

The Costa Brava

Maribel's Guide to the Empordà ©



Maribel's Guides for the Sophisticated Traveler™

September 2017

The Alt & Brix Empordà

Getting Around

Michelin produces an excellent zoom map, No. 147, for the Costa Brava, Barcelona and surrounding areas, which is not available in the US (only online in the UK) but which one can purchase at a highway gasoline station or in the news shops of Begur, in the center of the town, and in Llafranc, at the newsstand facing the beach. This highly detailed map can be invaluable. GPS is generally highly undependable in Spain; in some areas it will work well and in others, not at all.

Beaches

The Tourist Bureau has an excellent English language web site that will give you information on the local beaches near Palafrugell and for the small, cove beaches surrounding Begur. Waters here are among the purest along the Costa Brava. Your best bets for family-friendly, blue-flagged, albeit small, cove beaches with services--life guard, kayak rentals, sun loungers, toilets will be:

Aiguablava

This small, sandy cove beach, the Costa Brava's signature cove beach, only 100 meters in length, is found directly below the Parador de Aiguablava and is arguably the prettiest small cove beach around and offers sun lounge rentals, a diving center, kayak rentals and 4 restaurants at the water's edge, including the Mar i Vent, belonging to the Parador, for which advance reservations are needed during high season. There is plenty of paid parking, but it does fill up quickly. In general, it is best to arrive at any Costa Brava beach by 10:00 am to find easy adjacent parking. There is a staircase leading from the beach up to the government-run Parador, which has a formal dining room and a casual outdoor terrace for sandwiches, open to non-guests (although the cuisine is only average, at best).

The Mar i Vent Restaurant & Beach Club on the beach is quite popular at night and has a small branch of master Barcelona bartender, Javier de las Muelas' Dry Martini Bar (currently closed for renovation). Also on the beach is a the family-friendly Toc al Mar*, perhaps the best of the four beachside restaurants there-not your average *chiringuitos* or beachside bar, sitting on the Aiguablava beach below the Parador. It offers great seafood, a unique, "square" paella for two or more, and is a favorite of 3 Michelin starred chef Joan Roca, chef of El Cellar de Can Roca in Girona. It is owned by a husband and wife team that opened Toc in Barcelona, one of the city's earliest and best *bistronomics* (now closed). Clients loved their recent dinner here as well-the aroma of oak burning in the oven that is used to grill fish caught that day by the boats of Begur, and to cook rice dishes made to traditional recipes.

It's not cheap, as it's a favorite of Barcelona foodies, but the quality is high. Toc is open both for lunch and dinner from June 23 until October 15. Tel: +34 972 113 232

It is a short drive from the lovely town of Begur down to this cove beach on the Bay of Fornells.

At the [Aiguablava Diver Center](#) one can take a boat ride to the lighthouse of Sant Sebastià. Call for a reservation (+34) 607 599 336, or go snorkeling in the afternoon.

Llafranc

Set in a half moon bay, Llafranc seems more genteel than its neighbor Calella de Palafrugell. Of all the nearby beaches, Llafranc's long but rather narrow sheltered Blue Flag town beach in front of the promenade, Passeig Cipsela, is the most cosmopolitan (classily unflashy) and has the most services. It's great for sunbathing, diving or snorkeling. At the newspaper shop facing the sea you can purchase sandals, sun loungers, hats, any necessary beach items you might want, along with international press. And a shop above the beach, to the left, sells fashionable Cristina Castañer espadrilles. Llafranc also has a lifeguard, sun loungers for rent, kayak rentals, diving, showers and public toilets.

On the square behind the beach, [La Croissanteria de Llafranc](#) serves up good sandwiches and salads. Along the Llafranc beachfront promenade there are several family-run hotels, such as the [Hotel Llafranc](#), [Hotel Terramar](#) and the [Hotel Llevant](#) with noted restaurants. We had a recent casual meal on the outdoor terrace of the Hotel Terramar.

The bar of the Hotel Llafranc is where Kirk Douglas, Sophia Loren, Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor were once seen, and it was a hangout of Salvador Dalí's. Its original owner, a character known as the Gypsy, was renowned for his wild parties and famous Hollywood guests in the 50s. His nephew now runs the hotel.

Above the beach, inside the modest 2-star Hotel Casamar, you'll find Michelin-star dining at [Restaurant Casamar*](#), the best restaurant in this area. You can find it by walking up a long flight of steps from the beach's southern end. And if you feel energetic, you can walk the path from Llafranc up to the cliff top Sant Sebastià lighthouse where you'll be rewarded with great views and food at the restaurant of the [Hotel Restaurant El Far](#), belonging to the owners of the Relais & Chateau Mas de Torrent. El Far has some of the most spectacular panoramic views on the Costa Brava. Dine on the terrace or the indoor restaurant. Behind the El Far hotel is the tiny excavated area of an Iberian settlement, [Sant Sebastià de la Guarda](#). From here there is a footpath that snakes inland through pine woods as far as the cliff edge near Tamariú (a grueling walk of about 90 minutes).

