



Cala Estreta

Costa Brava

Alt Empordà · Baix Empordà · La Selva · Girona
+ The “Dalí Triangle”

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Costa Brava

The Costa Brava can be simply defined as a coastline of rocks sculpted by the wind and the sea and covered by a carpet of thickets and pines that twist and turn to the caress of the waves. Grey, blue, green and white: these are the colours of a Costa Brava that also includes long smooth sandy beaches. Its personality however, is determined by an endless succession of coves and unexpected spots.

The appearance of the Costa Brava alters with the different seasons of the year, retaining its beauty throughout. A rainy winter afternoon in Cadaqués; a Tramuntana storm swirling the Mediterranean in front of Cap de Creus or a morning of sun, shining over the Medes islands, south of Cap de Begur or in any corner of this rugged coast that descends towards Blanes. These are unforgettable spectacles—continuous, with no intervals, open to anyone who wishes to contemplate them— with only one actor: nature. The images gathered in this guide constitute a foretaste of the treasure that is made up of the coastline of the coast of Girona, that to a large extent, is still to be discovered.

Costa Brava is the name given to the tourist area at the north-eastern extremity of Catalonia, above the coastline of Girona. Its geographical limits are the border with France in the north, and Blanes in the south (approx. 60 km from Barcelona). It embraces the maritime façades of the Alt Empordà, Baix Empordà and La Selva regions.

The Costa Brava was so named at the beginning of the 20th century in view of its steep relief that is characterized by solid stones that extend down to the same Mediterranean shore. There are gentle coves that alternate with beaches of very different sizes.

The natural beauty and the mild Mediterranean climate (the average summer temperature is around 23 degrees centigrade and there is low humidity thanks to the Tramuntana wind) made the area into a tourist focal point already in the first decades of the last century. The first tourists were small groups of occasional summer holidaymakers from Spain or from abroad. Then began the building of private residences that resulted in the establishment of a colony of regular visitors. From the beginning of the 1960's, the Costa Brava went through an important process of changes to satisfy growing demand and became one of the most popular holiday destinations in Europe.

As a result of that overcrowding, the Costa Brava today is a classic tourist destination. Lloret or Platja d'Aro are locations that attract hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. Cadaqués is recognized as being one of the most enchanting fishing villages of the Mediterranean coastline. The Marine Reserve of the Medes islands, in front of L'Estartit, is highly valued as an underwater paradise by diving enthusiasts from all over the continent. Tossa de Mar has been visited by great artists for a century now. El Port de la Selva, the Cap de Creus Nature Reserve, Roses,



Empuriabrava, L'Escala, Begur, Tamariu, Llafranc, Calella, Palamós, S'Agaró and Sant Feliu are also, amongst others, well known locations on the Costa Brava. They form part of a sentimental education for various generations of Europeans.

However, in spite of its traditions and long history, the Costa Brava is still an area that holds surprises for visitors who arrive with a willingness to discover its whole; for those who are not content to limit their stay in their resort. Apart from the already mentioned mythical names, the Costa Brava is attractive as a whole and it is worthwhile exploring as much of the territory as possible. Only by exploring this

territory (which is usually done on land but which is also excellent by boat) can one adequately gauge the wealth and diversity of the area.

This guide was written with this idea in mind and it underlines the diversity of the Costa Brava. The collection of images gathered is more than eloquent in displaying a succession of enchanting places. It is also limited and token, owing to the wide areas of the region as well as the limited size of this guide. Its visual information is complemented by texts whose aim is to familiarize the reader with the area and to point out man-made attractions built by the inhabitants of the Costa Brava.



Sant Pere de Rodes

This is a monumental centre whose oldest buildings date from the 10th century. Sant Pere de Rodes is one of the Romanesque jewels of Catalonia. On a mountain elevation and facing the sea, it is irrefutable proof of monastic skill (in this case Benedictine) in building retreats in spots that are very moving. Visitors have to park their vehicles a certain distance away and then walk to the monastery along a path which is also a marvellous viewpoint over the Mediterranean.

