

LAND OF

VALENCIA

# Scenery

**TURISME**  
GENERALITAT VALENCIANA  
AGÈNCIA VALENCIANA DEL TURISME

DISEÑO: ESTEVE DURRÀ





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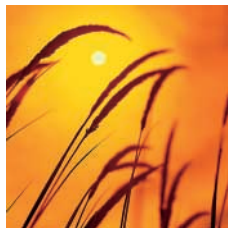
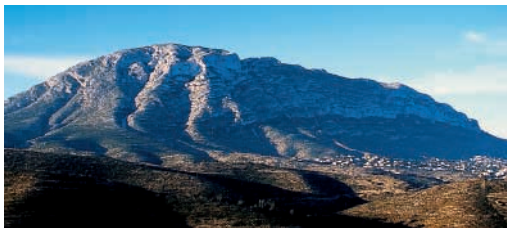
**F**rom the northernmost districts of Els Ports and El Maestrat to the southern coasts of the Vega Baja district, the Land of Valencia presents an exceptionally varied range of scenery. From sandy beaches to windy mountain peaks, from the reedbeds of the coastal wetlands to the savin and juniper forests on the mountain slopes, from irrigated farmlands along the river valleys to oak and maple woods in the interior, this territory is full of contrasts. This is the Mediterranean. With its own special characteristics, of the kind that have been explained by geographers and sung by poets, but of the kind that have to be seen to be fully believed. Sea and mountains in coexistence, temperate climates and semi-arid desert environments. Many features of the landscape are the product of human intervention, and climate has done the rest: clear, warm summers and benign winters along the coast; cold weather and snow-capped peaks in the hinterland. It's all here for you to enjoy.

The Land of Valencia, faithful to its Mediterranean roots, answers all needs, fulfils all classifications. Measuring over 20,000km<sup>2</sup> from north to south, the region has over 450km of coastline, but it is only 120km from east to west at its widest part. This thin stretch of land rises up to an altitude of 1,837m at the Alto de las Barracas. The coastline and the mountains stick close together like brothers. From the mountain peaks the sea is a constant factor. And from most beaches one can see the mountains rising up in the distance, forming a backdrop along the coast.



LAND OF

VALENCIA



Mountains in the Land of Valencia belong to two large chains - the Iberian and the Betic ranges extending from the interior. In the north, the Iberian range predominates, cutting into the region from the northwest and running southeast with the secret intention of coming as close to the sea as possible. The Espina-Espadán and Calderona sierras break off from this range and practically reach the beach. When the Iberian range runs into other smaller mountains marching in parallel up the coast, they give rise to impressive cliff faces in the Sierra d'Irta, between Oropesa and Benicàssim. The southernmost districts of the Land of Valencia belong to the Betic or Andalusian system, running southwest to northeast. These are abrupt formations, replete with rock walls, and sharp spires and pinnacles formed out of the hard, red and white limestone. On their march to the shore, the Betic mountains drop off into the sea in the La Marina Alta and La Marina Baja districts, creating spectacular cliffs. The tall capes of San Antonio, Cabo de la Nao or Moraira, the Morro de Toix, and the Rock of Ifach, the Sierra Gelada, etc., alternate with coves and sandy beaches washed by clear, transparent water, forming picturesque scenes.

The coastline in Valencia province has abundant sandy beaches sometimes separated from the sea by wetlands, including lagoons, marshes, salt flats, etc. These areas have special ecological and hydrographical functions in that they provide habitats for plant and animal life, with some endemic species of fish, and serve as nesting and stopover points for migrating and wintering birds.

The dryland areas in the mountains are also rich in plant and animal life. In all, the Land of Valencia has over 3,000 species, with quite a few autochthonous varieties found only in Mediterranean or even local areas, such as in the La Marina district or Els Ports and El Maestrat. The diversity of ambiances is reflected in the vegetation. There is a predominance of Mediterranean species (Aleppo pine, kermes oak, etc.) but along the riverbanks and in the shady mountain groves there are other Atlantic and Central European species (wild pine, cluster pine, *faginea*-type Lusitanian oak, ash, maple and big-leaf linden). In higher altitudes there are valuable juniper groves, and growing in mountains with siliceous soils are cork oaks. And just about everywhere one can see Mediterranean shrubbery and undergrowth lending aroma and colour to the atmosphere.





Valencian lands are full of examples of human labours, past and present. From the very first prehistoric settlers living in the caves of Parpalló or Bolomor, the Neolithic hunters of Valltorta, the honey gatherers shown on the walls of the Araña cave, and later conquerors and immigrants, many civilisations have contributed their grain of sand to the natural scenery. Small hilltop villages, terraced mountain slopes, monasteries in distant valleys, market gardens, castles, farmhouses, traditional herding paths, windmills and waterwheels - all form part of the landscape, and, in a way, lend meaning and significance to it.

Croplands are a large part of the scene. Olive orchards, carob trees, fig trees, cherry and other fruit trees, and more recently almond trees, have all found their place in dryland and mountain agriculture. Along the more fertile river valleys there are orange orchards and other citrus fruit plantations, vegetable gardens and rice paddies. Wherever possible irrigation is used. Even the most humble springs and fountains are brought into play, often using irrigation systems that go back centuries to the days of the Moors. The broad coastal lands are fed by rivers named the Mijares, Palancia, Turia and Júcar, plus their affluents the rivers Gabriel and Magro, Serpis, Vinalopó or the Segura. Agricultural cycles account for sometimes very spectacular scenes throughout the year: orange blossom time, almond and cherry tree blossoming time, rich green rice paddies around the Albufera lagoon south of Valencia, and other typical sights.

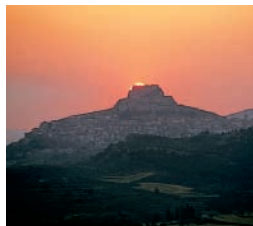


Valencian scenery combines the natural with its rich cultural heritage. You can get acquainted with the diversity of the landscape on a visit round the country. As an aid on your trip, we have selected the proposals included in this booklet. The reports also cover 16 protected areas (in their varieties of parkland, reserve or marine reserve) to be found in the Land of Valencia. But this selection does not mean there is no more to see - far from it. The sights are practically endless, with new landscapes and nature areas simply waiting to be discovered during your visit. The only thing you have to do is tour the country. You are sure to be pleasantly surprised.



