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## Spain: Barcelona to the Costa Brava

### Walking Vacation Only

From sweeping panoramas of snowcapped mountains to the hidden coves and fishing villages of its rugged coast, Catalonia offers an abundance of charming landscapes and authentic culture. In this entrancing Spanish region, you follow trails through the densely forested foothills of the Pyrenees, stroll cobblestone streets in medieval Girona, and explore whitewashed villages along Cap de Creus, the section of the Costa Brava where Salvador Dalí learned to paint. The ancient towns of Peratallada and Pals reveal quaint plazas, Romanesque churches, and stone towers dating back to the 11th century. On the slopes of Montserrat, discover the stunning geology of the region and an age-old monastery. Taste dock-fresh seafood in local restaurants just steps away from the waterfront in sleepy Cadaqués.

Throughout your journey, partake in the infectious Catalan spirit—a defiant and delightful culture eager to share its quirks with you.



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## Cultural Highlights

- Atop Montserrat, view panoramas stretching from the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean and to its ninth-century monastery perched on the mountainside.
- Sit among the grape arbors at an award-winning winery for a private tasting of its vintages.
- In Garrotxa Natural Park, discover a unique geology unlike any in Europe as you ramble through an area where 30 dormant volcanoes shelter lush beech forest.
- Walk in the footsteps of Salvador Dalí as you visit his Port Lligat home and studio, where he lived and worked for 40 years.

## What to Expect

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures. It is rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 7



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miles per day, with options on many days. There are few ascents and descents, with climbing time on the ascents ranging from about 15 to 30 minutes. The terrain varies from paved and cobblestone streets (during organized city tours and other easy village exploration) to uneven, single-track trails with loose stones or gravel, rocks, and roots. Some trails are exposed to the sun.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Group size:** 18 max

### DAY 1: Join your tour and visit Garrotxa Volcanic Natural Park

Breakfast is included at your hotel.

Your guide(s) will meet you at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Hotel Midmost in Barcelona. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed in hiking shoes for the first walk at Montserrat.

After brief introductions, you bid farewell to Barcelona as you head inland to nearby Montserrat, an imposing mountain in the pre-coastal Catalan range. Famous for its almost organic-seeming rock formations and Benedictine abbey, this mountain is often considered the “heart” of Catalonia by locals (the Caribbean island of the same name was christened by homesick Catalan sailors).

Upon arrival, a 10-minute ride on the Sant Joan funicular brings you near the summit, where spectacular views await. To the east, you can see Barcelona and the Mediterranean on clear days, to the north the distant saw teeth of the Pyrenees, and below you on the mountainside, the Santa Maria de Montserrat monastery. In this setting, enjoy a 2-(to 3-) hour walk along a well-maintained (though occasionally rocky) path up to the topmost peak, Sant Jeroni. From here, you may either continue down to the monastery on foot (a relatively steep trail with a significant number of steps) or, for an easier option, via the funicular.

Upon arrival at the monastery, you may be treated to a performance by its acclaimed boys’ choir (which sings daily except Saturdays and holidays). Santa Maria de Montserrat is also famous for its “Black Madonna”—a statue of a dark-skinned Virgin Mary that some believe was carved in Jerusalem during the early days of the church (though most art historians date it later). Today, Mare de Déu de Montserrat is the patron saint of Catalonia.

Lunch awaits at a nearby restaurant, where you enjoy a feast of traditional Catalan cuisine. Starters may



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include pa amb tomaquet (crusty country bread with tomato and garlic), jamón ibérico (Spanish cured ham), cod cakes, chorizitos (small chorizo sausages), and calamari. Main courses may include lamb cutlets, entrecote or cod in honey, roasted chicken with rosemary, or fideos (a paella-style seafood dish made with noodles).

Mid afternoon, you relax on a 1½-hour minibus transfer to Garrotxa Volcanic Natural Park—an inland region of rolling hills, gorges, and lush forest in the foothills of the Pyrenees and your home for the next two nights. After checking in at your accommodations, gather with fellow guests on the patio for a welcome aperitif and asado barbecue.

### DAY 2: Garrotxa Volcanic Natural Park: Jordá and Santa Pau

Today's walk provides an ideal introduction to the region surrounding your hotel. Created in 1985, Garrotxa Volcanic Natural Park is—as its name implies—home to 30 dormant conical volcanoes that last erupted only 11,000 years ago. This unique geology (there is no other region like it in Europe) has resulted in rich soils of ochre and black lava, which contrast beautifully with the region's beech forests and verdant meadows. The park hosts more than a thousand plant species, as well as animals ranging from wild boar to foxes, rabbits, weasels, and hedgehogs.

In this beautiful setting, you trace a path through the dense woodlands of Jordá with an optional detour to the Santa Margarida Volcano. Here, you'll find a unique Romanesque hermitage in the grassy crater at its center.

Pressing on, the path continues through lush vegetation to arrive in Santa Pau, a small medieval village with a beautiful 13th-century placà major (or main square) surrounded by arcaded stone buildings. Here, (if not earlier along the trail) you'll enjoy a well-deserved picnic lunch.. While in town, you'll have a chance to admire some of its buildings of cultural interest, including a Romanesque church, a castle, and many others (over 80 percent of the town has been preserved).

Afterward, return to your accommodations, and take time to relax before savoring a delicious, seasonal dinner in the hotel's elegant restaurant.



