

Scenery and Routes

The Costera and Vall d'Albaida districts consist of two strips of land running southwest to northeast, following the pattern of the Betic or Andalusian mountain system that forms their boundaries. The Plana and Enguera ranges mark the northern limits of La Costera; the Grossa range separates the district from La Vall d'Albaida and the Solana, Agullent-Benicadell and Mariola ranges form the southern boundary. From the Castilian plateau the two districts slope gently down in an attempt to reach the sea, only to be blocked by the southernmost of the Iberian highlands – the other major mountain system in the Valencian region – in the form of the Buixcarró-Montdúver-Serra Falconera-La Safor massif.



La Costera and La Vall d'Albaida are two fertile areas surrounded by mountains providing richly varied scenery. Industry and services have joined forces with traditional agriculture, creating landscapes that have undergone rapid changes in recent decades. The countryside is dotted with sometimes picturesque farmland, or urban or industrial areas offering visitors a wide range of scenery to choose from. For a more leisurely view of nature at its best, and of the transformation wrought by the labours of generations of inhabitants, it is best to leave the car behind and tour these lands at the unhurried pace of urban strollers and hikers, from the saddle of a horse or by bicycle.

Long-Distance and Short-Distance Hiking Route Network

The magnificent hiking opportunities available in the Costera and Vall d'Albaida districts have been put to good advantage on what are known as "Senderos de Gran Recorrido" (Long-Distance trails) and "Senderos de Pequeño Recorrido" (Short-Distance trails). These routes make use of traditional rural paths and tracks and are signposted with painted markers to facilitate their use. They are suitable for anyone who is reasonably fit and accustomed to a modicum of hill walking. Please remember that the conservation of these areas is a responsibility we all share. Do not light fires or leave

rubbish behind; take it back with you until you can deposit it in an appropriate place. Respect croplands, old buildings, and animal and plant life in general.

Crossing the west of La Costera and La Vall d'Albaida districts is the GR-7 (European E-4) Long-Distance Hiking Route that runs south to north through the entire Land of Valencia, signposted with white and red painted markings. Publications include a general information leaflet by the regional government Ministry of the Environment and the *Topo-guia GR-7 sector III Venta Boquilla-Alcoi* (València, Centre Excursionista de València, 1989). Short-distance Hiking Routes (white and yellow markings) have been plotted between Moixent and Vallada

(PRV-107), in Xàtiva (PRV-78) and on the Buixcarró-Montdúver massif (PRV-50, 51 and 60). Marked trails can also be found in Castelló de Rugat. The PRV-78 tours the area surrounding the town of Xàtiva: the Estret de les Aigües (the course of the river Albaida narrowed by the rocks) and the Vernissa mountain range. The walks to the Puig and Santa Anna chapels offer



magnificent panoramic views. In Ontinyent, the Pou Clar reveals a strikingly picturesque combination of rock and water, whereas the route known as the *Senda dels Enginyers* seeks out the shady spots in the Solana range. Benicadell (1,104m) is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful peaks in the Land of Valencia. The climb up this fine-looking mountain – referred to as *Peña Cadiella* in the poem *Cantar del Mio Cid* – from Beniatjar or Ràfol de Salem, is rewarded with an exceptional panoramic view and a visit to one of the finest examples of Valencian "neveras", or wells where snow was formerly stored for use by the townsfolk.

For cycling and climbing fans

La Costera and La Vall d'Albaida offer enthusiasts interesting routes via the dense network of roads and asphalted farm tracks, plus transport on the two railway lines that cross the districts. For example, the Genovés-Coll de la Creu-Benigànim-Beniatjar-Albaida-Agullent-Ontinyent route is a possible link between Xàtiva and Ontinyent. Those looking for steep slopes will find them on the road ascending to Pinet, in the Port de Salem mountain pass, the winding Coll de la Visteta pass leading to Barx, or on the old route through the Port de l'Olleria pass, as opposed to the modern route now facilitated by a tunnel.

Mountain bikers have an extensive network of tracks on which to map out their own routes. Tracks starting from Pinet, Barx or Barxeta head into the karstic landscape of Buixcarró: sculptured limestone, mouths of caves and potholes, and those red-carpeted "plans", or plains, where kermes oaks and even cork oaks grow (Pla de Surar).

For climbers there are climbing schools with conveniently equipped routes at Xàtiva castle, Montesa, Peña de l'Aventador (Bellús), Salem, Pou Clar (Ontinyent) and Benicadell (routes on the north slope and the magnificent crest).