## LA TINENÇA DE BENIFASSÀ

The ancient possessions of the Benifassà monastery extend across a mountainous area of great ecological value. Among the thick woods of black and wild pines, there are also big-leaf lindens and beech trees. The fauna found here includes the Spanish ibex, wild boars, vultures, Bonelli's eagle and the booted eagle. The area is part of the "Puertos de Tortosa y Beceite" National Hunting Reserve. There is a network of signposted hiking routes linking up the seven towns in La Tinença - Bel, Bellestar, Boixar, Castell de Cabres, Coratxar, Fredes and La Pobla de Benifassà - enabling visitors to experience the rare delights of this well-conserved nature area.



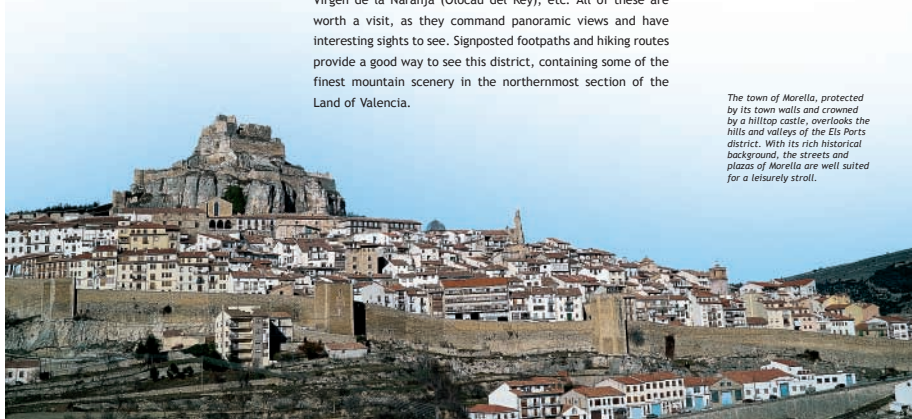
*The Santa Maria de Benifassà monastery and the village of Vallibona are set within the protective embrace of the Tinença and the Turmell mountains (left). The sun sets over Morella, illuminating the sanctuary of La Balma (right).*

## THE CÉRVOL RIVER VALLEY AND THE TURMELL SIERRA

The valley of the Cérvol or the Corses river runs between La Tinença de Benifassà, lying to the north, and the Turmell Sierra to the south. The village of Vallibona is set in the centre of the valley. On the slopes of the valley are ancient farmhouses surrounded by black pine forests, Spanish oaks, kermes oaks, etc. Vallibona is the starting point for the peak of Turmell (1,281m) and the chapel of San Domingo.

## ELS PORTS DE MORELLA: STONE REIGNS SUPREME

These are highlands crowned by the fortified town of Morella, whose silhouette stands tall on the horizon. In this district, the scenery is a combination of natural treasures (oak trees and shrubbery where truffles are found) and human constructions. Crops growing on terraced slopes, ancient stonewalled herding paths, stone farmhouses, chapels and sanctuaries comprise a landscape viewed from on high by soaring vultures and eagles. There are numerous sanctuaries and chapels: Vallivana (Morella), Sant Cristófol, Mare de Déu de la Font and Sant Pere (Castellfort), Mare de Déu de la Balma (Zorita del Maestrazgo), Virgen de la Naranja (Olocau del Rey), etc. All of these are worth a visit, as they command panoramic views and have interesting sights to see. Signposted footpaths and hiking routes provide a good way to see this district, containing some of the finest mountain scenery in the northernmost section of the Land of Valencia.



*The town of Morella, protected by its town walls and crowned by a hilltop castle, overlooks the hills and valleys of the Els Ports district. With its rich historical background, the streets and plazas of Morella are well suited for a leisurely stroll.*

## L'ALT MAESTRAT: MOUNTAINS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Traditional agriculture and cattle raising have contributed to the modelling of a rich countryside dotted with the results of human activities, alternating with holm oak and pine forests. To enjoy panoramic views, there are excellent lookout points on the peaks of Tossal de la Nevera (Cati, 1,281m), La Mola d'Ares (Ares del Maestre, 1,318m), and the Sant Cristòfol chapel (Benasal). For resting and relaxing, visit the fountains of Font de l'Avellà or the Font d'En Segures. For complete solitude, the river Montlleó hides canyons accessible only from Culla or Vilafranca. In winter the snow accentuates the contrasting attractions of this unique Mediterranean mountain landscape that one should take in and enjoy as calmly as possible.



*Ares del Maestre, at over 1,000m, is perched on a rocky mole buffeted by wind from all directions. The Valltorta ravine contains prehistoric hunting scenes on the walls of its rock shelters (below).*

## PREHISTORIC PAINTINGS: THE VALLTORTA RAVINE

The ravine of Valltorta winds its way through terrain in the municipalities of Albocàsser, Les Coves de Vinromà and Tírig. The landscape is austere, dominated by limestone rocks and vegetation adapted to relatively dry conditions, such as wild olive shrubs and dwarf palms. But for settlers here at the end of the Palaeolithic and during the Neolithic, Valltorta was a magnificent site for hunting. Along the rock shelters under the cliff faces, an impressive collection of prehistoric paintings of so-called Prehistoric Levantine art can still be seen. Paintings from the Gasulla ravine (Ares del Maestre) and from the Covarjos ravine (Benasal) also form part of this landscape, with scenery and historical values that have merited its conversion into a Cultural Park. The Valltorta Museum (Tírig, tel. 964 76 1025) provides an overview of this cultural legacy, and organises exhibitions and walking visits.



