

## ITINERARY 9

### **LLEIDA - PIRINEU (550 KM)**

**Regions: Segrià / Noguera / Pallars Jussà / Alta Ribagorça / Val d'Aran / Pallars Sobirà**

#### 1. Lleida

##### To see

You are starting an extremely interesting Itinerary that will take you to travel through a great part of the Catalan Pyrenees. And you will start in Lleida city (122,000 inhabitants), the capital of the Segrià region. The picture of Lleida is superb if you look at it from the left bank of the river Segre just before crossing the Pont Nou (New Bridge). The silver ribbon of the river lined with gardened park and in the background the imposing, proud, compact, of the Seu Vella skyline with its towering belfry (the highest one in Catalonia), and in the middle the old city of Lleida that occupies the slope between the River and the rocky hilltop of the castle-Seu Vella. This ancient city was founded by the Iberians (4th Century BC), romanized (1st Century. BC), occupied by the Saracens (8th Century) and finally became part of the Catalan domain (10th Century).

An ideal itinerary through the old town of this noble city can be started by the arc del Pont (ancient gateway to the city) and appreciate the statue of the two heroes and leaders of the ilergetas folk against the Roman domination (Indíbil and Mandoni), then walk along the Carrer Major (main street), visit the Palau de la Paeria of the 13th Century (current City Hall). You will also access the old Seminary, the Episcopal Palace, the old church of Sant Llorenç (13th Century), the old Hospital of Santa Maria (now Institut d'Estudis Ilerdencs), the Romanesque church of San Martí and the Diocesan Museum of Lleida. What is interesting is that Lleida has two cathedrals: la Seu Vella and the neoclassical New Cathedral built in the 17th Century.

Saving the best for last, the crown of our circuit is the jewel of Castell and La Seu Vella on the top of the hill, now very well restored, after centuries of devastation, ruin and transformation into military barracks. The whole set is impressive: the castell de la Suda (Saracen), the Seu Vella or Cathedral of Santa Maria consecrated in 1287, Romanesque temple with later enlargements in Gothic style. The Gothic cloister of gigantic proportions stands out with a spectacular view over the city and the river Segre. From the cloister you can step up to the huge and towering octagonal belfry with views over the extensive flat lands of Lleida and Pla d'Urgell. It was in in this Cathedral where the wedding was celebrated between the Count Ramon Berenguer IV of Barcelona and Peronella of Aragon daughter of the King of Aragon, of great historical repercussion for our country. Visit the website of the City Council: [www.paeria.cat](http://www.paeria.cat).

## Accommodation

Hotel Real Lleida (Lleida)\*\*\*

Hotel Zenit Lleida (Lleida)\*\*\*\*

Hotel Nastasi & Spa (Lleida)\*\*\*\*

## 2. Balaguer

### To see

Once you have greeted and explored the Capital, take the C 12 to Balaguer going up more or less the course of the river Segre. You will cross the region of Segrià and to the right you will have the region of Pla d'Urgell. They are both flat lands somewhat monotonous with some dry plateaus and semi-desert hills, which centuries ago were poor drylands except the valleys near the rivers that produced wheat and nuts. But the human effort throughout the last two centuries to bring the benefit of water through powerful hydraulic works (canals and ditches) to the sunny lands of Lleida has totally changed the landscape of these plains. Extensive extensions of thousands of hectares of land are now dedicated to the cultivation of vegetable gardens, maize, fruit trees (sweet fruit) and vine with the own D.O. name (Costers del Segre). The dry and steppe lands continue to cultivate the olive, dry fruits (almond trees) and the vine, some cereals, and in general the crops that best withstand the dry, warm and little rainy climate of the central Catalan depression. The landscape that you will see responds to these facts.

You reach the county town of Balaguer, which is the capital (13,500 inhabitants) of the region of La Noguera. Balaguer has a resemblance to the skyline of Lleida: at the foot of the river Segre, wide and well gardened, and looking west, the oldest city extends along the slopes of two irregular hills but with flat peaks. The most emblematic landmarks of the city are on top: on the one hand, Gothic church of Santa Maria (14th Century) with an imposing octagonal bell tower, declared a historical-artistic monument, the long wall of the old city with a walking path, and on the other hand, the Formos castle built by the Saracens and later transformed into the residence of the counts of Urgell and the church of Sant Crist de Balaguer. The center of Balaguer is the porticoed square, large, pleasant and graceful. Visit the website of the City Council: [www.balaguer.cat](http://www.balaguer.cat).