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### DAY 3: The Empordá Plains: Peratallada to Pals

Today you discover the rural plain, known as the Empordá, stretching behind the coastline—a mix of green pastures, apple and olive trees, churches, castles, and beautiful gold stone. After a 90-minute drive, you begin your exploration near the walled town of Peratallada, named for a deep moat sculpted into the bedrock that surrounds the town (pedra tallada means “carved stone”). After taking time to stroll through its stone streets and pause in its arcaded central square, you continue on into the beautiful surrounding countryside. Rambling along dirt paths through wheat fields dotted with poppies, you pass vineyards and olive and fruit trees on your way to Pals, a remarkable medieval town crowned with an 11th-century bell tower. Here, you explore cobbled streets vaulted by stone arches and enjoy sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. Take time to marvel at some of Pals’ ancient history as well: portions of its Church of Saint Pere date to the sixth century. Enjoy lunch on your own at the restaurant or café of your choice.

Late afternoon, a 45-minute transfer via minibus brings you to Girona—one of Catalonia’s major cities, with a remarkable historical center, well-preserved Gothic churches, and intriguing traces of its rich Jewish heritage. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant and features another feast of traditional dishes paired with fine local wines.

### DAY 4: Guided walking tour

Begin your day with a poolside breakfast on the terrace of your hotel (weather permitting), before venturing out onto the cobblestone streets with a local guide for an introduction to the highlights of Girona’s old town. Explore a unique Romanesque and Gothic cathedral built on the foundation of a Roman forum, with portions dating to the 6th century. A Jewish museum and neighborhood bear testament to Spain’s once-thriving Jewish culture, before the expulsion of 1492. Narrow streets wind down to the Onyar River, which separates the old and new cities and fronts vibrantly painted “hanging houses” in the Catalan modernist style.

Your tour concludes in the local market, where you meet up with a representative from Girona Cook School who walks with you through the stalls, pointing out specialties and sharing highlights of the culture, before continuing to their kitchen for a tapas cooking demonstration and lunch.

The afternoon and evening are yours for independent exploration. You may choose to spend the time



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browsing shops, returning to historical sites of interest, or lingering in one of Girona's many cafés. Alternately, you may join one of your guides for a late afternoon walk either along the city's ancient defensive walls, enjoying panoramic views, or a more challenging trail in the surrounding countryside before continuing on to the restaurant of your choice (with recommendations from your guides) for dinner.

### DAY 5: Sant Pere de Rodes monastery and Cadaqués

Today you make your way into the legendary Costa Brava, with picturesque stops along the way. After breakfast, you transfer approximately one hour to the majestic 10th-century Sant Pere de Rodes monastery. Built into the side of the Verdera Mountain, this terraced complex of naves, cloisters, crypts, and chapels, combines elements of Romanesque and Carolingian architecture. Today it is no longer a working monastery, but still enjoys an important function: as the aging cellars for a local winemaker. You enjoy a quick visit with your guide before a minibus transfer to a family-run bodega, where you delight in a private tasting and lunch, surrounded by their grape arbors—the only winery with vineyards located inside the national park. Afterward, depart on foot savoring panoramic views of the Gulf of Roses and Cap de Creus across the rolling vineyards of the Empordà plains.

Descend through olive groves to the charming seaside village of Cadaqués, your home for the next two nights. Cap your day with a dock-fresh seafood dinner at a local restaurant, enjoying such dishes as mussels in spicy sauce, grilled dorado, gambas al ajillo (shrimp in garlic sauce), and tuna carpaccio.

### DAY 6: Cap de Creus to Cadaqués via Port Lligat

Your day begins with a beautiful coastal walk to the Cap de Creus natural area. In a landscape of low Mediterranean vegetation, coastal cliffs, and hidden coves, you soak up aquamarine water views while passing ancient stone walls and olive groves. Upon arrival, you embark near the lighthouse at the cape's tip for a scenic boat cruise back to Cadaqués. After lunch, you continue to nearby Port Lligat and Salvador Dalí's home museum, where you enjoy a one-of-a-kind exhibition.

Dalí's roots on the Costa Brava run deep: he was born just inland in Figueres and vacationed in Cadaqués yearly with his family. In fact, it was here that the artist began learning to paint. It's no wonder, then, that he returned to the region to build his home after World War II. In his Port Lligat house, Dalí lived and



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worked up until his wife's death in 1982. Today, you can see some of his installations, his studio, and the private residence where he lived.

This afternoon is yours to enjoy at your leisure, perhaps exploring Cadaqués, relaxing on the beach, or swimming in the hotel pool. For your farewell dinner this evening, you head to an exceptional restaurant in the historical center of town. Here, you enjoy a feast of Catalan dishes, and together with your fellow travelers, you toast the week's adventures one last time before heading back to the hotel.

### **DAY 7: Your Spain: Barcelona to Costa Brava Tour concludes**

After breakfast, you bid farewell to Cadaqués and transfer to the Greco-Roman ruins of Empúries, a seaside port and one of the most monumental feats of ancient engineering on the Iberian Peninsula. Here, you learn about the construction of its massive breakwater, walled Roman precinct, and ancient paleo-Christian basilica while touring the site. Afterward, continue on via minibus to Barcelona, arriving at approximately 2:00 p.m., where you may transfer to the train station or airport for onward travels or continue your explorations of this vibrant city on your own. Your tour will conclude at the Hotel Midmost in Barcelona.