LAND OF

VALENCIA

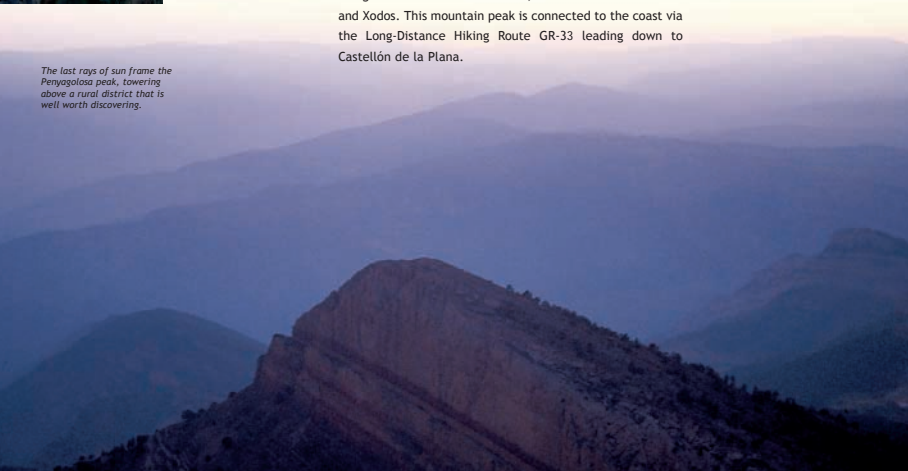


The Mijares river cuts its way through the narrow Chillapájaros defile (above). Water and forests make up the scenery of the Alto Mijares and the Sierra de Espadán (right).

### THE PENYAGOLOSA MASSIF

This is a tall and well-preserved mountain spur of the Iberian range in inland Spain. The Penyagolosa peak rises to 1,813m, providing a magnificent panorama over the surrounding province. The sanctuary of Sant Joan de Penyagolosa, an important site for annual pilgrimages, and extensive forests containing wild pine, black pine, *faginea*-type Lusitanian oak and others, all create rich scenery that visitors can enjoy. Access to the mountain is through the picturesque villages of Villahermosa del Rio, Vistabella del Maestrazo and Xodos. This mountain peak is connected to the coast via the Long-Distance Hiking Route GR-33 leading down to Castellón de la Plana.

The last rays of sun frame the Penyagolosa peak, towering above a rural district that is well worth discovering.



### THE UPPER REACHES OF THE MIJARES RIVER

The upper reaches of the Mijares river run through steep ravines and slopes cloaked in pine trees before widening out to irrigate the fields of La Plana district. Water from streams, dams or thermal and medicinal springs, is the true protagonist of the area. Near Montanejos, the spectacular Maimona ravine and the Chillapájaros defile offer excellent sites for climbers. The Villahermosa river, an affluent of the Mijares, descends through the Penyagolosa massif through Ludiente and Argelita. A number of signposted footpaths, among which is the Long-Distance Hiking Route GR-7, give visitors access to these attractive Mediterranean mountain scenes. On the frontier with the region of Aragón, Cortes de Arenoso and San Vicente have attractive highlands and moorlands.

### SIERRA DE ESPADÁN NATURE PARK AND SIERRA DE ESPINA

The Iberian range seems to want to reach out to the Mediterranean via the Espina and Espadán sierras, separating the Mijares and Palancia river basins. The Espina sierra is crowned by mount Santa Bárbara de Pina (1,405m) sheltering valuable vegetation on its skirts. In the Espadán sierra, a unique combination of Triassic sandstone soil and copious rainfall maintains magnificent pine tree and cork oak forests. The villages of Ain, Almedijar, Eslida, and Villamalur - among others - provide access to the Sierra de Espadán Nature Park, with its network of signposted hiking routes: the GR-36 and a number of Short-Distance Hiking Routes. Around the festivity of San Juan (24 June) the extraction of cork from the cork oaks enlivens the local scenery, with the usually dark tree trunks turning bright red in a magic contrast of chromatics.

## THE UPPER REACHES OF THE PALANCIA RIVER

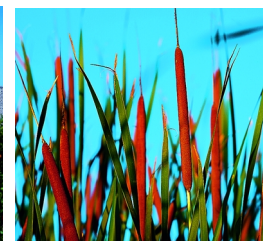
From the monumental town of Segorbe, a number of scenic areas can be visited along the upper reaches of the Palancia river. The tall El Toro mountains are spurs of the neighbouring Javalambre sierra covered by vegetation adapted to the harsh climatic conditions: black pines, incense or Spanish junipers, and savins. The narrow gorge hiding the source of the river Palancia and the Resinero ravine are accessible from the town of Bejis. The villages of Canales and Sacañet stand at the foot of the Bellida summit (1,319m), guarding the remains of 50 caves, or potholes, once used for storing snow before bringing it down to the city of Valencia and the surrounding L'Horta district.



## THE SIERRA DE IRTA NATURE PARK AND THE CASTELLÓN COASTLINE

The coastline along Castellón province, known as the Costa Azahar, presents a variety of different landscapes. Sandy beaches alternate with shingle in Cabanes, Moncofa and Torreblanca, and two tall cliff fronts also interrupt the normally flat coast. The first is between Benicàssim and Oropesa. The second is the magnificently preserved Sierra d'Irta (between Alcalá de Xivert and Peñíscola). Also running along the coast are wetlands providing important nature habitats. The Peñíscola marsh, the mouth of the Millars river (Vila-real), the Estany de Nules (lake), the Chilches-Almenara marsh and others, form an important eco-system with unique vegetation and a rich array of small animals, autochthonous fish like the "fartet" (*Aphanius iberus*) and "samaruc" (*Valencia hispanica*) and a wide array of nesting and migratory birds.

*The higher lands of the Palancia districts provide water for the Regajo dam, and form calm, peaceful natural surroundings (above). Water is also the main feature of the landscape in Prat de Cabanes-Torreblanca (below right).*

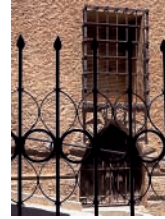


## THE PRAT DE CABANES-TORREBLANCA NATURE PARK

The Prat de Cabanes-Torreblanca Nature Park is a wetland area of major importance along the northern coastline of the region. One thin line of shingles, pebbles and sandy deposits separates the sea from a marshy area formerly known as the home of ducks (Albalat dels Ànecs). Today it provides shelter for birds such as the collared pratincole and the peregrine falcon. Nearby one can visit various old watchtowers along the coast: Capicorb (Alcalá de Xivert), Torrenostra (Torreblanca) and Torre la Sal (Cabanes). There is a park information centre at the Torre la Sal Experimental Aquiculture Centre in the locality of Ribera de Cabanes (tel. 608 04 8431).







