the year, and only 40 minutes from Barcelona. We enter **Barcelona**, the final point on this stretch of the **Grand Tour of Catalonia**.



STAGE 6

AN APPOINTMENT WITH GAUDÍ

The best modernist buildings by Gaudí and Domènech i Montaner, the craftsmanship of the *trencadís*, the most traditional Catalan cuisine and a literary walk through the Born district complete our first day in Barcelona.

Modernist Barcelona

It is not every day that we have the privilege of waking up in a modernist hotel, and the enchanting spell of modernism's suggestive forms pushes us to continue to dedicate the morning to this style of architecture. The **Modernist Route** in Barcelona covers as many as 120 buildings from this beautiful artistic movement, including works by such important architects as Gaudí and Domènech i Montaner. We choose to take a guided tour of some of the most impressive buildings of the **Barcelona's UNESCO world Heritage**, such as the **Casa Batlló**, **La Pedrera**, the **Casa Vicens**, the **Recinte Modernista Sant Pau** and the **Palau de la Música Catalana**, learning about the origins of this artistic movement, its importance for the city and revealing important details of the façades.

Catalan cuisine

We continue with a workshop to learn the technique for making *trencadís*, one of the

characteristic ornamental features of modernism. With basic tools, shards of ceramics and glass we leave with our own piece and great ideas for recycling old building materials. In another modernist building on the Passeig de Gràcia, we attend a **cooking workshop** where we learn how to prepare dishes such as *esqueixada*, a traditional salad with cod and tomato among other ingredients, and a delicious **crema catalana** with its top layer of burnt sugar.

A Literary Walk

Having tried the dishes we prepared, it is time for a good walk. We opt for a **literary route** and are given a choice of viewing settings from *The Shadow of the Wind* or *Cathedral of the Sea*. We go for the second option so we can visit the **Santa María del Mar** basilica in the **Born** district, and then continue in a leisurely fashion through this lively neighbourhood, where there are plenty of options to enjoy tapas and a glass of wine.



STAGE 7

BARCELONA'S SEA

We visit the markets and fishermen's guild of Barcelona, suppliers of the excellent fresh products served in the city's restaurants, which we will use in a cooking workshop later. The trip ends with a boat ride and a swim in the Mediterranean.

Dawn on the seafront

Our second day in Barcelona will be dedicated to the sea and local products, of course including a visit to one of the city's markets. With 43 members, the network of **Barcelona markets** is one of the largest in the world. We head out early to watch dawn and get a little exercise on the city's seafront. During a walk of just a few minutes, we go from the **Barceloneta**, a district full of bodegas and tapas bars, clothes laid out on the pavement and a Catalan rumba flavour, to the new architecture that sits on the seafront, featuring some interesting design-focused beach bars that we save for another visit.

Fresh products at the market

We've got a date at the market, so let's pick up the hand-made palm frond baskets we bought the day before at one of the shops in the Born district and get ready to let ourselves be advised by our guide on buying the freshest produce, with which we will prepare dishes at a cookery workshop. After enjoying the **seafood paella** we cook, and taking notes on every step of the recipe so we can repeat our success at home, we head to the **fishermen's guild** to see the arrival of the fishing boats and witness the bidding at the auction. It is interesting

to see how fishing has survived in such a large metropolis, thanks to a guild that can serve fresh fish to meet the high demand of the Barceloneta restaurants.

A swim in the Mediterranean

We end the day as we started it, by the sea, but this time aboard a catamaran to watch the sunset. Soon after leaving port, they unfurl the sails and shut off the engines. After sailing for a moment, and without losing sight of Barcelona, they stop the boat and invite us to take a swim in the **Mediterranean**; an invitation we are sure to accept. Back on board, we are served an aperitif of seasonal fruit and a glass of Cava, finishing up a great trip as the sun sets behind the **Collserola Mountains**.

FIND OUT +

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

THE NATURAL PARKS OF THE EMPORDÀ

In the districts of the Empordà, there are several natural areas of great ecological value which offer many environmentally friendly activities. The three main areas are the Natural Parks of **Cap de Creus**, **Aiguamolls de l'Empordà** and **Massís del Montgrí, Illes Medes** and **Baix Ter**. Among the varied offers is an outing in kayaks to see the vineyards of the Empordà DO, with a stop in a small cove overlooking Cap de Creus and a wine tasting; the "Vies Braves", sea routes that allow us to swim in open water, snorkel or **learn to dive**; a **parachute jump from Empuriabrava**, with views of Cap de Creus during the descent; hiking along a stretch of the **Camí de Ronda** which passes through Cap de Creus, with beautiful horseshoe paths; bird watching at the Aiguamolls del Empordà, sailing from l'Escala or the option to take the **Via ferrata de Cala del Molí**, which runs through a site close to the sea that is included in the official Natural Spaces Plan. There are also other types of protected landscapes, such as the **La Albera National-Interest Nature Reserve** and the **Massif of Les Salines**, **Massif of Les Gavarres** and **l'Ardenya**, where it is also possible to enjoy activities surrounded by nature.

CAMINS DE RONDA

Over the centuries, coastal inhabitants have taken all manner of routes to access resources, move between towns and look out for threats that could come from the sea in times of piracy and black market trade.

