

Montserrat

The holy mountain

Introduction → p. 4 **History** → p. 11 **The basilica** → p. 21 **The monastery** → p. 47
The museum → p. 57 **The Escolania** → p. 65 **The Monumental Rosary on the path to the Holy Grotto** → p. 69 **Saint Cecília** → p. 77 **The natural park** → p. 81 **Excursions** → p. 109
Services and unique transport → p. 124 **Conclusion** → p. 127



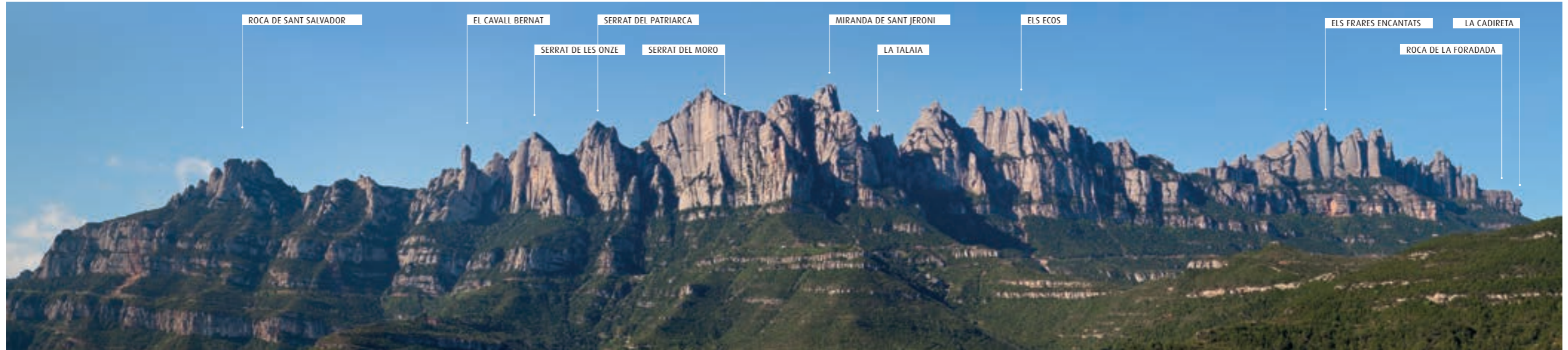
Montserrat

Montserrat is one of the few places in the world where the beauty of nature, culture and spirituality are so closely intertwined. This explains why the Catalans have made it one of their founding symbols.

Since time immemorial, people have been drawn to the unique geographical mountain formation they called Montserrat, or sawtooth mountain.

Dozens of whimsically shaped peaks rise up over a small area, 10 kilometres in length and 5 kilometres wide. They have been given thought-provoking nicknames such as the Mummy, the Elephant's Trunk, the Chair, the Dead Man's Head, the Hunchback, the Salamander, and the legendary Cavall Bernat, to name just a few. The highest peak, Sant Jeroni, stands 1,235 metres high.

On the site of this geological cathedral people have discovered their spiritual side and been brought closer to God. It is here that the country's Christian community continues to worship the millennia-old, spiritual presence of Saint Mary under the patronage of the Virgin of Montserrat who has been the patron saint of Catalonia since 1881.



Montserrat from Marganell | Montserrat from El Bruc.

The Virgin of Montserrat, "la Moreneta"

The image of Saint Mary of Montserrat was carved in the late 12th century and is one of the jewels of Catalan Gothic art. It is important to point out the dark colour of her skin, which places her within the European Black Madonna tradition, earning her the nickname "la Moreneta".

Countless people come to Montserrat to worship the image of the Virgin. Indeed this is often one of the main reasons for visiting or pilgrimage.

The monumental basilica was built in the Renaissance style with Gothic touches and consecrated in 1592.



Mary holds in her right hand a sphere symbolising the universe.



Two angels carry the shield of Montserrat (a mountain inside a carpenter's saw) on one of the capitals in the Gothic cloisters.



Arches in the Gothic cloisters in the Plaça de Santa Maria, built in 1476.



Statue of the Virgin, late 12th century. →



Rose window by Enric Monserdà, made in 1898.



Rose window seen from inside. It depicts the coronation of the Virgin.

The atrium and the façade

The atrium leading into the basilica has a mid 20th century marble floor inspired by the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome. The façade was designed in 1901 by the architect Francesc de Paula del Villar and features sumptuous neoplateresque details.

Above the main doors there are three sculptural groupings set out in three tiers: the first features Jesus and the twelve apostles, sculpted by the Vallmitjana brothers. The second tier was designed by Enric Montserdà in 1898 and features a large rose window depicting the coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity framed by four medallions representing the cardinal virtues. The third tier features a clock surmounted by the cross.



Atrium and façade of the basilica. →



The library

Montserrat has had its own *scriptorium* since the 12th century and it was particularly active in the 14th and 15th centuries.