*The volcanic rocks forming the Columbretes islands stand out because of their dark colours, giving rise to some spectacular scenery. Pine trees clothe the rugged relief of the Desert de les Palmes (below).*

## THE COLUMBRETES ISLANDS NATURE PARK

This is one of the points of major interest along the western Mediterranean coast, specifically the Castellón coastline, due to its unique character and its rich land and sea ecosystems. The Columbretes islands form an archipelago made up of small islands of volcanic origin. The largest of these is called Illa Grossa, and its form evidences an ancient crater. Among the fauna found on the island are Eleanor's falcon, Audouin's gull and a rare species of sea tortoise. Sea life in the water around the islands is equally rich and varied. The park information centre is located in the planetarium of Castellón (tel. 964 28 2968).

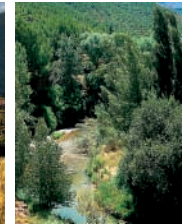


## DESERT DE LES PALMES NATURE PARK

This coastal range of mountains, rising up from the otherwise flat La Plana district, extends through the municipal areas of Benicàssim, Borriol, Castellón de la Plana, Cabanes, Oropesa and La Pobla Tornesa. The name of the so-called "Desert of the Palm Trees" does not refer to an actual desert, but historically relates to a Carmelite monastery where a spiritual refuge was sought. The area is home to numerous pine trees, cork oaks, shrubs and aromatic plants. Les Agulles de Santa Àgueda is a site richly endowed with reddish cluster pines from which magnificent views can be gained. Other points of interest are the Bartolo peak (729m), the castles of Miravet and Montornés, the Carmelite convent or hermitage of the Les Santes. The Bartola information centre is located in the park (kilometre 7.8 along the Magdalena-Desert road, tel. 964 76 0727).

## EL RINCÓN DE ADEMUZ

The Rincón de Ademuz, or Ademuz enclave, is isolated from the rest of the land of Valencia, reached by passing through the region of Aragón or Castile-La Mancha. Through the enclave runs the Turia or Blanco river, through alternating narrow and wider valleys. The riverbanks are lined with market gardens and modern poplar plantations. On both sides of the central valley, tall mountains rise up, connecting with the southernmost spurs of the Javalambre massif, which hosts juniper and savin trees, and forests of black pine. This is the highest point in Valencian territories: the Alto de las Barracas or Calderón summit (1,837m). All villages in the Ademuz enclave are linked together by a network of Short-Distance Hiking Routes that enable visitors to admire these exceptional landscapes in Iberian-type mountains.



*La Puebla de San Miguel, the Ebrón river, shots of Ademuz and Los Santos... some of the secret charms of the Ademuz enclave.*

LAND OF

VALENCIA



### THE CALDERONA SIERRA NATUR PARK

The Calderona sierra is a constant backdrop for scenery in the Valencian districts of L'Horta, El Camp de Túria, and El Camp de Morvedre. It serves as a dividing line between the Palancia river basin to the north and the Turia and Carraixet river valleys to the south. It is rugged terrain composed of Triassic sandstone and limestone soil in which numerous cluster pines and some cork oaks take root. The highest point is the Gorgo summit (907m), accessible from either Gátova or Olocau. The Garbí summit (601m), accessed from Naquera and Serra, or from Segart, is a magnificent lookout point over neighbouring districts. Its tranquil valleys provide shelter for historical religious communities such as the Catusians of Portaceli (Serra), Vall de Crist (Altura) and the Franciscan convent of Sant Esperit (Gilet). The Long-Distance Hiking Route GR-10 and a network of Short-Distance Routes enables hikers to enjoy these fine surroundings.

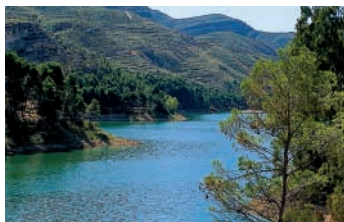


### THE ALTO TURIA DISTRICT

Upstream from the town of Chulilla, the Turia river flows through mountain landscapes covered with thick pine forests. Along the course of the river numerous recreational and camping areas have been laid out, and these serve as home bases for exploring the surrounding areas of Benagéber and Loriguilla, the Barchel waterfall, a variety of fountains in the area or the interesting examples of riverbank vegetation. Man-made monuments, such as the sanctuary of the Virgen del Remedio and its nearby lookout point, or the impressive Roman aqueduct of Peña Cortada, blend in harmoniously with the landscape. The towns of Chelva, Sinarcas, Titaguas and Tuéjar provide access to this large district constituting one of the most important woodland areas in the Land of Valencia. Following a visit to the area, the spas of Fuencaiente (Chulilla) or Baños de Verche (Domeño) provide a pleasant form of relaxation.



*The peaks of the Calderona sierra, clothed in cluster pines, offer extensive panoramas (above). Below, the Loriguilla dam and the Tuéjar river provide blue-green landscapes in the Alto Turia district.*



Waterfall in Chera; the waters of the Buseo dam wash the flat shoreline. The Júcar canyon, near Cortes de Pallás, and the Don Juan cave in Ayora are ideal spots for adventure sports (right page).

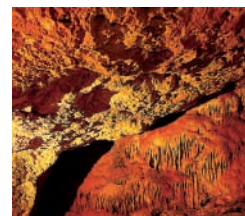
### THE REATILLO RIVER AND THE TEJO SIERRA

The Reatillo river is a tributary of the Turia river, collecting waters from the Tejo and Negrete sierras, which are crossed by the Long-Distance Hiking Route GR-7. Throughout its course the Buseo dam was built along a broad stretch of pine forest. Access can be gained via the villages of Chera, Siete Aguas, and Sot de Chera to visit the unique ravine of La Hoz, the Tejo peak (1,250m) and its interesting slopes, or the Hoya de Cherales.



### THE CABRIEL RIVER COURSE

The Cabriel river serves as a frontier between Valencian and Castilian lands for more than 50km, from the Contreras dam to its confluence with the Júcar river in the town of Cofrentes. The sinuous course of this river runs through a well-preserved area, rich in vegetation and populated by protected bird species such as the golden eagle, Bonelli's eagle and the eagle owl. From Villargordo del Cabriel, access can be made to see the spectacular Los Cuchillos rock pinnacles and the Fuenseca valley. Between the localities of Vadocañas and Villatoya, the Cabriel river is boxed in between cliffs in a series of meanders known as Las Hoces. Villatoya and the village of Casas del Rio are reached via Requena.