### The Train of the Lakes (Balaguer-La Pobla de Segur)

For some days in the months from July to October, a familiar and picturesque tourist train called El Tren dels Llacs departs from Lleida to the Pobla de Segur (90 km). We suggest the possibility of taking this train in Balaguer (only stop on its way) and enjoy without any worries a Harry Potter style trip that, following the course of the Noguera Pallaresa River, will transport us to the Pyrenees. You will cross spectacular cliffs of limes-

tone, rocky mountains, hills, river banks, forests and you will be able to see four of the most beautiful and great lakes of the zone (Lake of Sant Llorenç de Montgai, Camarasa, Terradets and Sant Antoni). All this through 41 tunnels and crossing 31 bridges. It is possible to go and come back in one day reserving the central hours of the day to visit the town of destination: La Pobla de Segur.

Once back to the station of origin: Balaguer, if you have taken the railway trip, you will have to return to your Itinerary and take the C 12 to La Pobla de Segur. However, you should stop at Les Avellanes to visit the Monastery of Santa Maria de Bellpuig de les Avellanes founded in the 12th Century and that was inhabited uninterruptedly for 650 years. The resort is stunning and most beautiful. The highlights are the Romanesque cloister and the Gothic Basilica that at the time used to be the pantheon of the counts of Urgell. At the moment it is perfectly restored, gardened and has a hostel open to the public. The environment is idyllic, leafy, very comfortable and full of peace.

### Àger

Continue your itinerary on the same C12 and you will reach the village of Àger. This village was a viscount's center and is situated on a hilltop and within a wide valley at the foot of the impressive rocky Montsec mountain range, like a wall that goes from east to west. The Romanesque collegiate church of Sant Pere, dates back the 11th Century. The defensive tower and the cloister, the sculptural elements and Romanesque paintings make of this monument an important exposition of the Medieval Art.

Another attraction of Àger is the Montsec Astronomical Park - Observation Center of the Universe of la Generalitat de Catalunya created for research, training and dissemination of science, especially Astronomy. It has a mobile dome of 12 m in diameter, park of telescopes and permanent exhibition of astronomy etc. The low light pollution and clear nights make Montsec one of the best skies in the world for sidereal observation. Sitting there and taking in the sight for sore eyes with telescope a starry night or with moon, travelling round the planets, stars and nebulae ... can be a memorable emotional and scientific experience. Recommended to earn and maintain the respect for our little planet that is our village in the universe!

After the scientific experience, you can continue your journey on the C12 following the long, desolate and barren wall of the Montsec until you reach the C13 and enter the gorge of Terradets that is a notch in the Montsec mountain range, narrow but of colossal height where the river Noguera Pallaresa flows through. Stunning passageway. At this point you are entering the Pyrenean region of Pallars Jussà. Past this narrow gorge the valley widens and is reflected in the lake (dam) of Terradets. You will continue to Tremp, capital of the region. If you fancy, you can take a brief detour, crossing the Terradets dam and drive up to the small village of Llimiana taking the LV 9121. Perched on a rocky cliff it

is a good watchtower over the river, the lake, the gorge and the Tremp basin. A Medieval village, with silent but eloquent history.

### **Tremp**

5,000 inhabitants, axis of the whole region, has an appreciable medieval core. The Plaça de la Creu (with a beautiful stone cross sculpted) the Basilica de la Mare de Déu de Valldelfors, the towers of the old wall are some of the many historical sites worth visiting.

### **Accommodation**

El Palauet de la muralla (Balaguer)\*\*

Hotel Santuari (Balaguer)\*\*

Monestir de les Avellanes (Os de Balaguer)\*\*\*

Hotel Terradets (Cellers)\*\*\*

## **3. La Pobla de Segur**

### **To see**

On leaving Tremp, you will drive along the C 13 to La Pobla de Segur, following the bank of the lake or dam of Sant Antoni, considered the largest freshwater surface of Catalonia (972 ha).

La Pobla de Segur is a typical medieval village surrounded by imposing rocky mountains. You can visit the most emblematic buildings, including the spectacular Casa Mauri, a modernist building and garden that is currently the seat of the Town Council. Also at the entrance of this village there is the confluence of the rivers Flamicell and Noguera Pallaresa and the beginning of the dam or lake of Sant Antoni. In this lake you can practice all kinds of water sports, hiking, observation of wildlife etc. Visit the Town Hall website: [www.lapobladesegur.cat](http://www.lapobladesegur.cat).

### **Accommodation**

Hotel Solé (La Pobla de Segur)\*\*\*

## **4. Senterada**

### **To see**

Your itinerary will continue north along the N 260 to Senterada along the course of the Flamicell River.