Read more and see photos of the Llafranc beach at [Visit Palafrugell](#).

Calella de Palafrugell

The low-slung, whitewashed buildings of Calella, an archetypal fishing village, are strung, Aegean-style, around a bay of rocky points and small, less tourist-friendly beaches, six in total. They are not large and don't attract as many foreigners.

Locals find the "secret" *Platja del Golfet* the most appealing, accessible by footpath 1.5 kilometers south of the town. Drive out of town on the *Avninguda de la Costa*, take a left on *Carrer del Golfet*, then another left on *Carrer del Cap Planes*. There should be parking places along this road (go early!). A small sign for the beach will take you down the steep flight of steps. No services. The whole point of this cove is its remoteness and privacy, so bring your own lunch or snacks. *Platja Canadell*, in Calella itself, the largest beach with the most services, is found at the northern end of the town. This is a Blue Flag beach with a promenade of 19th-century villas. At the northern end of *Platja Canadell* is the casual seafood restaurant Tragamar, belonging to Barcelona's Tragaluz Group.

At *Carrer de les Volts (arches)*, 11, next to the tiny *Calau* beach, there is Bar Can Gelpi with its green awning and a terrace looking directly out to the beach, noted for its seafood and featured in the February, 2017 issue of *Saveur* magazine. (There are some quibbles here about the service). And see photos and the menu at delicieuxpate.com.

Calella de Palafrugell is connected to Palafrugell by highway and with Llafranc by the *Camí de Ronda* footpath. At the end of the *Platja Canadell* beach, you'll find the walking path that borders the Mediterranean and takes you along the headlands to Llafranc in about 15-20 minutes, an easy and very pretty one-kilometer coastal walk.

Tip: The ice cream and horchata shop, Gelateria La Jijoneca, is found on Carrer Calau, 12. Horchata is a very refreshing summer drink, made from the chufa root, and native to Valencia.

Tamariu

The smallest and quietest of the area beaches is situated in a small, secluded and tranquil cove or *cala* suitable for small children, at the mouth of a flood river between Begur and Palafrugell. It has more sunbathing space than Aiguablava, with a very pretty sandy bay facing south with shelter from the wind, but is more popular with locals and not as cosmopolitan as Llafranc. It also offers a diving school. It sits 3 kilometers south of the very popular Aiguablava beach and 5 kilometers from the busy resort of Llafranc. Its name comes from the many tamarind trees found along the beach promenade.

The Hotel Hostalillo, above the Tamariu beach, has a restaurant with panoramic views, while the Hotel Tamariu, the historic and popular hotel dating from the early 1930s, also has a seaside restaurant, El Clot dels Mussols. And Es Dofi, at *Paseo Mar*, 22, facing the beach,

offers a wide selection of wines and seafood dishes with an Andalusian touch and is family run with reasonable prices. It has a non-pretentious, laid back ambiance that makes it easy for families. Ditto to [Restaurante Bar Royal](#) at Paseo del Mar, 9, for its calamari, chips, paella and other rice dishes. Read more and see photos of the Tamariú beach [Visit Palagrugell](#).

Other beaches are not recommended as either they are rocky, too small or too touristed.

Aiguafreda has no beach but is a favorite of divers, *Sa Tuna* does not have sand but instead rocks and is tiny, *Sa Riera* is larger but not particularly attractive and directly faces the open sea with a great deal of Tramuntana wind. Not recommended. The most expansive beach is *Platja de Pals*, with the largest, longest stretch of sandy beach, some 2 miles long and 40 yards wide, perfect for water sports, surfing and volleyball, but it's attractiveness is marred by the presence of Cold War Radio Liberty towers and rather tacky souvenir shops catering to its largely German clientele.

Additional Waterside Dining

[Hotel Gastronómico Sa Tuna](#)

On the small, rocky cove beach of Sa Tuna, whose kitchen excels in rice dishes, and has friendly, attentive service, with tables directly facing the water. It's a local icon and has been in business since 1944. We enjoyed a delightful Sunday afternoon lunch/shellfish paella feast here recently. Here you can also try paella made with noodles, *fideuá* and wonderful prawns from Palamós. There are two restaurants right at the water's edge in the Sa Tuna cove. We prefer the Hostal Sa Tuna to the Es Furió. It has been our favorite dining spot on the Costa Brava for many years.

[Sa Racassa](#)

Small and cozy and next to the diving center in the pebble filled cove of Aiguafreda, with a very serious kitchen serving contemporary catalán fare and delightful, romantic outdoor terrace within a walled garden. We had a lovely evening meal here during our recent stay. And it's family friendly. Don't miss the desserts! Tel: +34 972 622 845

[Sa Jambina](#)

On a back street (pedestrianized) in Calella de Palafrugel, at Bofill I Codina, 21. Simple nautical décor but sophisticated cuisine. Rice with fin fish and shellfish is a specialty. Homemade desserts and a solid wine list. It's considered the best dining spot in this Aegean-like fishing village, but has no sea views. Recommended in the Michelin and Repsol guides.