Maps and publications

It is advisable to consult maps and seek additional written information before embarking on outdoor sports and leisure activities. The La Costera and La Vall d'Albaida districts appear on the following pages of the 1/50,000 scale map: *Navarrés* 28-30 (769), *Alzira* 29-30 (770), *Canals* 28-31 (794), *Xàtiva* 29-31 (795),

Caudete 27-32 (819), *Ontinyent* 28-32 (820) and *Alcoi* 29-32 (821). Most of the corresponding pages are also available in 1/25,000 scale from the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Spanish National Geographic Institute). Some of the towns in these districts have excellent tourist

Useful tips

The Costera and Vall d'Albaida districts have good links to other areas. Regular bus links operate between Valencia and most towns in the area, as well as a regular service from Gandia.

The Valencia- Alicante railway line covers La Costera whereas the Valencia-Alcoi line – which branches off from the former at Xàtiva – links the centre of La Vall d'Albaida before heading for its final destination, the main town in the l'Alcoià district.



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Three main routes provide access by car:

- The N-340 national route allows access from the north (l'Horta and both Ribera districts) and from the south (l'Alacantí and La Marina).
- The N-430 national route, access from the west (Vinalopó and l'Alacantí).
- The CV-60 provincial route, access from the east (La Safor).



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The Costera and Vall d'Albaida districts, dominated by mountains and irrigated by streams that feed their fertile market gardens, offer fine landscapes providing the traveller with a thousand and one possibilities for enjoyment: climbing the tall peaks, discovering ancient snow wells called "pous de neu", drinking cool water from the fountains or admiring the variety of plant life found here.

We start our tour in the Serra Grossa, running along the southern side of the Montesa valley from Xàtiva to Moixent, broadening out to reach Ontinyent. The peaks of Cabeç Gros, Figueroles or Alt de la Creu offer 900m climbing challenges, as does the Covalta peak in the Agullent mountains, which shelter a swimming spot known as "Pou Clar" (the clear pool) outside Ontinyent, and then ascend to form a mountain pass above the town of Albaida. Around the Jordana fountain near Penya Llista, the land is thick with plant life, just as the 18th-century botanist Cavanilles described: scale fern, polypody, maidenhair, dyer's alkanet, lady's slippers, sainfoin, rockrose, thyme and some endemic species such as penny mountain.

North of the Albaida mountain pass is the Sierra de Benicadell, a continuation of the Agullent mountains, whose easternmost skirts reach the Sierra d'Ador. In the neighbouring mountains of the Safor district there is a beauty spot known as Els Fontanars – the head of the Albaida river – and a fountain known as La Font Freda. Here, the northernmost flank of this 1104m mountain should be visited, with its snow wells, or "neveras". The climb is compensated by the excellent vistas to be gained and the tantalizing aroma of the mountain geraniums and *Erinacea anthyllis*.

Lastly, we can visit the Buixcarró mountains, with their modern-day marble quarries, which according to the knowledgeable Cavanilles were the very same "from which the Romans extracted huge slabs to make 30-foot columns without the least imperfection". From here marble has been extracted for the Vatican, for New York's St Patrick's Cathedral, for Valencia's World Heritage 15th-C Lonja building, for the Moorish Admiral's Baths, and for the Valencia regional government palace, and even – according to legend – for the table on which the Borgias hatched their 15-C political plots.

The head of the Canyoles river in the Alforins valley, the natural pool formed by the Clariano river at Pou Clar and the narrow defiles passing through the town of Aielo de Malferit are attractive ravine landscapes. Also of interest is the area where the

Albaida river traverses the Serra Grossa and flows out strongly through a canyon called L'Estret de les Aigües.

The route to get acquainted with these areas starts in the Costera district, a corridor between the Enguera and the Grossa mountains that marks the transitional zone, extending from the municipalities of Barxeta in the east to Font de la Figuera in the interior between the arid meseta and the fertile market gardens of the Montesa valley fed by the Canyoles river.

History makes itself felt in the Iberian settlements of Xàtiva and Moixent, and in the ruins of the fortresses that once capped the hilltops in the age of Iberian splendour, before the Roman conquest. Romanization consolidated the area as an important coin-minting centre, and later under the Moorish domination, this was the scene of battles between the petty "taifa" kingdoms in their struggle to conquer the Valencian territory.

In the 11th century the first European paper industry was founded in Xàtiva by the Arabs. Between the 14th and 15th centuries the future popes Callistus III and Alexander VI were born nearby: Alfons and Rodrigo de Borgia, respectively.

Along the northern limits there are many villages flanked by rows of palm trees and market gardens, former noblemen's homes with terraces and large porches on which jasmine and honeysuckle grow, surrounded by orange groves, vineyards and olive tree orchards.