In Senterada we suggest doing an excursion to the dead end tiny village of Capdella following the Vall Fosca that is the one of Flamicell river. You will follow the L 503. Needless to say, the landscape is changing as we climb up the mountain (1,100 to 1,300 m altitude). In Capdella you have to ask for a guided visit to the Capdella Hydroelectric Museum to understand the epic feat that it represented in the early 20th Century (1911-1914) to undertake the most ambitious and pioneering hydraulic engineering works in the entire Spanish state. Pharaonic work for the period with the contribution of thousands of workers, construction of access roads, railways, drilling of lakes and construction of communicating tunnels at 2,200 m height, water channeling, power station with turbines and electricity generation for the supply of electricity to the capital Barcelona and industrialized areas, just before the outbreak of World War I, when the arrival of English coal, an indispensable source of energy for Catalan industry, was suddenly interrupted. It is a master lesson in science, politics, economics, history and sociology at high-voltage!

Next, we propose following the L 503 and to reach the reservoir lake of Sallent to 1,800 m of altitude, which is a dead-end spot. There you can take the cable car (it only works the summer months) that will lift you in 15 minutes to Estany Gento at 2,200 m of altitude that is the reservoir that regulates the system of communicating tunnels of the lakes and superior pools staggered and united by underground tunnels that assure the necessary flow to produce the hydroelectric energy of the immense reversible hydroelectric power plant of Sallent. Up there you are already in the National Park of Aigüestortes and Sant Maurici. The place has spectacular frame, rocky, granite, bare mineral geology, well prepared and signposted for some hiking of low difficulty. You can follow the main lakes (Estany Tort, Mariola, La Colomina and the Sea) and rest a little in the Colomina Shelter, after taking a dip, if you dare, in one of these transparent lakes. You can also walk along the greenway of the Carrilet (little railway) (5 km).

## **5. Pont de Suert**

### **To see**

Once you have finished your excursion through the Vall Fosca, you can follow your Itinerary by getting back to Senterada and turning towards Pont de Suert on the N 260. This route is relatively long (28 km) and winding (Port of Creu de Perves 1,335 m) because it crosses from east to west. You are forced to take this way to move to the other great river valley of Pont de Suert.

Pont de Suert is the capital with 2,000 inhabitants of the region of l'Alta Ribagorça and is in the valley of the river Noguera Ribagorçana. Pyrenean village, which has its prosperity very linked to the great hydroelectric works of exploitation of the river (Dam of Escalles). The parish church of l'Assumpció (1955) is a modern work in which the ovoid forms stand out.

## Vall de Boí

Then we suggest a trip to the Vall de Boí, along the L 500. This valley, popularized and accessible thanks to the hydroelectric works of Noguera Ribagorçana, is famous both for the surprising variety of its mineral waters and for the numerous villages with their little churches of the purest Romanesque-Lombard style with slender, towering belfries and prodigious paintings (11th-12th Centuries). The churches and bell towers have been beautifully restored and the original paintings and sculptures transported to the National Museum of Catalonia in Barcelona, but there are replicas in some churches. We recommend taking the following circuit: Santa Eulàlia d'Erill la Vall, Sant Joan de Boí, St. Climent de Taüll, Sta. Maria de Taüll, St. Feliu de Barruera, Durro and Sta. Maria de Cardet. All of them are close to each other. This valley has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (2000). To start, it is highly advisable to take an illustrative visit to the Romanesque Center of Erill la Vall to discover the singularity, beauty and richness of these churches in their architectural, aesthetic, artistic, social and religious aspects. Under an appearance of simplicity, they conceal a design, perfection, a mastery of a very high ambition. Can you imagine the people of the 12th Century, laden with so much work, taxes, fatigue and prejudices, entering their well-laid stone church with solid columns, spacious dimensions, painted with vivid colors and scenes of eternal life? What effect should it produce in their minds and spirits? Take a test: go to the church of St. Climent de Taüll, sit down and enjoy the Audio visual that virtually recreates all the paintings that used to cover the apse of the central altar with the majestic, timeless and most serene representation of the Pantocrator presiding over the heavenly choreography ... maybe you will feel transported to another higher, comforting and calm dimension. In any case, the prodigious paintings of Taüll will never give you anguish or anxiety, but rather the opposite: tranquility, dignity, elevation and peace. What else could they ask for? What more can you ask for?