Dining in the captivating Indiano town of Begur

Galena Mas Comangau

This country inn, a 19th-century farmhouse (mas) is just outside of town on the highway, is noted for its fish and grilled meats. Excellent and well priced. Smart but rustic, with vaulted ceilings and stone walls. There is a summer terrace and the kitchen offers an unbeatable value *menú del día* for lunch daily from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. And there may be live jazz on weekends. Easy parking. Closed Tuesdays. Tel: +34 972 623 210

Hotel Restaurant Aiguaclara

In the center of town at Santa Teresa, 3, his hotel-restaurant has a lovely, cozy garden hung with lanterns, hammocks, antique bicycles, all very quirky but romantic and stylish. It serves contemporary catalán cuisine with a wide selection of fish, fine local wines and very nice desserts. It opens for dinner at 6:00 pm. Closed on Sunday nights during the summer. Tel: +34 972 622 905

Restaurant Roistei

Also in the center of Begur at Concepcio Pi, 8, is loved by locals. Tel: +34 972 62 42 15

Can Climent Platillos

Carrer Pi i Rallo, 8, is a small, cozy restaurant offering a fusion of catalan cuisine and modern tapas.

La Pizzetta

Located in the center of Begur, down a flight of steps, housed in a former 19th-century *indiano* mansion, has the best pizza around, with salads as well.

Turandot

At Av. Onze de Setembre, 27, is a newcomer with only 38 seats, very well liked by our clients. The chef serves a 3-course lunch menu, including water and a glass of wine for 25€ and a 3-course dinner menu for 25€ except for weekends and holidays (some dishes have supplements). Reservations essential. Tel: +34 972 622 608

Dining in the Empordà countryside

La Calèndula

The restaurant in the Hotel del Teatre in Regenços, a catalán farmhouse (mas) a 10-minute drive from Begur, is in a converted theater and specializes in locally sourced, seasonal dishes with local meats such as lamb and fish dishes such as cod with a black garlic jus, along with excellent local wines. Tel: +34 972 303 859

Restaurant Ibéric

At Carrer Valls 11, in the medieval village of Ullastret, 15 minutes from Begur, is a small, traditional, family-run Empordan restaurant serving everything freshly sourced from the best local purveyors. A stand out dish is their fish stew, or *calderetais (suquet)*, featuring lobster and monkfish, a type of bouillabaisse. They also serve a wide range of local game and dishes such as wild boar stew and grilled fresh fish from Palamós. It's open for lunch daily except Mondays and for dinner on Fridays/Saturdays only. It's best to book ahead at +34 972 757 108.

Hotel & Spa Mas de Torrent

In Torrent, on the road from Pals to La Bisbal on the right. A hotel-spa-restaurant member of Relais & Chateau, housed in a stone-built former *masía*. It's considered the most gastronomic of the many fine gourmet restaurants in the area. Chef is Jorge Garrido and sommelier, Pere Palmada. Its walls are adorned with a private collection of paintings. Open to non-hotel guests. Panoramic views of medieval Pals. Tel: +34 902 550 321

Restaurant La Xicra

In the market town of Palafrugell, at Carrer de Sant Antoni, 17, where you have wonderful grocery shopping at Serra and on Sundays at the terrific street market and indoor market. It's housed in an old stone town house with three cozy dining rooms and specializes in *mar i muntanya* (surf and turf catalan style) and other traditional Empordà dishes. Recommended in the Repsol guide and has been featured in the NY Times. Tel: +34 972 305 630

Pa i Raïm

The restaurant "Bread and Grapes", at Carrer de Torres i Jonama, 56, in Palafrugell, is housed in the former family home of local writer Josep Pla, and comes recommended by a travel agent friend who loves their paella-style rice dishes. It also comes Michelin guide recommended. The chef's desserts, such as the chocolate soufflé with plum ice cream and Armagnac, are highly recommended. It opens for lunch on Tuesdays-Sundays and for dinner on Fridays/Saturdays. Closed on Mondays. Reservations by phone only. Tel: +34 972 304 572

Bo Tic

Is located at Avenida Costa Brava, 6, in the tiny village of Corça, northwest of the pottery town of La Bisbal and south of Dalí's castle of Púbol, on the C-66. It's housed in a former flour mill. Bo Tic sports one Michelin star. The young new chef, Albert Sastregener, is one to watch. He and the restaurant were featured in this month's Club des Gourmets magazine. He works mainly with shellfish, fin fish and vegetables and keeps 450 labels in his wine

cellar. One can reserve a table online. Closed Sunday nights and all day Mondays and Tuesdays until June 24, when it closes on Mondays. Tel: +34 972 63 08 69. For a splurge.

Can Dolç

Located in tiny Sant Feliu de Boada, it specializes in grilled meats cooked with oak charcoal, salads and homemade desserts. It has an outdoor terrace and sits on the main square next to the lovely Romanesque church. Phone: +34 972 635 003. Celebrating its 20th anniversary.

