

ITINERARY 4

RIPOLL - LA SEU D'URGELL (175 KM)

Regions: El Ripollès / La Cerdanya / Alt Urgell

1. Ripoll

To see

You will start Itinerary 4 in the town of Ripoll capital of the Region of El Ripollès. You will enter the Pyrenees and walk through the luminous Region of La Cerdanya and arrive in the capital of the Region of Alt Urgell: La Seu d'Urgell following the course of the Segre River.

Ripoll is a town with about 11,000 inhabitants located 30 km north of Vic. In this town two river basins converge: the Ter river basin and the Freser river basin that mix their fresh waters there. Ripoll is an unmissable visit because there is one of the most important monuments of Catalonia both for its architecture and for its historical significance: the Benedictine Monastery of Santa Maria de Ripoll. Founded in the 9th Century by the Frank Count Guifré I, el Pilós, to repopulate the area that had been devastated and abandoned after the battles against the Saracen occupation in 7th - 8th Centuries. This count was, in fact, considered the first sovereign one of old Catalonia and independent of the frank central power. Therefore, Ripoll is called the "cradle of Catalonia". This monastery, restored and expanded successively, acquired the category of Basilica under the government of Oliba, Bishop of Vic and Abbot of Ripoll in the 11th Century. Its famous library and archive were considered some of the largest in Europe. Unfortunately, all this was devastated in the wars and internal revolutions of the early nineteenth century but the buildings were accurately rebuilt at the end of the same century. The visit to the whole complex is a wonderful trip to the medieval past of Catalonia. The temple is stern, massive and imposing, flanked by two square towers. The one on the right, the belfry, is 40 m. high and is crenellated; the cloister contains two hundred and forty columns with capitals adorned with splendid and varied fantasy. Inside the entrance porch, however, the jewel is the entrance door with its wall, which is original, covered with reliefs of Biblical themes carved in stone. We can say that it is the most beautiful example of Romanesque sculpture in Catalonia and one of the largest in Europe. This single work already makes a visit to Ripoll a worthwhile one.

It is also inspiring to visit, if you have interest and leisure, the new Ethnographic Museum of Ripoll that will help you to understand the ways of life and work of the Ripollès region throughout history, especially the life of not only the shepherds of the Pyrenees but also of the peasantry, trades, popular religiosity, the Catalan forge and forged iron and the famous portable guns of Ripoll. Visit the Town Hall website: www.ripoll.cat.

Sant Joan de les Abadesses

If you are curious about the Romanesque architecture of the Catalan Pyrenees, you can complete your medieval journey with the visit to the town of Sant Joan de les Abadesses, following the course of the Ter River along the N 260. The road shows you a typical valley of the Pre- Pyrenean, wide, tender and fresh, covered with pastures and forests of pines, oaks or beeches in the highest places. The village was born in the shelter of the Monastery founded also in the 9th Century by Count Guifre I el Pilós, who named his daughter Emma as an abbess at the head of the Benedictine community with the same objective as in Ripoll, that is, to repopulate the lands that had been abandoned after the struggles against the Saracen occupation. You must visit the whole of the Monastery, jewel of Catalan Romanesque art, and the Palace of the Abbey with marvelous footprints of various styles (Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque) as well as the center of the town with the medieval arcaded main square. There is also a monument to Count Arnau, a mythical medieval character who created a universe of legends, songs, poems and short stories.

Torrent de la Cabana

Next we propose returning to Ripoll along the same road, the N 260 and to make an excursion along the Torrent of the Cabana or stream of La Cabana. To do so, in Ripoll you will take the N 260 to Campdevàrol. There turn left to the GI 401 and 2.5 km you will find a place to park and start the Torrent de la Cabana path. It is an easy walk with the surprise of finding up to 7 waterfalls with its pools of different heights, depths and shapes that satisfy hikers, photographers and swimmers alike. The place is of great beauty. The round trip is about 10 km. In very cold winters, the waterfalls are frozen and produce fantastic shapes.