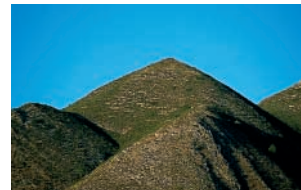


### MUELA DE CORTES AND THE CAROIG MASSIF

Between the Ayora valley, the Navarrés canal and the deep Júcar river canyon lies a vast plateau topped by the Caroig peak at 1,126m. Today's plant covering is composed of mastic trees and kermes oak trees, although there are some interesting evergreen oaks and ash trees. The Fralú, Ludey or Grande river courses are beauty spots that provide habitats for Iberian water turtles. Sites of geological interest are frequent here: volcanic remains on the hill of Agrás (Cofrentes), rock formations called Las Quebradas (Teresa de Cofrentes), the Don Juan cave (Jalance) now open for tourist visits, the Júcar river canyon, etc. There are numerous examples of Neolithic rock shelter paintings, paintings in the La Araña cave and the Moreno ravine can be seen with a local guide (information from the Town Hall of Bicorp, tel. 96 226 9110). Excursions can be made from any of the towns in the Valley of Ayora or the Canal de Navarrés to see the Muela de Cortes and the Caroig massif, which form part of the Muela de Cortes National Hunting Reserve.

## THE CORBERA AND LES AGULLES SIERRAS

Geological offshoots from the Iberian range, these sierras run from Alzira to Tavernes de la Vallidigna, hiding a now abandoned Hieronymite monastery in La Murta (Alzira) in a valley offering various botanical treasures, where over 1,000 plant species have been catalogued, many of which are endemic to the area. The ash trees here remind us of colder epochs, as do the Aleppo pines and oaks. Traditional footpaths cross the sierra between the fountains of Barber, Sangonera, La Casella, l'Ouet, etc. Mountaineering can be practised at diverse points throughout the area, and a network of signposted trails run between Alzira, Corbera and Tavernes de la Vallidigna, good for exploring these coastal mountains. The peaks of Ratlla (626m), Cavall Bernat (585m) and Les Creus (540m) offer panoramic views over the nearby coast.



*The Buixcarró mountains provide valuable marble (above). Among the orange trees of Marzuquera, the Molló sierra rises up near Gandia (page left).*



## THE MONTDÚVER MASSIF AND THE BUIXCARRÓ SIERRA

This limestone massif, modelled and re-modelled by karstic erosion, presents a landscape of dotinas and caves whose centrepiece is the polje of Barx, with no surface outlet, because the waters drain out in subterranean streams through the l'Avenc de la Donzella. In the caves of Bolomor (Tavernes de la Vallidigna), Parpalló (Gandia) and Les Malladetes (Barx), the first inhabitants of the Valencia region left numerous remains of their culture. In addition to these towns, Pinet and Xeresa are start-off points for picturesque excursions through this terrain offering interesting plant life and peculiar karstic scenery. The peak of Montdúver (841m) crowns the sierras lining the coast and provides an excellent lookout point over the surrounding shoreline.

## THE LA SAFOR AND L'ALMIRALL SIERRAS

The La Safor massif, close to the historic town of Gandia, is bordered to the north by the deep ravines of the Serpis river, where sites such as "Hell's Straits" (Estret de l'Infern) and the "Duke's Corner" (Racó del Duc) can be seen. Both the lie of the land itself - a thin river valley boxed in between mountains - and the habitats it offers for abundant plant and animal life, are worthy of interest. The area can be traversed from L'Orxa or from Villalonga, taking advantage of the bed of the former Alcoi-Gandia railway. The spectacular La Safor cirque, with its abrupt rock walls, stands 1,010m above sea level, providing magnificent views for brave climbers.

## THE BENICADELL AND AGULLENT SIERRAS

These are narrowish sierras separating the Vall d'Albaida to the north from the Alcoià-Comtat to the south. Sights here include, from the town of Ontinyent, a swimming hole called *Pou clar* ("clear well") on the Clariano river, or the track through the mountains called the *senda dels enginyers*. From the towns of Albaida, Atzeneta d'Albaida or Beniatjar, there are various routes to La Covalta, the Fontanars ravine, and the fountain called Font Freda or the peak of Benicadell (1,104m). Near the peak and on the northern slopes are a dozen or so "snow wells" (*pous de neu*), once used for storing snow and ice and preserved intact up to the early 20th century. From the heights of the sierra one understands why the ancient Moorish inhabitants called this area "white" (*albaida*): limestone deposits make the valley look pale under a coat of green vegetation surrounding the many gullies and ravines.



## LA ALBUFERA NATURE PARK

Lying to the south of the city of Valencia, the Albufera freshwater lagoon is one of the most important nature areas in the Land of Valencia. A slim strip of coastline protects it from the sea, and on this strip of land, sand dunes have formed, plus a curious Mediterranean pine forest growing in sandy soil with rich shrubbery. This area is called the Devesa del Saler, a word derived from a kind of pastureland. Three canals (two natural and a third man-made), connect the lagoon and surrounding wetlands with the sea, and each has its own characteristic flora and fauna. La Albufera is an important stopover point for migratory birds and a nesting area for resident birds. There is an Information Centre for getting better acquainted with the Albufera Lagoon Nature Park, located at Racó de l'Olla (tel. 96 162 7345), on the road to El Palmar.



Sand dunes and plant life: canals, rice paddies, and the broad lagoon. La Albufera is an attractive mosaic of landscapes south of the city of Valencia.

## THE VALENCIA COASTLINE

The coastline along the gulf of Valencia is low-lying, with sandy beaches and a few shingle beaches. Numerous banks, some with dunes (Arenals de Canet, Devesa del Saler) keep the sea out of the inland lagoons and marshes. Despite their valuable eco-systems, including endemic flora and fauna and providing irrigation, many of the marshes have been dried up. The marshland known as Marjal dels Moros (Puçol, Sagunto) is now listed as a Zone of Special Importance for Birdlife, and the nearby Alqueria dels Freres is an Environmental Educational Centre (tel. 96 268 0000). Other marsh areas of importance are: Marjal de Cullera (Bassa de Sant Llorenç, L'Estany Gran and El Brosquil); Marjal de Tavernes; and the Xeraco-Xeresa marsh. In all these wetlands typical plant and animal life can be found, and birdwatchers will find a lot to do. One good panoramic lookout point over the beaches and wetlands of L'Horta, La Ribera Baixa and the La Safor districts is the Muntanya de les Raboses (234m), just outside the town of Cullera.