In 1499 Abbot Cisneros set up a typography studio to ensure the culture of the monastery reached a wider audience.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the library grew and expanded its collection until its shelves housed thousands of works. The most tragic period in its history occurred in 1811 during the Napoleonic Wars when the monastery was destroyed and most of its treasure trove of books lost forever.

The library we see today dates from the late 19th century and grew notably during the abbacy of Father Antoni Maria Marcet from 1913 to 1946.

In 1917, the architect Puig i Cadafalch remodelled the vaulted ceiling and designed the shelves and furniture. Highlights in the great hall include a painting by Miquel Massot (from Josep M. Sert's workshop) and a sculpture of the Virgin of Montserrat by Josep Llimona.

The library at Montserrat has an important collection of musical documents from different eras and more than 300,000 volumes on theology, philosophy, history, art, literature and patristics. It also has a collection of 18,000 prints, 400 incunabula, 500 maps and an important collection of papyri. The binding workshop is still working today.



Sculpture of the Virgin of Montserrat by Josep Llimona.



Detail of the library stacks designed by Puig i Cadafalch.

← Puig i Cadafalch remodelled the vaulted ceiling in 1917.



The Monumental Rosary

The trail begins in the Plaça de la Creu down a flight of steps leading to the square where you will find the Monumental Rosary. Halfway down, you will pass Josep M. Subirach’s sculpture of Saint Dominic which was placed there in 1970.

This Monumental Rosary was begun in 1896 as a result of donations from associations, institutions and families, and completed in 1910. Architects, sculptors and different craftsmen were involved in creating the trail and this explains why each group of sculptures has its own individual style.

Nevertheless, the decisive intervention of architects of the calibre of Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Antoni Gaudí, as well as sculptors like Josep Llimona and the Vallmitjana brothers, gave the Rosary a unity that makes it the most important open-air artistic ensemble of the Catalan art nouveau movement, *modernisme*.

Once you have reached the fifth Sorrowful Mystery, the Crucifixion of Christ – depicted by the magnificent bronze *modernista* cross designed in 1896 by the architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch with sculptures by Josep Llimona and Josep Montserrat – the path veers off in the opposite direction and opens out. It leads swiftly to the chapel of the Santa Cova, which stands 605 metres above sea level.

Along this stretch of the path you will come across the last five mysteries, the Glorious Mysteries, which are the most monumental in scale and steeped in symbolism. They are east facing and bathed in light in the early morning. The first one, dating from 1916 and designed by Gaudí, depicts the resurrection of Christ and is particularly outstanding. It features sculptures by Josep Llimona.



The third Joyful Mystery, *The Nativity of Jesus*, by Puig i Cadafalch.



The first Sorrowful Mystery, *Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane*, by Josep Campeny.

← The second Glorious Mystery, *The Ascension of the Lord*, by Bonaventura Bassegoda.



A dream transformed into a mountain

Despite the lack of streams and meagre soil, Montserrat has an extraordinary array of plants. In fact, you can find 1,600 of the 3,000 vascular plants native to Catalonia on the mountain.

Montserrat also has an abundance of fauna, particularly birds. You will also find small mammals, such as weasels, beech martens, foxes, squirrels and badgers, as well as wild boar and the Spanish mountain goat, which was successfully reintroduced in 1995. We recommend you visit the exhibition about the natural park in the same building that houses the upper station of the Sant Joan funicular.

Members of the trust, the Patronat de la Muntanya de Montserrat, include representatives of the Catalan and Spanish governments, and the four towns that fall within the Montserrat area, and Montserrat Abbey. Their endeavours help to improve this wonderful natural site that rises up, suffused with light, against the sky.



The special combination of hard materials (pebbles, sand and calcareous cement) and soft ones (clays, sandstone, schist...) explains Montserrat's peculiar relief.



Rising above or in the mist, the mountain has even more of a fairytale-like appearance.



Above, sculpture of Pau Casals, at the start of the path. Below, the Creu de Sant Miquel viewing point.

The path to Sant Miquel

The path that begins in the Plaça de l'Abat Oliba features several points of interest, including the hermitages of Sant Miquel and Sant Joan, both of them recently restored. At the beginning, you will find monuments on both sides of the path, including sculptures dedicated to Pau Casals and Saint Francis of Assisi, and the gateway, the Porta de Sant Miquel, with its sculpture of the archangel that marks the eastern boundary of the shrine.

Shortly before you reach the chapel of Sant Miquel, a path on the left leads to one of the best-known viewing points on the mountain, the Creu de Sant Miquel, which boasts spectacular views of the monastery and the Llobregat Valley.

After the chapel of Sant Miquel, the concrete path on the right climbs gradually to the upper station of the Sant Joan funicular, on the Pla de les Taràntules, where you can visit the Aula de Natura, an interpretation centre that describes the main features of Montserrat's ecosystem and the excursions on offer. To return to the monastery you can go back along the same route or take the funicular.



Views from the Pla de les Taràntules viewing point.