2. Ribes de Freser

To see

You will then take the N 260 to Campdevàrol and northwards to Ribes de Freser, following the course of the Freser River. You will quickly come to realise that all of the Ripollès is a totally mountainous, woody, ascending countryside with a background cyclorama of great Pyrenean peaks. On the banks of the rivers and streams there is a great variety of very beautiful deciduous trees: a variety of poplars, willows, ash trees, and at higher altitudes we find beech trees and a variety of pine trees. You will enter the valley of Ribes surrounded by a wall of imposing rocky mountains.

Ribes de Freser. It is a village at 900 meters above sea level where the waters of the Freser river, Nuria river and other streams converge. It was formed under the protection of

the castle of Sant Pere and around the parish church of Santa Maria. In medieval times, it belonged to the county of the Cerdanya. Currently the valley is a place frequented by mountain tourism. In Ribes de Freser the railway that goes from Barcelona to Puigcerdà passes through. At the same railway station, you can connect with the rack railway that will take you to the Nuria Valley, 12 km to the north. We propose taking a trip to this beautiful and secluded border valley. Visit the website: www.ajribesdefreser.cat.

Vall de Núria

The Nuria Valley offers two surprises: the railway that climbs up to 2000 m altitude and offers impressive panoramic views and the Nuria Valley itself which is small but with all the amenities desirable by nature lovers, hiking, skiing (there are good slopes) or the simple and contemplative stay (there are excellent hotels and services). There is an imposing Sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin of Nuria, very popular in Catalonia, recently declared Basilica minor and an old church dedicated to Sant Gil, a hermit that, according to the tradition, inhabited these solitudes during the 8th Century and is the patron of the shepherds. You will be surrounded by great Pyrenean summits that serve as a natural border with France, above all by the well-known Puigmal summit of almost 3,000 m. If you feel in good shape, you can descend on foot to Queralbs by the old trail. The beauty of the surroundings, the stream and the gentle descent will make you forget the word fatigue! Visit the website: www.valldenuria.cat.

Accommodation

Hotel La Sèquia Molinar (Campdevàrol) ***
Hotel Els caçadors de Ribes (Ribes de Freser) ***
Resguard dels Vents (Ribes de Freser) ****
Hotel Vall de Núria (Núria) ***

3. La Molina

To see

Returning to Ribes de Freser, you will continue your mountain expedition along the N 260 to climb up to La Molina and finally enter the Cerdanya Region. It is popularly known as the Collada road (25 kms from Ribes de Freser). The N 260 road climbs smoothly and slickly, meandering through the corners of the slopes and offering a wide panoramic of the Ripollès full of immense forests until reaching the Collada de Toses at 1.800 m altitude. Once up there you can already closely see the magnitude of the eastern Catalan Pyrenees. There you will take the GI 400 that will take you to la Molina. La Molina has become one of the great centers of winter sports in Catalonia with all kinds of facilities and

services, and is located at the back of the mountainous masses of Puigllançada peak (2,400 m.) and La Tosa (2,500 m.). It is accessible by train from Barcelona. La Molina has pleasant landscape all year round and it is the gate of the Region of La Cerdanya. Visit the website: www.lamolina.cat.

Accommodation

Hotel Sercotel Hotel & Spa la Collada (Toses) ****
Hotel Supermolina (La Molina Alp) ***
Hotel HG La Molina (La Molina Alp) ****
Hotel Roc Blanc (La Molina) ***

4. Puigcerdà

To see

Puigcerdà is the capital of the Catalan Region of La Cerdanya. It has about 9,000 inhabitants. Its origin goes back to 11th Century when the castle of “Mont Cerdà” is mentioned in the testament of the count of Cerdanya Guillem Ramon, in which it was bequeathed to his son Guillem Jordà. It must be assumed that this was an important fortification, within which or in the environment from which the new population would grow. The place, located in a strategic hill and large enough to build a large and strong population, should have been the reason why King Alfons I in 1177 decided to enable it as the new stronghold of the border. For this purpose, he granted it the capital, as well as numerous privileges that were directly destined to populate and strengthen it until, in the middle of the fourteenth Century, it became the fifth or sixth village of the Principality by the number of inhabitants.

