



Itineraries

The mountain areas of La Plana Alta and l'Alcalatén, dominated by the Penyagolosa peak, offer visitors attractive rural scenes that should be explored with plenty of time to spare for enjoying nature at its best while seeing how the local inhabitants have lived and worked in this region over the centuries. Mountains, gorges, chapels, fountains, trails and monuments are all waiting to be discovered at the calm pace of the hiker, or from the saddle of a horse or the seat of a bicycle.

The magnificent opportunities provided by this area for nature excursions are fully covered by the long-distance and



short-distance hiker's routes known in Spain as the Senderos de Gran Recorrido (GRs) and Senderos de Pequeño Recorrido (PRs). These are traditional trails used by hikers, who mark them using different coloured paints or signposts. These trails can be used by anyone in reasonably good shape with some hiking or walking practice over mountain terrain. 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.

1. Long Distance Route GR-7

The GR-7 crosses the district, running through towns such as Culla, Vistabella del Maestrazgo, Sant Joan de Penyagolosa and Villahermosa del Río. It is marked with red and white paint. The section between Culla and Vistabella crosses the impressive Montlleó river canyon and accesses the Pla de Vistabella via the Sant Bertomeu chapel. This section is hard going and calls for stamina and strength. Then comes a gentle descent from Sant Joan de Penyagolosa to Villahermosa del Río along the course of the Carbo river, an authentic mountain stream with the occasional riverbank millhouse or orchard. For further details, see the 'Topo-Guía' publications (in Spanish) in two volumes: *Fredes-Sant Joan de Penyagolosa* (Castelló, 1987), and *Sant Joan de Penyagolosa-Andilla* (Castelló, 1993).

2. Long Distance Route GR-33

The GR-33 (red and white marks) runs from the city of Castelló de la Plana to the Sant Joan de Penyagolosa peak. From the town of Les Useres it follows the same route used by the procession in the famous annual pilgrimage taking place here. The section between Xodos and the sanctuary of Sant Joan de Penyagolosa can be combined with the PR-V-71 or 73 to form a circular route around the central part of the Penyagolosa massif.



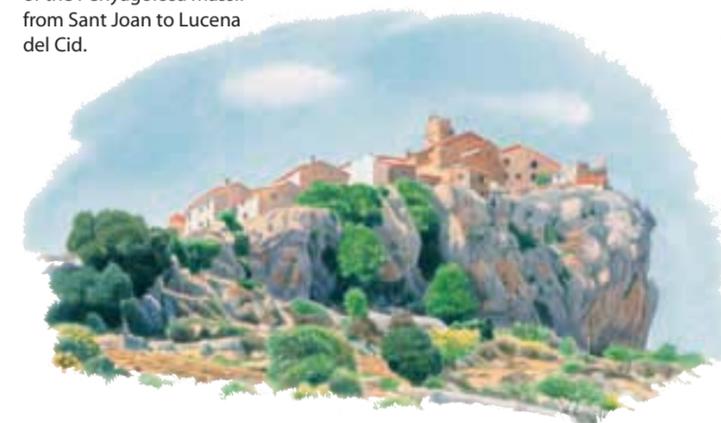
3. Short Distance Route PR-V-79

The PR-V-79 (yellow and white marks) links Lucena del Cid to Sant Joan de Penyagolosa following the trail once used by ice dealers who stored mountain snow in so-called 'neveras', or 'iceboxes' on the slopes leading down to the plain. It runs by the mountain shelter Mas de la Costa, a home base for hikers and mountain bikers, with excursions described in a leaflet published by the Centre Excursionista de València *Centros de Aire Libre: Mas de la Costa* (Valencia, 1996).

4. Short Distance Route PR-V-64 / PR-V-74 Network

There is a network of 11 short distance routes (marked in yellow and white) covering part of the Penyagolosa massif. These routes all have one leg that leads to the sanctuary of Sant Joan de Penyagolosa, and some of them combine with the GR-7, GR-33 or PR-V-79. There is a 'Topo-Guía' publication (in Valencian) covering this network from the Centre Excursionista de Castelló: *Penyagolosa, excursions a peu* (Castelló, 1994). The district offers a wide variety of routes, from simple walks to a chapel to day-long excursions. Not all trails are signposted, however, enabling hikers to find their own way. Guidebooks, detailed maps and knowledgeable guides are recommended. In addition to the above publications, there are two guidebooks by Ricardo Muñoz worth consulting: *El Maestrazgo, l'Alcalatén y el Ducado de Villahermosa* (Antinea, Vinaròs, 1996), and *Guía de Penyagolosa* (Valencia, 1987). De Enric Roncero, *Penyagolosa: paisatges del sostre d'un País* (Valencia, 1999).