Within the enclosure, whose restoration includes modern elements, the church stands out. Its nave has beautiful arches, capitals and what has remained of painted murals; it has a Lombard bell tower and cloisters in the abbatial palace. The views from the castle ruins, situated above the monastery, are spectacular.

Lovers of architecture can visit the monastery of Sant Quirze de Colera after leaving Sant Pere de Rodes.



Cadaqués



Cadaqués is probably the town in the Costa Brava that has most successfully preserved its traditional appearance. Located in a wide bay south of Cap de Creus, but separated from the rest of civilization by the El Pení mountain (605 m), Cadaqués lived through the first half of the 20th century with a notable autonomy. It was dedicated to looking after its olive groves, fishing and maritime trade. On land, Roses or the neighbouring El Port de la Selva seemed far away at the end of an even discouraging path that was full of bends. Legend has it that fishermen from Cadaqués got to know the island of Cuba before getting to know the town of Figueres!

That isolation in an environment of thickets and green and grey slate, burnished by a particularly blinding light, has resulted in being a blessing for Cadaqués. Its white silhouette, with its low buildings crowned by the church of Santa Maria (with its bell tower, its humble rose window and cypresses planted next to its portal), has survived the passage of time. It almost seems to be a framed painting. Behind the façade and criss-crossed by various beaches and coves is a hidden Cadaqués with steep and narrow streets. These have rustic paving and are dotted with benches and flower pots. They are rich in shade, background noises and where time stands still. Without a doubt it was this double factor of picturesque, peaceful village and open fishing village that made Cadaqués a meeting point for artists and intellectuals from all over the planet. At the head of these was Salvador Dalí whose father originated from here. Dalí invited García Lorca and Buñuel, his



Church of Santa Maria



Costa Brava Alt Empordà

Empúries

The Empúries Ruins, just a few metres away from the sea, bring together Greek, Iberian and Roman remains. A colony of Greeks from Focea was established in the 5th century B.C. and it was the first settlement in Empúries, known as *Palaiapolis*. The same group later founded *Neapolis*, that today is a much admired archaeological site. Later, Iberian groups settled here and from 218 B.C. Roman troops set up a camp that over the years transformed itself into a base for the colonization of Hispania. The site, that has been excavated since the beginning of the 20th century, has unearthed the urban network of Empúries. Walls, buildings, sculptures, mosaics, jetties and a lot of implements have been unearthed. Some of these items are on exhibit in the museum that complements this first class archaeological site.



Moll Grec Beach

Empúries Ruins



Calella de Palafrugell

The white and welcoming porches of Port Bo make up the central enclave of Calella de Palafrugell, which is also one of the most characteristic places on the Costa Brava. It lies opposite the beach and there are boats in the water. Despite its growth, this town has preserved its architectural identity.

In contrast to Tamariu and Llafranc, Calella has more than one beach owing to the reefs along its coastline that divide its sandy areas into various segments. The largest beach is that of Canadell, from where one can set off on a walk to the Calella tower (16th century) and then, following a beautiful coastal path, one reaches Llafranc. In the surrounding area of the beach of Port Bo (which despite its limited size attracts tens of thousands of people every year in July for the traditional *habaneras* festival), there are the beaches of Port Pelegrí, Sota Can Calau, Port de Malaespina and Sota de Sant Genís.

South of Calella —and up to Cala de la Fosca, which is already in the Palamós area— there is one of the largest areas of the Costa Brava still unspoilt by urban occupation. A dirt path that goes through the wooded mass that covers this bit of virgin coast, provides the only access to enchanted spots like the botanical gardens of Cap Roig and, on the shore, Golfet, Cala Massoni, Cala del Vedell, Cala El Crit, Cala Font Morisca, Cala Pomes... This is a stretch of coastline that is ideal for sailing and diving.