We begin our tour of the capital, Xàtiva, by ascending to the chapel of Santa Anna, built by the Borgias in the 15th century in nearby **Llosa de Ranès** (formerly known as "Locsà", or "healthy place"), to see what Cavanilles called "one of the finest vistas in the kingdom". To the north we can see the mountains of Benicàssim and the nature area known as Desert de les Palmes; to the west lies the valley enclosed by the mountain pass of Almansa and the Sierra de Enguera; to the east stand the Barxeta and La Valldigna mountains; and southward, the market gardens of Xàtiva, El Puig, the peaks of Benicadell and Mariola, and further afield, the peaks of Serreta and Aitana.

Xàtiva, listed as a historic-artistic complex, dates back to 30,000 BC, to judge by a Neanderthal skull found in the nearby "Black Cave", or Cova Negra. This town was the birthplace of José Ribera *el Españoleto*, and of the Borgia Pope Alexander VI. The black legend was contributed by Felipe V, who after winning the Battle of Almansa in the War of Spanish Succession in 1713 ordered the city to be burnt to the ground and changed its name to San Felipe. As a reminder of this affront to the Bourbon-oriented city, Felipe's portrait was thereafter hung upside down in the local Almodí museum.

The town preserves a rich artistic heritage that can be discovered on a short walk: the Renaissance Collegiata (cathedral),

the St Felix chapel, the oldest in the town (said to have been a Mozarabic temple reconquered by Jaime I after occupying the city in 1244), the church of Sant Pere, where Pope Alexander VI was christened, the Royal Hospital, preserving its original Renaissance façade intact, the palaces of the Marquis of Montortol and Alarcó, and numerous fountains: the Baroque San Francisco fountain, the Gothic Trinidad fountain, and the Neoclassic Fountain of the 25 Spouts.

Standing out above the town, with 30 towers and four fortified gateways is the sprawling hilltop castle resulting from the fusion of two fortresses – one Iberian-Roman and the other Moorish – from which the ramparts descended to enclose the original Roman city in the 10th century. Later, a second wall was added to enclose what is today the historic centre of town. The castle chapel preserves the tomb of the Duke of Urgell, who was once imprisoned here.

From Xàtiva we travel to **l'Alcudia de Crespins** to visit the "Saints Fountain", La Font dels Sants, described by Cavanilles as "the most copious in the kingdom". And in **Canals** we can visit the ancient town quarter and the Borgia tower, where Pope Callistus III was born.

Further along the valley, next to the ancient Roman road, the Via Augusta, **Montesa** rises up on a summit next to its historic castle. The houses here, decorated with coats-of-arms, ceramic panels and shields in stone, remind us of the rich past of the monastic-military Order of Montesa (created by Jaime II to replace the Order of the Temple in the Kingdom of Valencia). The remains of the castle still show thick walls, solid towers and a large courtyard where over 2000 men were once stationed; it contained a convent, church, palace and barracks destroyed in the earthquake of 1748.

Towards **Vallada** the road runs through olive orchards, almond and fruit tree groves. The town, which formerly grew rushes and canes along the banks of the Canyoles river, today imports materials to manufacture its famous cane furniture which is then exported to Germany, France and America. Close by, acacia gardens surround the Cristo and San Sebastian chapels, forming a picturesque spot where parties and fiestas are held on summer evenings.

Moixent sits on the slopes of the Serra Grossa, surrounded by pine trees, round-leafed holly oaks, esparto grass and thyme. Of interest here is a visit to the Iberian settlement of La

a stronghold protected by a wall and flanked by four gateways. Here Spanish/Carthaginian coins, ceramics and bronzes have been found, including the "little bull" of La Bastida and the popular "Warrior of Moixent" (shown left). In addition, in Garamoixent, one of the largest silver treasures on the Iberian peninsula was found: the so-called Treasure of Moixent. In El Bosquet, a man-made 18th-C dam surrounded by pine trees, we can take a rest before resuming our tour.

La Font de la Figuera, birthplace of the medieval painter Joan de Joanes, is located on a hilltop at the foot of the imposing Caporutxo mountain. Climbers may wish to conquer the peaks of Cofranet, Castelló, Cova Negra or Caporutxo itself, at almost 1000m, which are well-clothed in Aleppo pines and kermes oaks.