Fishing boats on the Estany lagoon in Cullera. The swifte Benicadell summit towers over the Vall d'Albaida district.





*The Pego-Oliva marshlands at the foot of the mountains (below). Between Dénia and Jávea, the Montgó mountain and the coastal cliffs offer impressive sights from land and sea (page right).*

### THE PEGO-OLIVA MARSHLANDS NATURE PARK

The karstic relief of the Mostalla, Segària and Migdia sierras feed these broad marshlands which were once separated from the sea by a strip of sand dunes. Today there are still pools of clean water, which are practically always flooded, and an extensive area of canes providing nesting sites for a variety of birds, including the marsh harrier and the ferruginous duck. A number of man-made canals criss-cross the area, and in these waterways live the regional samaruc (*Valencia hispanica*) and the loach. The Pego-Oliva Marshlands Nature Park Information Centre is located in the town of Pego (tel. 96 640 0251).



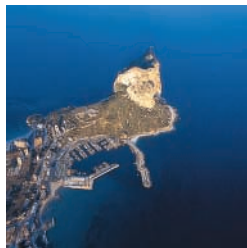
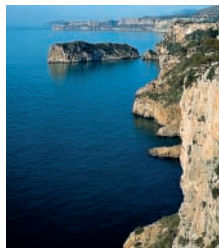
### THE MONTGÓ MOUNTAIN NATURE PARK

An imposing limestone massif called the Montgó mountain rises up 753m from the plain between Dénia and Jávea. It connects to the San Antonio cape via a ridge known as Les Planes, which is the site of age-old agricultural terrain. Flora on the mountain slopes is varied, with about 600 different species, some of which are unique to this area. It is possible to climb to the top of Montgó from all sides. This is an enjoyable excursion leading through numerous eco-systems: stony terrain, croplands, pine forests, scrubland, etc. The summit commands panoramic views of the surrounding area, both inland and out to sea, where the island of Ibiza can be seen on a clear day. The Information Centre located in Torrecremada, Dénia (tel. 96 642 3205) provides details on the ecological value of this park. The area around the cape of San Antonio and its seabed are now listed as a Marine Nature Reserve.



## THE ROCK OF IFAC NATURE PARK

Joined to land via a narrow isthmus, the limestone Rock of Ifac (Penyal d'Ifac) rises 332m over the sea. At its feet lies the town of Calpe, with its fishing port, tourist area and old town centre. Thriving on the rocky cliff faces of the nature park are a number of curious plant varieties, including endemic cliff plants, dwarf palms and the Phoenician juniper. Over 80 species of birds use this rock either for nesting or migrational stopovers. The views over the coast are marvellous from the top of this rock. It can be climbed using the Nature Park trail, and mountaineers have various cliff faces available for use. Next to the rock are the Calpe Salinas, or salt flats, also making for an interesting visit. The Penyal d'Ifac Nature Room (Aula de Naturaleza) provides further information on the park (tel. 96 597 2015).



*The Rock of Ifac and the cliff faces of La Marina provide habitats for cliff plants and sea birds.*



## FROM CAPE SAN ANTONIO TO CAPE BLANC

Between Cape San Antonio (Jávea) and Cape Blanc (in Teulada) the Alicante coastline presents rugged, inaccessible cliff faces. The Betic or Andalusian mountain chain finally drops off into the sea at this point, creating unique landscapes including sharp cliffs, hidden coves and a few smaller beaches. Cape San Antonio dominates the sea from a height of 160m and its seabed and surrounding area are now listed as a Natural Marine Reserve. South from the bay of Jávea come a row of coastal cliffs with small islands (Portitxol, Descobridor), followed by coves, and the capes of Sant Martín or Prim, Negre and La Nao. Further south is the spectacular Granadella cove and Les Morres de Benitaxell cove, dominated by the peak called Puig de Na Llorença (445m) boasting rich vegetation and numerous species unique to the area. Punta de Moraira, or Moraira point, protects the bay with its picturesque little port. The shoreline along this natural beauty spot has numerous watchtowers from olden days: Cap Prim, Descobridor, or Cape Moraira. The rocky seabed, part of the attractions in the Land of Valencia, is an excellent area for sub-aqua activities.

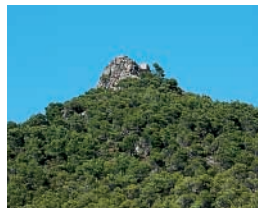
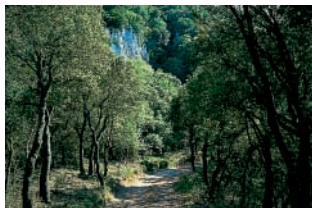


## THE SIERRA MARIOLA NATURE PARK

The Sierra Mariola is basically a limestone massif located on the borders of the towns of Agres, Alfafara, Alcoi, Banyeres de Mariola, Bocairent, and Cocentaina. Because of its altitude and size, it offers a wide range of landscape. As a catchment area, its streams and springs feed the Vinalopó, Serpis and Barxell rivers. The sierra is rich in botanical attractions, growing numerous aromatic and medicinal herbs. It also has pine forests, sprinkled with occasional oaks, maples, ashes and yew trees. The Sinc ravine is a deep gorge leading into the sierra from Alcoi, providing spectacular rocky scenery. The peak of Montcabrer (1,390m) crowns the sierra and offers fine views over the surrounding mountains. The Mariola mountains were once a storehouse for snow and ice preserved in so-called neveras, or snow caves - with names like Gran, Don Miguel, l'Habitació, El Buitre - and later carried to towns in the La Costera and La Ribera areas. Various signposted trails (Long-Distance Hiking Route GR-7 and interconnected Short-Distance Hiking Routes) and two mountain shelters facilitate excursions around this area.



The Mediterranean forest is well preserved in the Carrascar de la Font Roja Nature Park.