La Plaça

Can be found in the pretty, charming medieval village of Madremanya, the in the heart of the village, which attracts discerning diners from Barcelona and Girona. It's both a hotel and a gourmet restaurant, housed in an ancient *masía*. We've enjoyed several lunches there on the outdoor terrace. They have their own garden and serve great desserts. One can reserve online. Madremanya sits outside of the Costa Brava area, in the Gironés, closer to the capital of Girona. Tel: +34 972 490 487 / +34 619 096 231

Mas Pou

At Plaça de la Nota, 4, in small, medieval Palau-Sator, offering traditional cuisine, is family-run and housed in a lovely traditional farmhouse. The restaurant produces its own olive oils and offers its dishes for take away, as the restaurant has several homes for rent. Closed Sunday nights (except for July/August and all day Monday. It's Michelin recommended and has a quite inviting terrace for alfresco dining. Tel: +34 972 634 125.

L'Hort del Rector

"The priest's vegetable garden", at Davant l'Esglesia, is housed in a country house in Monells, just opposite the church, surrounded by a garden full of flowers. It's a local favorite. The dish to order here is one of the many house versions of cod or *bacallá*. Closed Sunday evening and all day Monday. Tel: +34 972 630 396

Dining in Cadaqués

Compartir

At Riera Sant Vicenç, is widely considered by gourmet critics to be the best dining spot in this artsy town. It opens in June-July-August daily for lunch and dinner, except Sundays. The dishes here are meant to be shared (hence, the name, "compartir"=to share). The 3 chefs here, Oriol Castro, Eduard Xatruch and Mateu Casañas, trained at El Bulli and have opened a gastronomic restaurant in Barcelona, Disfrutar, which made number 55 on Restaurant Magazine's The World's Best Restaurants for 2017. It also earned two "suns" from the Repsol Guide and the personal recommendation of Joan Roca. Tel: +34 972 258 482

Local Specialties

- *Pa amb tomàquet*-rustic toasted bread smeared with fresh tomatoes, sprinkled with salt and drizzled with olive oil.
- *Coca*-a flat pizza-like bread with a savory or sweet topping
- *Escalivada*-roasted eggplant, pepper and onion salad, served cold
- *Esqueixada*-salt cod, pepper, tomato, onion and olive salad, served cold
- *Xató*-Salad of salt cod, bitter leaves, tuna and anchovies, served cold
- *Rossejat*-fried rice cooked in fish stock
- *Samfaina*-the catalán answer to ratatouille
- *Canalons*-catalán cannelloni
- *Caldereta de llagosta*-spiny lobster soup
- *Arros negre*-black rice with squid ink
- *Suquet*-fish and potato stew
- *Llobarro al forn*-baked sea bass with potatoes
- *Mar i muntanya*-dish containing fish and meat, “sea and mountain” (surf & turf)
- *Peix espasa en cassola*-swordfish with raisins and pine nuts
- *Branada de bacalla*-salt cod purée
- *Botifarra amb mongetes*-sausage with white beans
- *Anec amb peres*-duck with pears, a specialty of the Empordà countryside
- *Oca amb naps*-goose with turnips, a specialty of the Can Bonay in Peratallada
- *Escudella I carn d'olla*-soup with boiled meats and vegetables, a type of pot au feu
- *Cargols*-snails
- *Bunyols*-fried pastries or fritters
- *Recuit de drap*-a type of dessert similar to the Basque mamia (cuajada), made of goat milk, produced in the village of Ullastret
- *Gamba de Palamós*-the acclaimed shrimp from the piers of Palamós, quite pricey at the market but the best in the country

About Cremat

In Calella de Palafrugell and other Costa Brava ports, to warm up after a day's fishing and keep the conversation going, fishermen used to drink the classic *cremat* made with Cuban rum brought from Spain's colonies. Cremat is prepared by heating rum and sugar with a stick of cinnamon, lemon peel and coffee beans. Then it is flambéed until the flames burn off the alcohol. The best time to try it is during the traditional *havaneras* (sea shanty) singing in Calella de Palafrugell on the first weekend in July, although it is served in the bars/restaurants during the entire year.

In the old days, at night, by the sea, the sailors would sing songs about the loves they left behind in Havana, Cuba and drink this flaming beverage. Though the years have passed and Spain's colonial empire diminished, the Cremat still lives on, as do the *havaneras*, which are now a popular part of Catalan tradition. Order Cremat at one of the little cafés or restaurants in Calella de Palafrugell, such as La Bella Lola, and it will usually arrive at your table in a large clay bowl suffused in blue alcohol flame. It's then a waiting game as the Cremat should burn for 10 minutes or a little less before it is ready to drink. A small amount of rich dark freshly brewed coffee is poured into a cup and then the *cremat* ladled carefully on top – it is very hot – breathe in the delicious fumes and then sip gently.

Local wines

The D.O. Empordà appellation does produce some quite nice wines.