In the **Vall d'Albaida** district, the erosion produced by the Albaida river and its tributaries have given shape to uneven geography crisscrossed by gullies and ravines in which oleanders and other plants thrive. The landscape here, dotted with fruit trees, abounds in medicinal plants and herbs. Towards the west, well-tended vineyards provide excellent wines. The district is industrial yet preserves its craftsmanship, offering visitors blankets and home textiles, as well as fine hand-made candles and crystalware.

Ontinyent is a town built around the banks of a winding gorge, where former factories took advantage of the course of the river Clariano as a source of power, dividing the town in two. A walk around the old town centre enables us to see its rich heritage: the Town Hall, from the days of Carlos III; the church of Santa Maria, erected over an ancient Moorish mosque with an interesting high altar showing canvases by Ribalta, Vicente López and Segrelles and a belltower rising 68m into the air; the Carmelite convent; the church of San Miguel; the San Roque gateway; the old bridge (Pont Vell) and the bridge tower.

Albaida, a town with an Arabic name meaning "the white" because of its limestone landscape, had its origin in a place known as Castell Vell (Old Castle) until in the 13th century Jaime I transferred the town onto the plain. Of its illustrious past – the Marquisate of Albaida was comprised of the villages of **Aljorfi**, **Atzeneta de Albaida**, **Benisoda**, **Bufali**, **Carricola** and **Palomar** – the impressive Palace of the Marquis of Albaida, is still standing, today transformed into a museum, the International Puppet Museum, containing a beautiful collection of puppets from Burma, India, Japan, Cuba, Turkey and Spain, along with interesting files, a videotheque and a library.

Albaida is proud to be the home of the painter José Segrelles, whose home-museum contains over 100 pictures (including the watercolours used to illustrate a Spanish version of *The Thousand and One Nights*). The painter is also present on the canvases of the archpriest's church in the main square, or Plaza Mayor, with its tall, slim belltower. The "Acequia del Port" (Port Canal) leads us to the ruins of a farmhouse built over the remains of the ancient Santa Ana convent, and further upstream, to the mills of Penalba and Moli Nou.

In **Atzeneta d'Albaida** a visit to an esparto grass workshop is mandatory, as well as to the canal, which is incorporated into the houses as a public wash-house. **Carricola**, one of the most picturesque villages under the shadow of the Benicadell mountain, shows off its houses with Arab roofing tiles amongst the orange orchards. Surrounded by olive trees are the villages of **Otos** and **Benijatjar**; to the north, amongst the vineyards, lies **La Pobra del Duc** with a majestic kermes oak tree called *Les Simones*, the finest specimen in the whole valley; to the east is **Castelló de Rugat**, with its 16th-C church dedicated to Our Lady of the Remedy; and on the Sant Antoni hill, overlooking the town, is the chapel of Santa Bárbara and Sant Antoni. From **Llutxent** we can ascend to the Castle of Xiu to command a fine panorama reaching down to the coast, including Mont Sant (the "holy mountain") with its ancient Dominican convent and Chapel of the Consolation, which preserves a tradition about a miracle. Finally, we can make a stop in the town of **Bellús**, famous for its rich, carbonated water, and another in **l'Ollería**, to visit the churches of Santa Magdalena and Santo Domingo, the convent of San José and Santa Ana, the Hospital and the chapel of Cristo de la Palma.

Throughout the area, rice is cooked with vegetables or sausages. Typical dishes are *arròs amb fesols i naps* (rice with beans and turnips), *cassola d'arròs amb arròs al forn en tanda* (oven-baked rice), *arròs en bombes* (rice with chick peas and spinach). For desert, there are local apricots and plums, or exquisite sweets such as *arrop i talladetes* (fruit medley), *almoixàvenes* (cakes) or pumpkin pie known as *amardi*. For fewer calories, try confectionery products such as *coques*, *mantecados* and *rollos de anís*.