## THE CARRASCAR DE LA FONT ROJA NATURE PARK

This protected nature area occupies the Menejador sierra (1,352m) in the municipal areas of Alcoi and Ibi. Its east-west orientation accentuates the contrasts between the shady area and the sunny slopes, creating multiple types of landscape. It has one of the best-preserved Mediterranean forests in the land, with shady evergreen oak forests (holm oaks, small-leaf oaks, maples) and perennials such as yews, flowering ash and kermes oak. Each of the areas has its own associated fauna, including mammals (wild boar, genets, wild cats, badgers, etc.), reptiles and above all birds (Bonelli's eagle, golden eagle, vultures, eagle owl, etc.) Numerous routes for visiting the sights (old farmhouses, caves, etc.) start from the Nature Park Information Centre located in the Font Roja sanctuary (tel. 96 533 7620).



The Sierra Mariola is capped by the Montcabrer peak (above). El Puig Campana shows two of its peaks - Pic Prim and Pic Gros - above the village of Finestrat (below).

## THE AITANA SIERRA AND EL PUIG CAMPANA

Between the districts of La Marina and l'Alcoià-Comtat lies this imposing limestone mountain range located close to the coast. Its cliff faces, pinnacles and peaks carved in limestone give the surrounding landscape an impressive, rugged look. Climbers from home and abroad come to tackle the Ponoig (1,181m) near the town of Polop, Puig Campana (1,410m) near Finestrat, and the Penyal Divi near Sella. The mountains offer scenery with tiny villages nestling in the valleys, with ancient Moorish remains, and typical olive and almond orchards. The Aitana sierra towers to 1,558m, with the southern slope dropping abruptly to the sea, and the northern slopes thick with a variety of vegetation. And interesting stopping points (Simes de Partagat, Font Forata, etc.). The villages of Alcoleja, Benifato, Confrides, Sella and others are scenically set around the sierra.







*These are Valencian lands: mountains like the Bèrnia and Maigmo peaks (above, opposite page), and the coast with marshlands and salt flats providing habitats for migratory birds (below, this page).*

## THE BÈRNIA SIERRA

The Bèrnia Sierra runs straight inland from the coast between the town of Callosa d'En Sarrjà and La Punta de Toix, with a sharp limestone crest reaching 1,129m. To the south of the summit are the remains of the Bèrnia Fort, built following orders from Felipe II (16th C) to command the area in case of possible rebellions by the Moriscos (Moors converted to Christianity) who populated the area and covered the slopes with terraces and stone walls, until their forcible removal in 1609. One recommendable walking route (typically signposted as a Short-Distance Hiking Route) leaves from Cases de Bèrnia (Xaló) along the northern face up to the Forat de Bèrnia, a spectacular natural tunnel through the crest. After crossing the tunnel, the return is made along the southern face, leading past the Fort. The excursion provides privileged panoramas over the bay of Altea.



## THE MAIGMÓ MASSIF AND THE L'ARGUENYA SIERRA

The Arguenya sierra, aka Carrascar de Castalla, and the Maigmó massif separate the areas known as Foia de Castalla to the east, and the Vinalopó valley to the west. The Arguenya mountains, covered in pine forests and shrubbery, rise up to the Replana de la Font del Llop at 1,228m. Of note on the way up is hexagonal-shaped "snow well", or *pou de neu del Carrascar*, whose ashlar roof is covered in huge slabs of worked stone. The Maigmó massif (1,296m) preserves well-stocked pine forests and kermes oaks. The peak, called the Balcony over Alicante, commands excellent vistas of the surrounding area. At the foot of the mountain is the Tibi dam (1595), constructed to detain the waters of the Verd river and irrigate the market gardens of Alicante. Various signposted trails can be used for excursions.

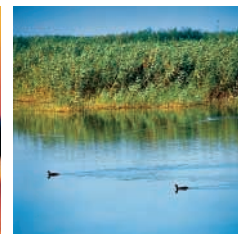


## TABARCA ISLAND AND SANTA POLA SALT FLATS NATURE PARK

Near the ancient wetlands outside Santa Pola, salt has been mined since the beginning of the 20th C at Braç del Port, El Pinet, etc., contributing to changes along the edge of these marshlands. Today's Nature Park preserves various habitats: the salt flats close the sea, the freshwater pools in the marsh area and periphery, and the bordering farmlands. Flora and fauna have adapted to the wet conditions and high salt content. Spectacular concentrations of greater flamingos, including thousands of birds, can sometimes be seen here. The dunes in the El Pinet area are an interesting part of the park, which has an Information Centre at the Casa Forestal de la Mata (tel. 96 692 0404). Off the Santa Pola coast is the island of Tabarca (Alicante), offering attractive coastal and marine ecosystems, which have merited being listed as a Natural Marine Reserve. There is a boat service to the island from the port of Santa Pola and also from Alicante harbour.

## LA MATA AND TORREVIEJA LAGOONS NATURE PARK

Extending all the way across the municipal areas of Torrevieja, Los Montesinos and Guardamar del Segura are the La Mata and Torrevieja lagoons, which are still used for salt extraction, as they have been for many decades. Salt water is drawn from the Cabeç de la Sal in Pinoso and left to dry in the sun until the water evaporates. The marshlands here are an important wintering and nesting area for over one hundred bird species, such as the greater flamingo, the black-necked grebe and various duck varieties. To the north of the La Mata lagoon, near the mouth of the river Segura, are the Guardamar dunes, whose location is now stable due to large pine plantations that prevent them from moving inland. The Nature Park Information Centre is located in the Casa Forestal de La Mata (tel: 96 692 0404).



*The southern part of the Land of Valencia contains various marshland areas of international importance due to their flora and fauna.*



## THE FONDÓ NATURE PARK

Drainage work and landfills carried out in the 18th century by the clergy (Cardinal Belluga) reduced the original expanse of this large lagoon, known as the Albufera d'Elx. Today, the remains of the original area comprise Les Salines de Santa Pola, and El Fondó (Deep), which, in combination with the La Mata and Torrevieja lagoons, form a triangular wetland zone of great importance due to its unique plant and fish life. The Fondó Nature Park extends from the municipal limits of Elx and Crevillent, and includes a variety of ecosystems, depending on the degree of humidity and the water quality. The Fondó marshlands have both ecological and agricultural value, as the water is used for controlled irrigation purposes. There is a Nature Park Information Centre at La Vereda de Sendres (tel. 96 667 8515). A visit to the park can be combined with a sightseeing tour of the thriving town of Elx, with its famous Palmeral, or Palm Forest, the largest collection of palm trees to be found in Europe.