- *Castell Peralada*, white, red and rosé
- *Oliver Conti*, white and red
- *Rosat Floresta Clos*, rosé
- *Sinols Coromina*, red
- *Moll de Alba*, red
- *Verd Albera*, white
- *Caminito*, rosé
- *Finca Maleveina*, red
- *Mas Oller Mar*, white

Local olive oils and wines

At the Empordalia wine cooperative in the town of Pau, you can taste/purchase the excellent local olive oil, *el Oli de Pau*, along with the winery's Sinols label wines. The cooperative is open from Monday-Saturday from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm and on Sunday to 2:00 pm. To arrange for a tour, one can book online at: www.empordalia.com.

Another excellent local olive oil is the *Ermedàs* brand, produced in Palafrugell. In the village of Torrent, you'll find another winery, the *Mas Oller*, on the GI-652 highway.

The beautiful Celler Bell-Lloc winery in Palamós produces high quality organic wines and is open for tours and tastings. It is considered one of the Empordà region's most exceptional examples of winemaking architecture and received an award from the Girona Architects Association in 2008. The aging cellars are a labyrinth of darkness. Advanced booking is required. Cost: 20€/person. Tel: +34 972 316 203. See the web site for directions to reach the estate from the C-31.

Bell Loc also has opened a lovely 6-room boutique, *Botiga Bell Lloc*, at its farm, Finca Bell-Loc, where their wines are sold, along with their own olive oil, breads, jams, honey, fresh vegetables and soaps. To reach the Botiga, follow the directions on the web site

The estate also offers horseback riding through the vineyards and tapas in its 13th century country home, Mas Salvá.

Weekly Outdoor Street Markets

- Monday - Torroella de Montgrí
- Tuesday - Pals and Palamós
- Wednesday - Begur
- Thursday - Figueres and Calonge
- Friday - La Bisbal d'Empordá
- Saturday - Girona and Santa Cristina d'Aro
- Sunday - Palafrugell, L'Escala and Roses

Gourmet Food Shopping

In the center of the market town of Palafrugell, at the Placa Nova, we highly recommend the gourmet delicatessen, Serra, a Pastisseria (pastry shop), Xarcuteria (charcuterie shop) and Celler (wine cellar), in business since 1904. The owner is passionate about his wines, brandies, armagnacs, etc. and can advise you regarding the best labels of the Empordà. (It's the perfect place to stock your villa bar.) The shop is located on Palafrugell's main square, Plaça Nova, near the area where you'll find the excellent indoor market and the weekly Sunday open-air market.

In the indoor market, in the center of the main building, you'll find an excellent stand, María, that sells the finest hams, wines, pre-made Spanish omelettes, pizzas, smoked salmon and other gourmet treats for your pantry.

Palafrugell is well known as the town of the region with most commercial activity on Sunday mornings. From eight o'clock in the morning, the market stalls start to open in Carrer Pi i Margall and spread along the neighboring streets filling the town with fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, cloths, shoes, toys, kitchen utensils and much more. There is a large public parking lot (pay) that is within an easy walk from this market and the main square, the Plaça Nova. The first hour of parking is free.

Begur also offers sophisticated shopping both for clothing and food. Its gourmet delicatessen, Carnisseria Xarcuteria Figuerola (since 1898), at Bonaventura Carreras 1, near the main square, presents the finest in local treats and sells buckets of delicious potato chips, of the Bonilla a la Vista brand, along with hamburgers, brochettes, artisanal cheeses and

Iberian ham. Also in Begur there is the *Slow Gastroboutique* at Cami del mar, 6, a member of the Slow Food movement, offering local, organic, artisanal products and Empordanese wines.

Village Festivals

- August 23, 24: festivals in the villages of Cruilles and Monells
- August 24: Handicraft fair in Peratallada

Concerts

Spanish guitar concerts in the medieval church, *Església de Sant Pere*, of Pals, in the century of the restored village, every Friday at 9:00 pm in July/August. On the day of the concert one can buy tickets in the church, from 8:00 to 9:00 pm. €15.

Local activities and walking along the sea

It's best to leave your car in one of the car parks or underground garages near the old town. The very helpful tourist office is found on Avinguda Onze de Setembre, 5, and is open from June-September daily from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm and 5:00 to 9:00 pm. There's a municipal underground garage right above the tourist office on the same side.

On the eve of the feast day of St. John, called the *Revetlla de Sant Joan*, (from sunset on 23rd to sunrise on 24th June) there will be bonfires on the beach of *Sa Riera*. Feast day events start there at 7:30 pm. Saint John's Eve is such a magical night that it's also known as the Night of Fire or the Night of Witches. It's the time when catalans say goodbye to spring and hello to summer. And in all the pastry shops you will see the traditional dessert served on this

Take the seaside walk on the coastal footpath, the Camí de Ronda (GR-92), from the fishing village of Calella de Palafrugell northeast to the fishing village of Llafranc, tucked beneath the pines, with a good semicircular beach and small marina. The one-kilometer walk along the headlands takes about 20 minutes and commences at the far northern end of the Plaja de Canadell beach, where you'll find a restaurant with outdoor terrace (beyond the Tragamar restaurant).