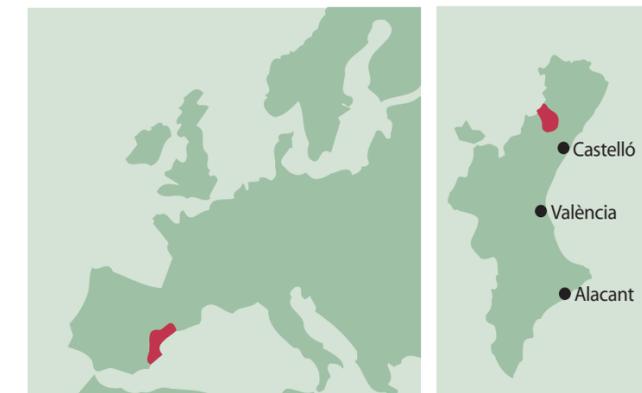
Along local roads with very little traffic and quiet forest trails, cyclists have many possibilities for enjoyment, with a variety of ascents and descents to choose from. The villages of Sierra Engarcerán and Sarratella in the Serra d'En Galceran mountains are good stopping points for ring routes from Albocácer, Vall d'Alba, Benlloch or Els Rosildos. Atzeneta del Maestrat is a good starting point for tough but worthwhile climbs to the peaks of Benafigos, Vistabella del Maestrazgo or Xodos. Mountain-bikers can follow a number of forest trails in the area, for example, a complete tour of the Penyagolosa massif from Sant Joan to Lucena del Cid.



All hikers and bikers should consult detailed maps before planning their excursions, and seek additional written information in guidebooks. The area described in this publication is covered by the following 1:50,000 scale maps: Villahermosa del Río 29-23 (592), Cuevas del Vinromá 30-23 (593), Alcora 29-24 (615), Vilafamés 30-24 (616).

Practical Tips

The l'Alcalatén district can be accessed from the city of Castelló using two routes: 1) Local road CV-16 to Alcora. In La Foia you can either take the CV-165 to Costur, Les Useres and Atzeneta del Maestrat, or go straight to Lucena del Cid by CV-190. 2) Local road CV-15 leading through Borriol to La Poble Tornesa, from which you can reach Vall d'Alba and Atzeneta del Maestrat. From the latter there are three roads leading to Vistabella del Maestrazgo, Benafigos and Xodos.



Most of the hinterlands of the La Plana Alta can be reached using the CV-10 from Castellón to La Poble Tornesa, and then to Cabanes, Benlloch, Sierra Engarcerán, Sarratella, etc. The CV-160 runs from La Poble Tornesa to Vilafamés and Sant Joan de Moró.

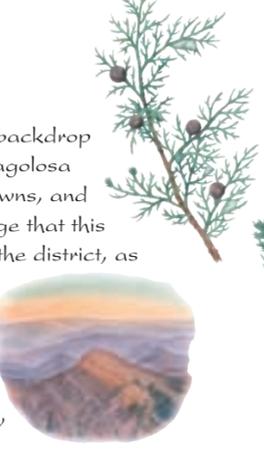
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Pl. M^a Agustina, 5
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E-mail: castellon@touristinfo.net

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The L'Alcalatén and La Plana districts enjoy the backdrop of the highest peak in the Land of Valencia, the Penyagolosa massif (1814m). It is visible from many surrounding towns, and looms high in Castellón skies. It is by no means strange that this peak has acquired a symbolic value for the people of the district, as suggested by the song of the local musician Rozalén, which goes something like this: "Penyagolosa, giant in stone/Your mighty head, whitened with snow.../ Penyagolosa, rock-like symbol of the land I know."



The district basically has two kinds of scenery. Narrow valleys lie between the folds of the mountains, where unirrigated croplands and small market gardens have been eked out of the slopes, with the occasional mountain spring or waterwheel-driven well quenching the land's thirst. Apart from this, there are dry mountains slopes leading sheer up to the lofty level of the Penyagolosa. Vegetation has adapted to diverse climatic conditions and eco-systems, with small dense woodlands clustering along valley streams, Aleppo pine forests, Faginea oaks and wild pines on the slopes of Penyagolosa, and Spanish juniper on the moorlands. These rugged heights are home to a number of birds of prey, such as the short-toed eagle, the goshawk, the booted eagle, the peregrine, and others. Among the larger animals are a few hard-to-find mountain goats inhabiting the Montlleó river canyon.

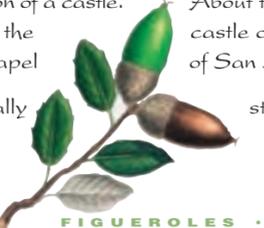


These lands provide truly picturesque and well-preserved surroundings for the historic towns in the area, which can be reconnoitered using two major routes.