## Parc Nacional d'Aigües Tortes i Estany de Sant Maurici

From the village of Boí you can access the Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de St. Maurici. You just need to take a jeep taxi from Boí or go up on your own car to the La Molina car park and continue on foot to the entrance. There you can start a pleasant circular walk along the Planell d'Aigüestortes following a well-marked track between lush riverside forests, wide grasslands and comfortable wooden walkways over the gentle and winding waters of the river. This excursion is adapted for people with reduced mobility. If the day permits, you can also take the trail that goes up to the Estany Llong Refuge, which is located a short distance from the lake itself. Half way through you will come across Lake Llebre. On the way back we advise you to follow the Ruta de la Llúdriga (Otter trail) that follows by the course of the torrent. You will pass by the grades of the Salt de l'Esperit where the waterfalls of whitewater combine with the corresponding green and deep pools. You will find that the environment is privileged, accessible, open,

virgin, and comforting as well as an authentic symphony for the senses.

### **Caldes de Boí**

To round off the excursion, do not hesitate to arrive to Caldes de Boí to visit the Balneario de Caldes de Boí. The place is fascinating and of really green frond. If you wish, you can go up to the bottom of the valley where you will find the lake (dam) of Cavallers with the viewpoint of the dam that provides a perfect view of the amphitheater of mountainous cliffs to the north and the valley of Boí of thick and green forests to south.

### **Accommodation**

Hotel Manantial – Balneari Caldes de Boí (Caldes de Boí) \*\*\*\*  
Hotel Cotori (Pont de Suert)\*\*\*

## **6. Vielha**

### **To see**

You will continue your Pyrenean tour, returning to Pont de Suert and taking the N 230 that will take you to the Vielha Valley, after crossing the tunnel of Vielha.

Vielha is the capital (3,000 inhabitants) of the Val d’Aran with its own personality and language (Aranès language is a Gasconian variety of Occitan). Culturally it is an Occitan country with a rough mountainous relief but with sunny meadows to mid height, abundant pastures, crops, hot springs and plentiful forest resources. The Garona River along with its affluent the Nere River, crosses the capital and the Val d’Aran. Without a doubt the parish church of Sant Miquel is the richest historical building (Door, Tower, Altarpiece, Organ and Baptistry). Built over several periods (12th -17th Centuries). The Crist de Mijaran is the most precious religious piece of the Valley. It is a bust of Christ that was part of a sculptural group of Romanesque style, of polychrome wood, called “Descent of the Cross” of natural proportions and typical of the area of the Pyrenees. If you want to delve into the history you can visit the General Martinhon Tower (18th Century) where is the Museum of Val d’Aran. In the village of Les (23 kms from Vielha) you can visit interesting Nacarii fish farming company producing sturgeon caviar of Russian origin.

If you feel like doing an excursion through the woods, we suggest two alternatives:

### **Uelhs deth Joeu to Artiga de Lin**

Take the road from Vielha to France (N 260) and 9 km away you will find the indication of Artiga de Lin. Follow it and drive 9 kms on a secondary but paved forest track that

will take you to a beautiful place to contemplate the mountains, the lush forest and the course of a thunderous and powerful torrent that springs right there (Uelhs deth Joeu). The water comes from the area of the Aneto, it infiltrates the Forau d'Aigualluts (Mediterranean slope) and reappears with strength here at Uelhs deth Joeu (Atlantic slope).

### **Saut deth Pish**

Take the road from Vielha to France (N 260) and 6 km away you will reach Pont d'Arròs. There you will find the indication of Saut deth Pish. Follow it and drive about 12 kms on a secondary but paved forest track that will take you to a double waterfall that forms deep gorges that will captivate your senses.

In the Val d'Aran everyone will recommend that you should develop some mountaineering courage and set off for the circuit of the Colomers Lakes, a set of lakes (48 in total!!) in and around the Colomers Circus or abrupt set of mountains arranged in a circle with steep ravines. There is a hiking trail that covers the circuit in about 3 hours and a level difference of 600 m. To do this you have to get to Salardú taking the C 28 from Vielha and from there go up the valley of Aiguamòg to Tredòs and Bahns de Tredòs. There, you have to leave the car and take a mountain taxi to Shelter of Colomers at 2,135 m. There you can begin your expedition ... and enjoy the most primitive and wild nature! You can test yourselves and take a swim in some lakes: it is very healthy! Visit the Town Hall website: [www.vielha-mijaran.org](http://www.vielha-mijaran.org).