Or take the coastal footpath south from Calella to Plaja del Golfet beach close to Cap Roig, which will take about 40 minutes. Atop Cap Roig you'll find the 8-hectare Botanical Gardens, a garden of 500 Mediterranean species set around the early 20th century castle-palace of White Russian colonel Nikolai Voevodsky. Open 10:00 am to 8:00 pm. There are exceptional views of the headland from here. Entrance is 7€.

Drive up, take the little train or walk up through the pine forest to the lighthouse, *El Far de Sant Sebastià*, above Llafranc for glorious sea views and nature trails. The path up to the lighthouse leaves from Llafranc's parish church. On the way up you'll pass a Megalithic dolmen, Can Mina de Torrents, dating from 3,000 B.C. See photos of Llafranc, its beach and the lighthouse at: es.blog.costabravas.com.

Hot Air Balloon Rides

The company, Globus Emporda arranges 75-minute flights followed by full breakfast and champagne. Call them at +34 620 846 742.

Tennis

Tennis Club Llafranc sits between Llafranc and Palafrugell and rents out courts by the hour.

Golf

The closest golf course to your villa will be the Golf Platja de Pals, built in 1966. All necessary equipment can be rented.

Sea Excursions

The Nautilus company runs several excursions to view the submarine life of the Nature Reserve of the Medes Islands (*Illes Medes*) off the coast of L'Estartit. These are a cluster of 7 tiny, uninhabited and ecologically protected islets, and their coral reefs are popular with scuba divers. The boats have underwater cabins with large windows, and its excursions offer passengers the opportunity to swim along the Montgri coast. Excursions vary in length from 1 ½ hours to 5 hours, the longest cruise venturing all the way to the bay of Cadaqués and it anchors for passengers to take a swim. Boats depart from the Maritime Promenade, Passeig Maritim in downtown L'Estartit. See pricing and schedule on the web.

Snorkeling and Scuba Diving

The biggest and best-supplied diving center is the Snorkel of Llafranc.

Kayaking

In Calella de Palafrugell you'll find kayak rentals at Platja Canadell, the last beach before the headland to Llafranc; in Llafranc they are available for rent at the long town beach and at the small, beautiful cove of Aiguablava they can be rented as well. Or take a half-day (3-hour) kayaking tour from the cove beach of Tamariú with Kayaking Costa Brava to access some of the coast's most pristine stretches. Cost: 45€/person. Tel: +34 972 773 806

Spa Services

Spa Begur, owned by the Hotel Rosa in Begur offers wellness services. Open daily from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 to 8:00 pm.

Nightlife

The Vintage Lounge, below the Vintage Hotel on the highway to Cap Sa Sal, just beyond the diving cove of Aiguafreda, offers chill out music and dining by candlelight at tables and couches spread among its cliff side gardens and Tuscan style terrace and draws in the young and hip who drive up here to soak in the sunset along the sea (but we found rather indifferent and slow service).

La Bodeguita del medio at Pi I Ralló, 1, in Begur offers salsa music and dancing at 11:30 p.m. on August 22.

Bar & Restaurante Aiguaclara in the Aiguaclara Hotel in Begur from 8:00 pm until midnight has "Vinyl night"- jazz, blues, folk, soul and salsa from July until the end of August.

Tothora at Francesç Forgas, in front of the City Hall of Begur, offers flamenco performances by a trio (dancer, singer, guitarist) in summer every Friday at 10:00 pm.

Excursions on the Costa Brava

In the Alt & Baix Empordà

Medieval Villages

Take a driving tour of the highly picturesque, beautifully preserved, charming, atmospheric medieval villages of Pals and its castle tower and rice fields (but is perhaps a bit too-well restored and overly manicured), and the nearby tiny Sant Feliu de Boada, with its lovely 12th-century Romanesque church. A little further inland is the beautifully preserved walled village of Peratallada, with its defensive walls still intact, a moat and castle-palace, 13th-century church of Sant Esteve and lookout tower-its name means “cut stone”. Palau-Sator, a sleeper, has a little farm museum that's open from 12:30 to 9:00 pm is a 10-minute drive north of Peratallada. Ullastret, a few minutes west of Palau-Sator, is another village surrounded by defensive walls. You can also visit the ancient ruins of the Poblat ibèric d'Ullastret (Puig de Sant Andreu), the oldest known Iberian settlement, set on a lush hillside just north of Ullastret. It was inhabited continually from the 7th-century BC until its mysterious abandonment in the 17th-century. And if time allows, end your driving tour in picture postcard perfect Monells, where the river divides the town-Old Quarter. It has a pretty porticoed square and flower lined streets.

The villages of Peratallada-Pals-Palau Sator are architectural jewels and form the “Golden Triangle” of the Lower, Baix Empordà, which is often called Catalonia's version of Tuscany. The villages are close to one another so you can hit them on one long driving excursion.