The first route starts in l'Alcora, the gateway to the mountainous l'Alcalatén district from the flatter La Plana district. This town sits on the river Mijares, flanked by ridges where visitors can see chapels devoted to Sant Cristòfol del Calvari, and a little farther on, to Sant Vicente Ferrer. The town church is Gothic in style, remodelled in the 16th C. The name of Alcora comes from the Arabic "cora" meaning the lands under the jurisdiction of a castle. About three km north of the town are the remains of the castle of l'Alcalatén, at the foot of which lies the chapel of San Salvador.



Today's tile industry originally stemmed from the



so-called Royal Ceramics Factory founded in 1727 by the Count of Aranda, Lord of l'Alcalatén. Provençal, Dutch and Saxon craftsmen once worked here, bringing great renown to the factory. A few artisan workshops here still preserve the tradition of the beautiful Alcora tiles made in centuries past.

The route continues through the village of La Foia, where the church has a baptismal font tiled with products from the factory. Then comes Figueroles next to the LLucena river, boasting the historic Casa dels Col·legials and the Sant Mateu church, with interesting altarpieces in wood. The landscape becomes rougher and steeper as we reach Lucena del Cid, whose steep, narrow streets run around a hill between the Pedronyera ravine and the LLucena river. The ancient town centre is representative of the architecture of these higher and colder lands: a porticoed main square with a handsome neoclassical church and town hall; quiet side streets leading to lookout points over the market gardens bordering the river; and crowning the hilltop over the town, the white mansion of the Duke and Duchess of Híjar, occupying the erstwhile castle of Urrea. Other sights worth seeing are the Sant Antoni chapel, a Mediaeval village called San Miquel de les Torrocelles, a cliff south of town called Salt del Cavall ('horse jump'), the Iberian tower of Foios, and the farmstead called Mas de la Costa. Lucena del Cid is the starting point for the short distance hiker's route PR-V-79 leading to St John's chapel on the peak of the Penyagolosa.

From Lucena del Cid we can take the C-232 to the northernmost part of the Alto Mijares district, traversing Castillo del Villamalefa, Zucaina and Villahermosa del Río. The route then doubles back to La Foia to branch out again towards Costur and the nearby village of Mas d'Avall. These dry farmlands were once home to Neolithic hunters, Iberian tribes, Roman troops (vestiges of a Roman road at Camí dels Bandejats) and later, Moors, Moriscos and Christians.

Les Useres is the home of one of the most impressive religious traditions in the Land of Valencia: a pilgrimage made by thirteen "actors" in a religious rite that has survived down to our days. Every last Friday of April since the 14th C, twelve pilgrims, accompanied by a

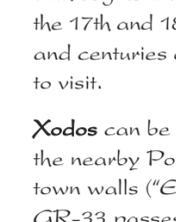


Alcora

guide, make a daylong pilgrimage to the chapel of St John on Penyagolosa peak to give thanks for the town's miraculous relief from a terrible plague in the Middle Ages. With full-grown beards, purple sackcloth gowns and sandals, wide-brimmed hats and staves, they take vows of silence, ascend 35km to the mountain peak, spend the night in vigil and then descend from the chapel to return to the village, always barring their feet before entering with solemn demeanours. This vow taken by the townsfolk of Les Useres has been maintained down through the ages intact. Passing through Les Useres is the hiking route GR-33 running from Castellón to Sant Joan de Penyagolosa, which is the same route taken by the pilgrims.



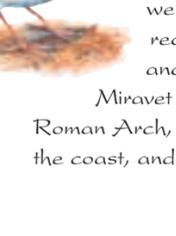
Located at 1246m above sea level, Vistabella del Maestrazgo is the highest town in the entire region of Valencia. It preserves Mediaeval portals and some stretches of the ancient town walls. The stout parochial church dates from the early 17th C, presenting a monumental façade by Joan Anglés. Traversing the Pla (plain) de Vistabella is a road leading to the sanctuary on Penyagolosa peak and the Font Coberta, a centre of devotion for the whole district, and a hub for various hiker's routes that meet here: the GR-7, GR-33 and PR-



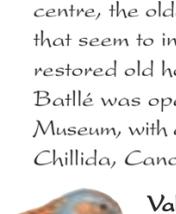
Atzeneta preserves much of its ancient town centre, although its 14th-C town walls are somewhat hard to envisage today. The Sant Bertomeu church dating from the 17th C contains noteworthy Baroque altarpieces. The Barranc de la Vall is the site of a fortified chapel dedicated to Sant Joan del Castell (15-16th C). This town is the starting point for three other villages higher up on the Penyagolosa massif: Xodos, Vistabella del Maestrazgo and Benafigos. Benafigos is a small village grouped around another church of Sant Joan from the 14th C. Further along the road closer to the Montlleó river is the chapel of l'Hortisella. The road continues to the mountain pass Port del Vidre (or La Xaparra) where the right fork leads to Vistabella del Maestrazgo.