Palamós

Palamós is one of the largest port towns in Catalonia, the third largest after Barcelona and Tarragona even though its population is much lower than the other two cities. Its old quarter is built on a wide projection that ends at the Moli point where the Palamós lighthouse is situated. At the south and the north of this projection, the town of Palamós located its two ports. On one side there is the commercial and fishing port (where the very bustling daily fish market auctions take place in the small hours of the fish caught the previous night by the powerful local fishing fleet) and on the other side there are boats moored in the marina. Palamós has grown in an orderly fashion in all directions. Towards the south, along the beach of Platja Gran, there is the larger stretch of the town, and the interior front part towards La Bisbal up to the north.

Given its historical traditions (it was one of the medieval Catalan bases for the Mediterranean expansion to Italy and Greece), its central location in the Costa Brava and its various activities, Palamós has offered, since olden times, all types of services. Amongst its attractions is the Gothic church of Santa Maria del Mar and the Cau de la Costa Brava-Museu de la Pesca (Museum of Fishing), with interesting collections of paintings, coins, shells, etc. Its Sunday open-air market is also remarkable, being one of the most colourful and lively in the region.

As well as this urban profile, Palamós has known how to conserve (and continues to do so with ecologists) coastal stretches that maintain the integrity, purity and flavour of long ago. This begins to be evident starting from La Fosca (to the North of Cap Gros),



El Carme, Port of Palamós



Tossa de Mar



Tossa de Mar offers one of the most characteristic outlines of the Costa Brava thanks, basically, to its old town (which is encircled by battlement walls) that sits proudly above Cap de Tossa. The walls date from the 12th century and the houses protected by them were mostly built starting from the 15th century. Despite their venerable age and the beating sea and wind, the three large cylindrical towers and other smaller ones that give identity to the complex are in a very good state of preservation.

Just by arriving in Tossa, the visitor feels inevitably captivated by this old town that is in a constant and loving process of restoration.

The peaceful and steep streets that cross it, often refreshed by the abundance of flowers in pots and flower beds or climbing up aged stone walls, or beside carved wooden front doors, afford endless visual enjoyment.

The town centre, sitting on a hillside that faces north, has an agreeable feel and is without doubt responsible for the attraction that Tossa has had historically—even before the boom of the Costa Brava—on a legion of painters and artists who, like Marc Chagall and Yves Klein, frequented it and opened studios there. The municipal museum, located within the Batlle palace, a Gothic building in the old town, is testimony to the presence in the town of many of those artists.

From the walls of the Vila Vella (the old town), where, at its highest point, there are ruins of a 15th century Gothic temple, one has splendid views of Tossa in addition to a promise of countless treasures on the north coast. Also and in particular one can



Platja Gran beach



The “Dalí Triangle”

Figueres

The Dalí Theatre-Museum

Figueres, capital of Alt Empordà as well as the Tramuntana —the dry and tenacious north wind that sweeps across the area— is a remarkable commercial, gastronomic (the dining rooms of the Hotel Empordà are highly recommended) and cultural centre that has some singularly good features in its urban part. Outstanding amongst these is the Museu del Joguet with its collection of historic toys that attracts both children and grown ups equally, the Museu de l’Empordà and especially the Dalí Theatre-Museum which is at the head of the Dalí route and is an authentic mass phenomenon on the Spanish museum map.

Salvador Dalí was its most famous son but it is also the birthplace of Narcís Monturiol, forefather of the submarine. The church of Sant Pere and the castle of Sant Ferran are amongst its main monuments, although the most characteristic urban space is the wide Rambla, the epicentre of local life.

The Dalí Theatre-Museum, with around a million annual visitors, is one of the most visited museums in the Spanish state. It is also a unique cultural centre that brings together an important collection of works of the surrealist painter and is in itself a rare work of art. At the beginning of the 1960’s, Dalí started to nurture the idea of building a museum in his town and in this regard he chose the building of the local theatre that was built in the 19th century and was in ruins since 1939, the year the Spanish civil war ended. The choice of this building was, in Dalí’s words, due to three facts: “I am a theatrical painter, I was baptized in the church opposite the theatre and it was in the foyer of this theatre that I held my first



Plaça Gala-Salvador Dalí

Figueres