For lunch on this loop we recommend the Restaurant Ibèric in Ullastret (their fish comes directly from the Palamós pier), the Mas Pou in Palau-Sator (a Bibi Gourmand selection for value in the Michelin guide), the Can Bonay in Peratallada, Can Dolç in Sant Feliu de Boada, on the main square next to the church, with a children's play area, and L'Hort del Rector on the outskirts of Monells, run by a Catalán/Canadian couple. You'll find this last one on the Monells-Madremanya road, just in front of the Saint Genís church, which has a Gothic apse and a Baroque façade. Its catalán name means “The Parish Priest's Kitchen Garden”. But here you should enjoy cod, as most of the main courses are versions of cod in its many guises, the house specialty, although there are main courses and starters for non-cod lovers.

Sant Martí d'Empúries

See the splendid Greco-Roman ruins and Museum of Empúries + lovely sandy beach under shaded pines of Sant Martí d'Empúries next door. The drive to Empúries from Girona will take about 45 minutes. These ruins are considered some of the finest, most fascinating ancient archaeological sites in Spain, if not in all of Europe. The Greek settlers who arrived

here in the 6th-century BC developed "Emporion" (the market place) into one of the most significant Greek trading centers in the western Mediterranean. In 218 BC the Romans invaded, and towards the end of the 2nd-century AD they established a settlement here for their veteran soldiers to the west of the Greek town. The Roma and Greek settlements were united as one during the reign of Caesar Augustus. The decline of this once-flourishing city set in around the end of the 2nd-century.

After an Empúries visit you can explore the nearby village of Sant Martí d'Empúries with its beach of golden sand and have a meal at the Impressionist painting-filled Mesón del Conde on the Plaça Major at No. 4. It has an outdoor terrace and is a local favorite. This could be an unforgettable day of art, history and nature.

While in the area be sure to visit L'Escala, the anchovy capital, with an anchovy museum. Buy a tin of local anchovies. The Museum of Anchovies & Salt is open from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 5:00 to 8:00 pm. Admission is 2€.

For one Michelin star dining in L'Escala, you have El Roser 2 with prime views of the bay at Passeig de Lluís Albert. Chef Jordi Sabadi helms the kitchen and his brother, Rafel, acts as the sommelier.

Begur

Visit, dine and/or shop in the lovely hilltop market town filled with 19th-century *indiano* mansions and crowned by the remnants of a 17th-century castle, once used as a defense against frequent pirate raids. The top of Begur commands extensive views of the central Costa Brava and the town itself attracts an international crowd in the summer. Many of its *indiano* homes, some porticoed with fading frescoes, have been restored by noted catalán architects, and plaques have been placed in Spanish and English explaining the history of each home.

What is an indiano?

The *indianos* were locals from all over the Costa Verde (Green Spain) who in vast numbers immigrated to the Americas: Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela and Cuba in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to seek their fortunes. Once they had amassed considerable wealth in the textile, tobacco and banking industries, they returned to Catalunya, Asturias, Cantabria, Galicia and the Basque Country and built huge, ostentatious palaces to showcase their newly minted fortunes. In early September Begur will celebrate its annual Fira Indians Festival, a 3-day event that commemorates the relationship between the town and Havana, Cuba.

Figueres

Salvador Dalí's over-the-top, wildly extravagant Teatre-Museu Dalí in Figueres in the Upper (Alt) Empordà attracts more visitors than any other museum in Spain, apart from Madrid's Prado. In addition to the museum, Figueres has a pleasant, prosperous old center. There is underground parking at Placa Catalunya and the Dalí Museum is walkable from there. A regular Thursday morning outdoor market is held on the Rambla lined with plane trees. To visit the Teatre-Museu it's best to look online in advance, noting the opening hours of each month, and to avoid a long line during high season, purchase your tickets (14€) online at Salvador-Dali.org.

The 11th-century castle that Surrealist Salvador Dalí purchased and restored for his Russian wife, Gala, in this sleepy little village in 1970, the Gala Castell Dalí Púbol, is one of the three points that make up the so-called "Dalí Triangle". The artist himself lived in this palace until 1984 but moved back to Figueres after being badly injured in a fire here. The third point is found near rather isolated Cadaqués, his equally outré home, the Salvador Dalí House in Portlligat.

Figueres also boasts another small museum, Museu del Joguet de Catalunya, the Toy Museum of Josep Maria Joan Rosa, at Carrer de Sant Pere, 1, a short walk from Teatre-Museu Dalí.

For lunch after a visit to the Dalí museum, we recommend the dining room of the Hotel Durán at Carrer Lasauca, 5, nearby, off the Rambla, in business since 1855, serving traditional catalán fare at moderate prices. It's open daily, and its famous all over Catalunya.