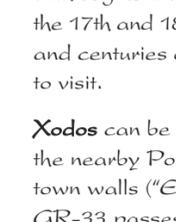
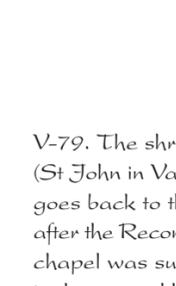
Vall d'Alba is located in undulating terrain leading up to the l'Alcalatén mountains. The scenery in this flat area, called Pla de l'Arc, is mainly dry farmland dotted with wellhouses. Its excellent potential for agriculture was recognized by settlers long ago. Cabanes belongs to the ancient holdings of the Miravet family, to whom the castle of Miravet and Albalat once belonged. Pla de l'Arc presents a solitary Roman Arch, once marking the major Roman Road running along the coast, and this arch now symbolizes the area. In the town centre,



The second itinerary runs through a number of towns in the La Plana district, with its mountainous terrain and dry farmlands which have carefully preserved their monuments, traditions and landscapes. La Pobla Tornesa is located between the Montnegre and Les Santes mountains, set right on the Greenwich meridian. This village once pertained to the domains of the Montornés estate, and was a strategic crossroads for communications between the coast and the interior. Vilafamés preserves a castle from Moorish days, now substantially reconstructed, and an original urban centre, the oldest part of which is built on limestone rocks that seem to integrate themselves into the very carefully restored old houses. In 1972 the 15th-C Casa del Batllé was opened to house the Contemporary Art Museum, with an important collection of works by Miró, Chillida, Canogar, Chirino, Gargallo, and others.



Xodos can be accessed from the road to Atzeneta del Maestrat or from the nearby Port del Vidre. This town preserves part of its castle and town walls ("El Callís"), now integrated into the town. The hiker's route GR-33 passes through Xodos, which is a good home base for exploring the entire Penyagolosa massif.

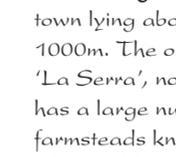
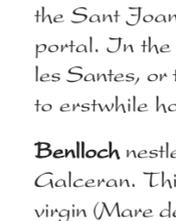


visitors can see a well-restored Gothic town hall building and the Sant Joan church with a monumental late Baroque portal. In the green valley of la Serra de les Santes, or the 'saints' mountain' is a chapel to erstwhile holymen dating from the 17th C.

Benloch nestles against the slopes of the Serra d'En Galceran. This small farming village has a chapel to a virgin (Mare de Déu de l'Adjutori) whose image was carved in wood in the 15th C. East of the town lies the so-called 'Pedra Fita', a large limestone rock standing on its edge and mentioned in the town charter from 1250. It may have been related to the nearby Roman road, the Via Augusta.

Sierra Engarcerán, also the name of the mountains, is actually a town lying above 700m, with mountain peaks reaching over 1000m. The old town centre is known simply as 'La Serra', now underpopulated, but it has a large number of outlying villages or farmsteads known as 'masías', such as Els Jvarsos and Els Rosildos. Recommendable visits in the town centre are the 16th-C church of Sant Bartomeu, the mansion of the Casalduch family, popularly known as El Fort, and now the Town Hall, and Casa Bertrán, another ancient mansion. In a pine wood near the town, called Mola de la Vila, the 18th-C Valencian botanist Cavanilles encountered a regional species of oak called the "roure valencià".

On lower land, passing back through Benloch, comes the town of Vilanova d'Alcolea, with an interesting Calvary route showing 18th-C ceramic tiles made in Onda and Alcora on some of the stations of the cross. The fiesta of Sant Antoni, a symbolic farewell to winter using bonfires to salute the spring, is very popular in this area. Vilanova is the centrepoint for these festivities, and lights bonfires in the streets, through which local bravehearts gallop on horseback. Torre Endoménec, named after a tower, is a small village at the foot of the Penya-roja peak, leading to the village of Sarratella, which has a chapel to Sant Joan Nepomucé.





- Cima
- Zona de escalada
- Cueva / Pinturas rupestres
- Árbol monumental
- Fuente
- Castillo / Murallas
- Ermita
- Monumento / Museo
- Pozo de nieve
- Turrón
- Aceite
- Alfareria
- Madera
- Área recreativa
- Área de acampada
- Refugio
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- Albergue
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- Gasolina
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- Información Turística

- 0 - 400 m
- 400 m - 800 m
- 800 m - 1.200 m
- más de 1.200 m
- Carreteras
- Itinerario excursionista señalizado
- Curso de agua