On the **Costa Brava**, we can hike numerous sections of the coastal "camins de ronda" paths, which largely follow the route of the **GR-92**. Along the different paths we find small, lonely coves of turquoise water, dizzying cliffs and different beaches. Many of the sections depart from locations where it is easy to leave the vehicle parked and make a round trip. One of the most beautiful stretches of this network is the horseshoe path that runs from **Cadaqués to Cap de Creus**, through a landscape of volcanic rock. Although most routes are suitable for family trips, these are particularly recommended between **Calella de Palafrugell** and **Llafranc**, from **Platja d'Aro to Palamós**, along the route that starts in Lloret de Mar and leads to Blanes and the one starting at the **Platja de Riells**, in L'Escala, and goes as far as **Sant Martí d'Empúries**. Along the different roundabout paths, we will find privileged **lookout points over the coves of the Costa Brava**.



L'ESCALA AND THE SALT CURING TRADITION

For many years, **L'Escala** lived almost exclusively off catches of oily fish. They had established two working periods, the “early dawn” and the “prime dawn”. Families, always uncertain of what would greet them, waited on the beach to help unload and scrub the day’s catch and begin the process of **salting the fish**. This is a method of preservation with ancient roots; the nearby **ruins of Empúries** bear witness to it being practised in Roman times. To discover the special features of this trade, which shaped L'Escala’s culture for decades, we can visit the **Alfolí de la Sal**, the building where they stored the prized raw materials for producing the salted fish, and the Anchovy and Salt Museum, where we can take a tour of the different jobs involved in the process.

We can also visit the shops and taverns of one of the four factories that keep the tradition alive. In addition, during the **L'Escala Salt Festival**, held each year in September, the town is completely transformed. Part of the population dresses up in traditional clothing and the beach is once again a workplace rather than a place of leisure. On this day of historical recreation we can see a sample of the trades involved in fish salting, the arrival of the boats on the beach, the construction of vessels led by the master boat builder, life in the taverns, traditional songs, the weaving of nets and the work of boatmen and the basket makers, among other activities. All of this is accompanied by performances of folklore, each year they invite a country or region of the world with links to salt, and the singing of traditional Habanera songs. They will also tell us why L'Escala residents are known as *esquenapelats*.

PALAMÓS FISHERMEN

Every morning before sunrise, **fishermen from Palamós**, who practice bottom trawling, go out to the sea in search of the varieties of fish that will be sold in the best restaurants and fishmongers, including the prized Palamós shrimp. Starting from the **Fishing Museum** we are given the opportunity to accompany them on a working day to learn about life on board, how to handle and guide the boat to the fishing grounds, the art of “*xorrar*”-ing the nets and sharing the food they cook on board. We will also learn how they are trying to make their business increasingly sustainable. Once back in port, we can attend the **fish auction** to see the full cycle.

EL TER BY KAYAK

After a little over two hundred kilometres, from its source in the **Capçaleres del Ter y del Freser Natural Park** in the Pyrenees, the **Ter River** reaches the coastal town of **Torroella de Montgrí**. From the **Gola del Ter** we can go back up part of the **river in a kayak**. It is a simple activity, designed for all audiences, that only requires basic instructions to use the paddle and get going. Where the river narrows further, riverside vegetation contributes to the feeling of being in a much more isolated spot, even as the road passes very close by. Many bird species can be seen along the way, including the little grebe, herons and the striking kingfisher. Another option is to follow the river along the **Ter Route**, an itinerary linking the Pyrenees to the Costa Brava that can be covered on foot and by bike.

COSTA BRAVA FESTIVALS

Nearly two hundred **festivals are held throughout the year in the Costa Brava** celebrating nine disciplines: music, theatre, cinema, dance, circus, comedy, digital technology, art and magic. In addition to the great quality of their line-ups, many of these festivals share the heritage and landscape of the Girona districts as their setting.

Some of the most established and internationally recognised festivals are those held in the **gardens of Cap Roig**, the **Castell de Peralada** and the so-called **Sons del Món**, where they try to pair the artists with **Empordà DO** wines, offering guided tastings of the wine selected before the performances. Other good choices include the **Portaferrada** festival and the **Temporada Alta** in autumn.

MODERNISME IN BARCELONA

Catalonia's home-grown art nouveau movement, **modernisme**, emerged between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, with Barcelona being its greatest exponent. It produced some outstanding examples of architecture and the decorative arts. The Cerdà Plan, Ildefons Cerdà's town planning project that extended the city beyond its medieval walls to create the new Eixample district, provided space for **modernista** architecture to grow.

This architectural style, which can be found in residential and industrial buildings, is characterised by its curved forms inspired by nature, organic structures, asymmetrical layouts and the use of new materials and new techniques, such as **trencadís** mosaic made using shards of broken pottery and tiles.



Barcelona is the European city with the most art-nouveau, or *modernista*, buildings. Not for nothing have nine of its *modernista* landmarks been awarded World Heritage status by UNESCO. The *modernista* façades are associated with the Barcelona bourgeoisie as well as some of the city's foremost architects. One example is the so-called "*manzana de la discordia*", or block of discord, where the architects **Lluís Domènech i Montaner**, **Josep Puig i Cadafalch** and **Antoni Gaudí**, built a house for the Lleó Morera, Amatller and Batlló families respectively. Although the Eixample, and its heritage quarter, the *Quadrat d'Or*, in particular, have the greatest number of *modernista* buildings, they can also be found in other parts of Barcelona. The Torre Bellesguard, at the foot of the Collserola ridge; the Palau Güell, in the Raval; the Casa Vicens, in Gracia; the Casa Bruno Quadros, on La Rambla; the Col·legi de les Teresianes, in Sant Gervasi; the former Casaramona textile mill, on Montjuïc; and many more buildings that won't fail to impress, are some other examples.