### **Accommodation**

Hotel El Ciervo (Vielha) \*\*  
Hotel Eth Solan (Vielha) \*\*\*  
Hotel Eth Pomer (Vielha) \*\*\*  
Hotel Albares (Vielha) \*\*\*  
Hotel Petit Lacreu (Salardú) \*\*\*  
Hotel & Spa Casa Irene (Arties) \*\*\*\*

## **7. Espot**

### **To see**

Sooner or later, you will return, tired and satisfied, to your starting point in Salardú and you will continue your journey taking the C 28 driving up the port of the Bonaigua and then following the C 13 to Llavorsí. You will have entered the Pallars Sobirà region. The descent of the Port of Bonaigua is a spectacular zigzag that allows you to admire the geology and botany of Vall d'Àneu from all angles. You have to take it easy and patience



has its reward!

Before arriving in Llavorsí, you will see the tiny village of the Guingueta and then you will follow the bank of the dam of Torrassa. Then you will come to a junction with the LV 5004 to Espot which you have to follow.

Espot is a tiny village with a medieval watchtower and a Romanesque bridge over the River Escrita. It is, however and mainly, a gateway to the National Park of Aigües tortes i Sant Maurici. You have to rent a taxi to the lake of Sant Maurici since private cars are not allowed. There you can see one of the most beautiful spots in the Catalan Pyrenees. One feels very small in front of the immense, majestic rocky spires of the two Encantats, the Big one (2.747 m) and the Small one (2.738 m), but fascinated by the flat, still and greenish mirror of the waters of the lake of Sant Maurici. You can follow the path on the right bank and cross the scented forests of fir and birch trees until you reach a tremulous waterfall of La Ratera that flows down by a steeple of edgy stones, go up to La Ratera lake and finally get to the Mirador de l'Estany, a viewpoint strategically located to capture the whole geological setting with a single glance: the lake, the forest and the crests of the Encantats. And as background music, the tremor of water always accompanies you. At that point you can either go ahead to complete the tour around the lake and return to the starting point or go back. The circular route is almost 7 km long and about 3 hours. Visit the Town Hall website: [www.espot.cat](http://www.espot.cat).

## Llavorsí

After the tour, you will head back taking C 13 until you reach Llavorsí.

Llavorsí is a small village in the county of Pallars where the confluence of the rivers Noguera Pallaresa and the Noguera de Cardós takes place. And it is the crossing of Vall d'Àneu, the Vall de Cardós and the Vall Ferrera, very crowded by hiker tourism.

## Accommodation

Hotel Roca Blanca (Espot) \*\*\*

Hotel Saurat (Espot) \*\*\*

Hotel Roya (Espot) \*\*\*

Hotel Spa Riberies (Llavorsí) \*\*\*\*

Hotel Pessets (Sort) \*\*\*

## 8. Sort

### To see

In Llavorsí you have to continue along the C 13 to Sort, always following the course of the river Noguera Pallaresa.

Sort is a small village of 1,500 inhabitants, lively, sunny, much visited by the tourism of passage to the Pyrenees and the tourism lover of the water sports of adventure, like the rafting taking advantage of the white waters of the river.

Ten minutes from Sort, in the tiny village of Pujalt we highly recommend a visit to a curious and complete Museum of the Butterflies of Catalonia. With more than 4,000 specimens exposed, you will be able to know not only local species and their biology, but also details about mimetics, sexual dimorphism, geographic and seasonal, relationships with other insects, symbiosis and adaptations to the environment.

From Sort, you will continue southwards taking the N 260 and you will stop in Gerri de la Sal, a small village of medieval origin, that had important salt resources. There you must visit the Monastery of Santa Maria, declared Cultural Heritage of National Interest (Historical Monument) already documented in 9th Century. It had had a vast heritage and dominion. The unique three-storey steeple bell tower stands out.

You will continue your itinerary on the N 260 and you will arrive at the gorge of the Collegats which is the natural passage between Pallars Sobirà and Pallars Jussà. It is an open breach between very high walls of limestone rock of reddish tones of about 5 km where the river Noguera Pallaresa flows towards the south. The strait is impressive. If you are attentive and deviate by the old road you can stop for a moment and admire the ravine called l'Argenteria which is a water outlet on the walls that have formed wet and bright travertines. L'Argenteria inspired the national poets Jacint Verdaguer and Joan Maragall and it is said that the architect Antoni Gaudí was inspired by it to design the Pedrera of Barcelona...!

Once you have seen these architectural and geological wonders you will descend through the Pyrenean valleys along the N 260 until returning to La Pobla de Segur and then the C 13 to Tremp and finally Balaguer where you will end your Pyrenean Itinerary. Farewell and good luck! Visit the Town Hall website: [www.sort.cat](http://www.sort.cat).