## THE HIGH...

The Land of Valencia, like many other Mediterranean areas, is very mountainous. The average altitude tops 500m, and one fourth of the land area is above 800m. The westernmost areas share the heights with the inland meseta, or Iberian range, extending along the tabletop lands called La Plana de Utiel-Reguena and Els Ports, with over 20 villages located above 1000m. The highest of these are in the mountainous districts of Castellón province: Vistabella del Maestrazgo stands at 1,246m; Coratxà is located at 1,235m; Ares del Maestre at 1,194m; Castellfort at 1,181m; Castell de Cabres at 1,134m; Vilafranca del Cid and its modern textile factories at 1,125m; and Culla at 1,121m. In Valencia province the highest village is La Yesa at 1,008m, followed by Puebla de San Miguel at 1,000m, Alpuente at 974m and Vallanca at 950m. The Betic or easternmost spurs of the Andalusian mountains rise up through the southern part of the Valencian region, but villages here are lower down. The highest municipality in the districts of Alicante are Banyeres de Mariola at 816m, Confrides at 785m, La Torre de les Maçanes at 788m and Tollos at 773m. The views from any of these towns and their surroundings provide pleasant surprises for travellers interested in the cultural heritage of these lands and their scenic attractions.



## ...AND THE DEEP

The Land of Valencia is predominantly an area of limestone formations in which karstic phenomena are numerous. Geological formations were easily moulded by water and erosion to form cavities, canyons, chasms, poljes, dolinas, etc. due to the dissolving limestone rock. There are some 5,000 cavities, all of which are now protected by the Law of Natural Spaces of the Land of Valencia. Some of these caves are large in size, and of special interest due to their geomorphology (submarine caves, caves in gypsum, flooded caves, rock formations, etc.) or because they are the habitat of endemic flora and fauna. The majority can be visited using customary caving, potholing or spelunking techniques. But there are also various caves adapted for tourist visits. Les Coves de Sant Josep (La Vall d'Uxó) have an underground stream that can be traversed by boat. The Cueva de Don Juan (Jalance) has interesting formations and lies in the picturesque area of the Valle de Ayora. La Cova del Rull (La Vall d'Ebo) is a compulsory visit for those interested in the La Marina Alta mountains. In the legendary Cova de les Calaveres ("Skull Cave") (Benidoleig) important archaeological remains were found. La Cova dels Canelobres (Busot) is impressively large and has attractive rock formations. It has even been used occasionally for staging concerts.

*The northernmost districts of the region have towns and villages lying at the highest altitudes: Vilafranca or La Tinenca de Benifassà (page left). Cave scenery and underwater scenes are also of great interest in the Land of Valencia.*



## ■ PRACTICAL TIPS

The Land of Valencia has a complete tourist information service that will help you to prepare your trip and will provide further information while you are here. There are many tourist publications available that will allow you to familiarise yourself with Valencian scenery and choose those places you would most like to visit. Professional staff members are on hand at the tourist info network, comprising over 90 offices, to attend to you personally and provide you with leaflets and tourist publications.

### **Tourist Info Alicante**

Rambla Méndez Núñez, 23 · 03002 Alicante  
Tel. 96 520 0000 · Fax: 96 520 0243  
E-mail: [touristinfo.alicante@turisme.m400.gva.es](mailto:touristinfo.alicante@turisme.m400.gva.es)

### **Tourist Info Castellón**

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For further information link to our internet address at:  
[www.comunitatvalenciana.com](http://www.comunitatvalenciana.com).



## ■ HOW TO REACH THE LAND OF VALENCIA

The Land of Valencia has numerous regular and charter flights to and from the two international airports serving the region: Manises airport, outside the city of Valencia; and El Altet in Elx, near Alicante. Valencia, Gandía, Dénia and Alicante have maritime ports with regular ferry services to points around the Mediterranean. There are also a large number of fishing harbours and sports marinas for recreational craft, with moorings and a full range of harbour services. There are speedy and frequent railway and bus links to cities and regions in Spain and also to a number of European cities.

If you are coming by road the basic route to follow is the A-7 motorway or the N-340 national route, both of which run parallel to the coast and connect major towns in the Land of Valencia. To reach the picturesque districts of the interior of the Land of Valencia you can use public bus services and railways. If you are travelling in your own vehicle, the network of provincial and district roads will enable you to enjoy the landscape. At the entrance to all towns and villages in the Land of Valencia you will find signposts indicating the resources and tourist attractions available there.



1. La Tinença de Benifassà
2. The Cérvol River Valley and the Turmell Sierra
3. Els Ports de Morella: Stone Reigns Supreme
4. L'Alt Maestrat: Mountains of the Mediterranean
5. Prehistoric Paintings: the Valltorta Ravine
6. The Penyagolosa Massif
7. The Upper Reaches of the Mijares River
8. Sierra de Espadán Nature Park and Sierra de Espina
9. The Upper Reaches of the Palancia River
10. The Sierra de Irta Nature Park and the Castellón Coastline
11. The Prat de Cabanes-Torreblanca Nature Park
12. The Columbretes Islands Nature Park
13. Desert de les Palmes Nature Park
14. El Rincón de Ademuz
15. The Calderona Sierra Nature Park
16. The Alto Turia District
17. The Reatillo River and the Tejo Sierra
18. The Cabriel River Course
19. Muela de Cortes and the Caroig Massif
20. The Corbera and Les Agulles Sierras
21. The Montdúver Massif and the Buixcarró Sierra
22. The La Safor and L'Almirall Sierras
23. The Benicadell and Agullent Sierras
24. The Valencia Coastline
25. La Albufera Nature Park
26. The Pego-Oliva Marshlands Nature Park
27. The Montgó Mountain Nature Park
28. The Rock of Ifac Nature Park
29. From Cape San Antonio to Cape Blanc
30. The Sierra Mariola Nature Park
31. The Carrascar de la Font Roja Nature Park
32. The Aitana Sierra and El Puig Campana
33. The Bèrnia Sierra
34. The Maigimó Massif and the L'Arguèny Sierra
35. Tabarca Island and the Santa Pola Salt Flats Nature Park
36. La Mata and Torreveija Lagoons Nature Park
37. The Fondó Nature Park