Cadaqués

On a slighter longer trip from Girona, taken during the week to avoid horrendous weekend traffic on a tortuous road, would be the journey to the Aegean looking, bohemian, artsy whitewashed fishing village of Cadaqués, home of Surrealist Salvador Dalí. If you venture here, wear extremely comfortable shoes as the steep streets of the old quarter, the *Barri Vell*, are paved with large, rough stones. There is a market held on Mondays at Riera de Sant Vicenç, Mercadillo de Cadaqués. The town features an interesting museum, the Museu de Cadaqués, at Carrer Narcís Monturiol, 15, with displays relating to Dalí's work and excellent exhibitions of local art. And the 16th-century Esglesia de Santa Maria is highly photogenic. It has an ornate gilded altarpiece and the 3rd side chapel on the left was painted by Dalí. The seafront offers a pebble beach, artist shops, street musicians and cafes and restaurants where Dalí and writers, such as García Marqués, used to congregate. Read all about the village in 36 hours in Cadaqués.

The best restaurant in town is Compartir at Riera Sant Vicenç. The dishes here are meant to be shared (hence, the name, “compartir”=to share). The three chefs here trained at El Bulli and have opened a gastronomic restaurant in Barcelona, Disfrutar, which made number 55 on Restaurant Magazine's The World's Best Restaurants for 2017. It also earned two “suns” from the Repsol Guide and the personal recommendation of Joan Roca, of Girona's 3-Michelin starred El Cellar de Can Roca. Another attractive dining spot with lovely views overlooking the bay is Es Baluard.

Dalí's home at neighboring Portlligat, a rambling collection of fishing huts, is a fascinating museum that can be visited by advanced appointment only, bookable online.

Palamós

Attend the daily fish auction from 4:30 to 5:30 pm on weekdays, Tuesday-Friday, at the port in Palamós, south of Begur. Fishing is a huge business in Palamós and its red prawns, *gambas de Palamós*, are highly coveted and quite pricey. This thriving town, home to the fishing and cork-producing industry, has a life of its own, independent of tourism. Its old quarter is a bustling knot of pedestrianized streets centered on its town square, Plaça Major, full of shops, cafes and restaurants. The tourist office sits at Passeig del Mar 22.

At the working port there is a small Fishermen's Museum, Museu de la Pesca, which explains the past and present of the fishermen's work. Fishing is a huge business in Palamós and its red prawns, *gambas de Palamós*, are highly coveted and quite pricey. The museum is open May, June and September Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm and from 3:00 to 7:00 pm. On Saturday, Sunday and holidays it opens from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 to 7:00 pm. In the months of July and August it opens Monday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 9:00 pm. The *Espai del Peix* was opened in 2011 next to the town's interesting interactive Fish Museum to raise awareness of the industry and local gastronomy. It runs a variety of cooking classes/demonstrations.

Have a lunch of the acclaimed prawns at La Salinera, at Avinguda 11 Setembre, 93, a Bibi-Gourmand (great price to quality ratio) selection of the Michelin guide. During the week it's only open for lunch but on Fridays/Saturdays it also opens for dinner. Another Michelin recommendation is La Menta at Tauler i Servià 1, with an outdoor terrace, open for lunch and dinner but closed Tuesdays. Or a more rustic fishermen's tavern founded in 1936, a local institution, La María de Cadaqués, with a wood beamed interior hung with artworks, where Truman Capote dined during the two years he lived here while writing *In Cold Blood*. You'll find it on the same street as La Menta, at number 6. From September 1 to June 22 it closes on Sunday evenings and all day Mondays/Tuesdays. In July it closes only on Mondays and in August it closed for Monday lunch.

In Palamós the celebrations of the summer solstice, the Festa de Sant Joan on June 23, 24 and 25 are especially lively with music, dancing and fireworks.

Girona

Spend the day in the multi-layered, beautiful city of Girona, one of Catalunya's most prosperous and colorful cities, sitting on the banks of the river Onyar. The highlights of Girona include the Cathedral of Santa María and its museum, with the Romanesque Tapestry of the Creation and 12th-century Romanesque cloister, Museum of Jewish History, its interesting Cinema Museum, the Arab Baths (actually 12th-century Christian), its ancient medieval Jewish Quarter, El Call, and walking along with city ramparts, the Passeig de la Muralla.

Have lunch in El Call of Girona at Cal Ros, located on an atmospheric square and considered one of the city's best tables for traditional Empordanese cuisine.

Palagrugell

Tour the recently renovated and enlarged Cork Museum, Museo del Suro, in the center of Palafrugell, to learn all about the world of cork and the importance of its production here in the Empordà. Cork reserves in the nearby cork forest are manufactured mainly into bottle corks. A boom set in when catalán wine growing expanded following the 19th-century birth of cava, the catalán sparkling wine. Palafrugell is still the most important cork manufacturing location in Catalonia today.

Jardi Botanic de Cap Roig

Visit the Castle and Gardens of Cap Roig just south of Calella de Palafrugell, a cliff top, 8-hectare botanical garden, which took 50 years to lay out and was finished in 1927. It was constructed by a White Russian colonel named Voevosky and his English wife. It boasts exceptional views of the headland of Calella amidst a colorful display of flowers and plants from all over the world. An all-star music festival is held in the gardens each summer from July 4-August 15. The botanical gardens are open in summer from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm. Admission is 6€.