Puigcerdà has an elevated position on a hill top as if it presided all the Cerdanya. That is why it is a splendid panoramic viewpoint towards the directions of the east, south and west. Being close to the border has made it a highly-accredited hiker’s center. It has an artificial lake surrounded by an urban park with some residential summer mansions from the beginning of 20th Century. Visit the Town Hall website: www.puigcerda.cat.

Accommodation

Hotel Villa Paulita (Puigcerdà) ****
Hotel del Lago (Puigcerdà) ***
Hotel del Prado (Puigcerdà) ***

5. Bellver de Cerdanya

To see

After getting to know Puigcerdà, you will take the N 260 to La Seu d'Urgell, following the course of the Segre River.

The road is the backbone of the region that is a slightly inclined plane that goes from east to west, instead of north to south as it typically happens with Pyrenean valleys. It is a vast sunny sided valley, with a dry climate, tonic, very healthy because the north wind dominates. It is about enjoying the valley, with its multiple shades of green, the riverside forests of the river Segre always buzzing and abundant and the great wall of the Cadí mountain range, half forest half colossal rocky, impressive wall. It is part of the Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park. You will see some villages on the way with a small and old nucleus and now surrounded by residential areas of elegant category and tourist services of all kinds.

Bellver de Cerdanya

Half way you will find the village of Bellver de Cerdanya, the second village of the region. Its foundation dates from the 13th Century by Nuno Sanç, lifetime count of Roselló and Cerdanya who granted the Population Charter to Bellver -o Belid-. The village is located on the top of a rectangular mountain with the castle in the west and the church to the east. King Jaume II of Mallorca ordered the construction of the walls around the town centre. It is pleasant to take a stroll through the medieval center and see the most emblematic buildings: the portal square, the middle street, the parish church of St. Jaume, the main square, the prison tower etc. Visit the Town Hall website: www.bellver.org.

6. La Seu d'Urgell

To see

You will continue your itinerary along the same N 260 until entering the Alt Urgell region passing through the narrow Baridà gorge and reaching its Capital: La Seu d'Urgell, final destination of your Itinerary 4.

La Seu d'Urgell. Capital of the Region of Alt Urgell with about 12,500 inhabitants. It is located in the Urgellet plain between the rivers Segre and Valira. Historically, its strategic position and the political power of the bishopric consolidated La Seu as one of the most important towns of medieval Catalonia. You have to visit the Cathedral of Santa Maria built in the 12th Century, which is the most emblematic building of the city. It is, in addition, the only Romanesque cathedral that is conserved in Catalonia. It is the fourth and

last of a series of cathedrals that rose in the Seu d'Urgell between the fifth and twelfth centuries. Also see the Cloister and Church of Sant Miquel in Romanesque style which was built in the 11th Century. It is attached to the Cloister of the Cathedral. It is also pleasant to stroll through the porched streets of the medieval city, such as Canons Street or Main Street. Other important buildings that you must not forget in your tour of the Seu d'Urgell are: the Sant Domènec Hall, the Sant Agustí Library, the Town Hall, the Church of the Immaculate, the Seminary, the Valira Park (Cloister), The Ermengol Space and the Diocesan Museum.

The Park of the Segre is magnificent on a channeling the Segre River and that allows the practice of white water sports. It was designed and constructed on the occasion of the Olympic Games of Barcelona in 1992. Visit the Town Hall website: www.laseu.cat.

Accommodation

El Castell de Ciutat (La Seu d'Urgell)****

Dolcet l'Hotel (Alàs) ***