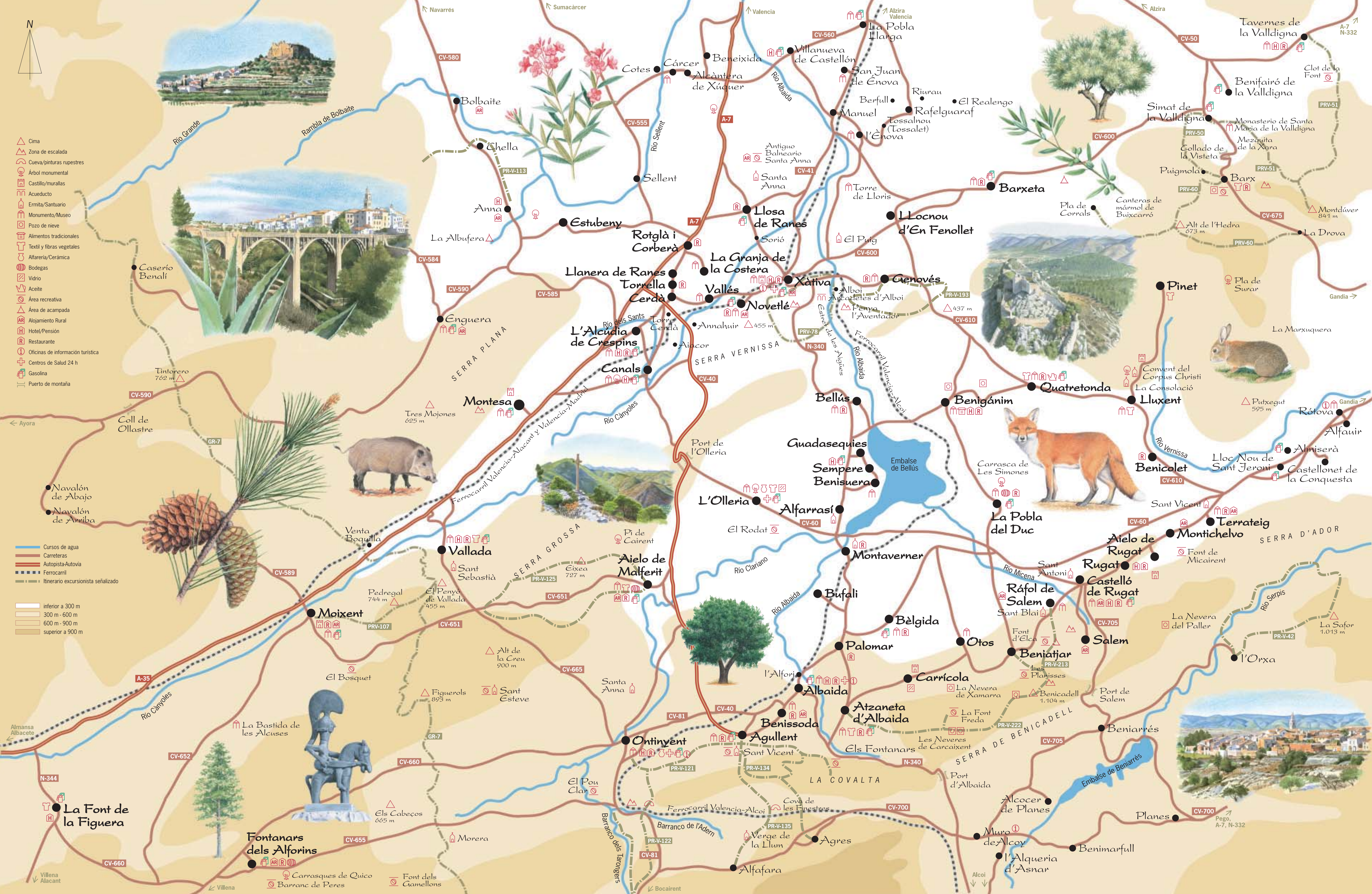
The festive character of La Vall d'Albaida combines gunpowder, music and parades of Moors and Christians. In April we can see these pageants in **Agullent** and **Llutxent**; in September, in **Atzeneta d'Albaida**, **Bellús**, **Beniganim**, **l'Ollería**, **Quatretonda** and **Vallada**; and in October, in **Albaida**. But it is in Ontinyent, at the end of August, where these festivities are the most outstanding. La Costera celebrates patron saint festivities in which fire, music and bell-ringing are the main features. The enormous bonfires of Sant Antoni in **Canals** and the August Fair in **Xàtiva**, which have been held eve since James I instituted them in the year 1250, are the most spectacular.





- Cima
- Zona de escalada
- Cueva/pinturas rupestres
- Árbol monumental
- Castillo/murallas
- Acueducto
- Ermita/Santuario
- Monumento/Museo
- Pozo de nieve
- Alimentos tradicionales
- Textil y fibras vegetales
- Alfarería/Cerámica
- Bodegas
- Vidrio
- Aceite
- Área recreativa
- Área de acampada
- Alojamiento Rural
- Hotel/Pensión
- Restaurante
- Oficinas de información turística
- Centros de Salud 24 h
- Gasolinera
- Puerto de montaña

- Cursos de agua
 - Carreteras
 - Autopista-Autovia
 - Ferrocarril
 - Itinerario excursionista señalado
-
- inferior a 300 m
 - 300 m - 600 m
 - 600 m - 900 m
 - superior a 900 m



Villena Alacant

Alcoi A-7, N-332