

A 7 Days Hiking Itinerary Through La Garrotxa



La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park



TURISME
GARROTXA
la comarca dels volcans



Costa Brava
Pirineu de Girona

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I

About the author



Claudia Tavani is a travel writer and travel blogger, creator of [My Adventures Across The World](#), which has been online since late 2014. Through hiking, she goes in search of hidden gems and she gets to know the culture, history and people of the places she is visiting.

Claudia's passion for hiking has started at a young age, when her parents took her around their beloved Sardinia, or on hiking trips to Trentino. She then went on to walk the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu; the Poon Hill Circuit in Nepal; the Jesus Trail in Israel and parts of the Jordan Trail.



Introduction



This eBook strives to be a comprehensive resource for anybody planning a trip to La Garrotxa and who would like to hike in the volcanic zone and the Pyrenees while at the same time getting to know its culture and hidden gems.



In this book you will find a section containing practical tips and other information to plan your trip; as well as a detailed packing list with all the items, clothes and equipment that you should carry with you for an accommodated hiking trip to La Garrotxa.

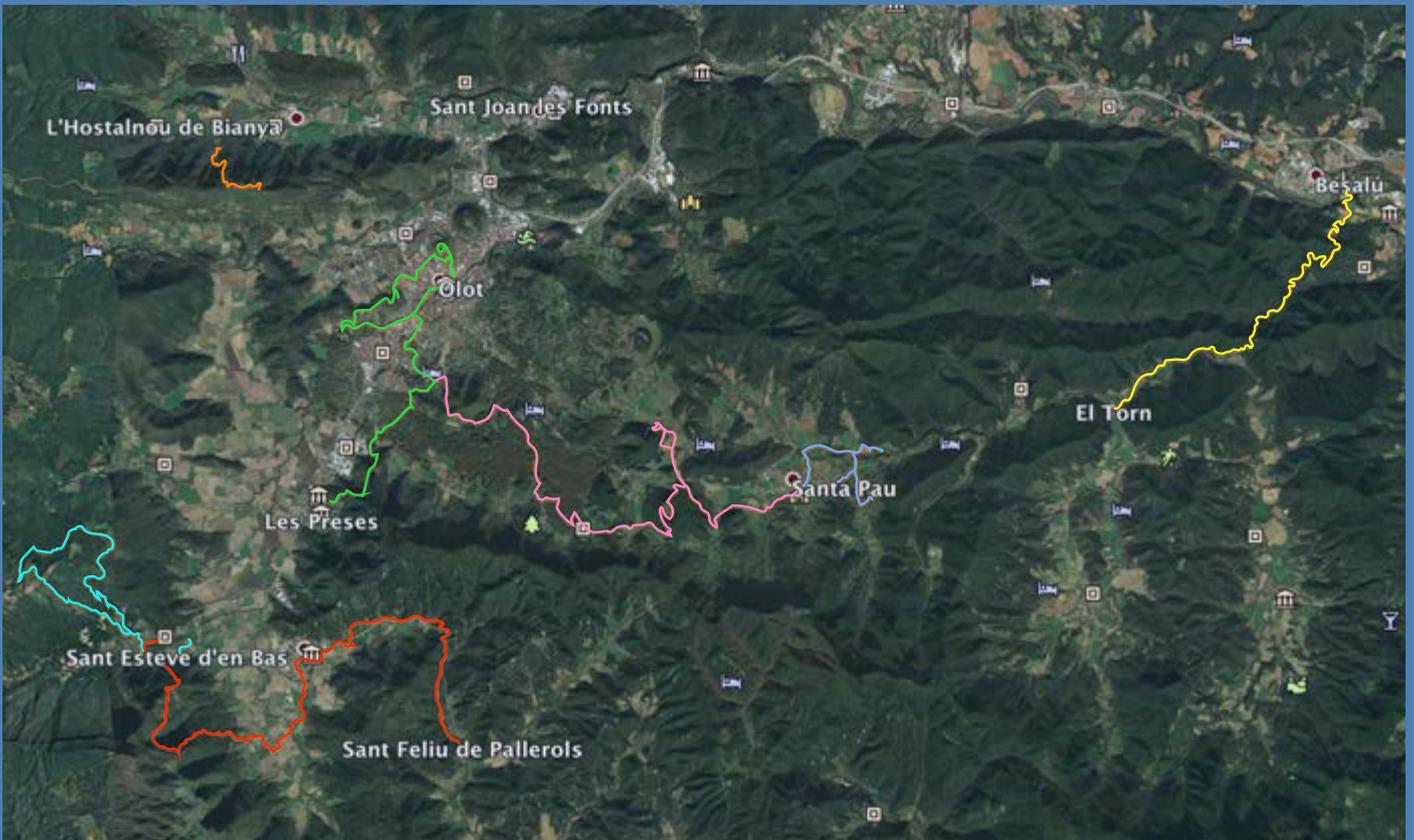
You will find a day by day hiking guide, with photos for each of the stages and which details the main challenges of the trail, and the points of interest you will find on your way.

Check out www.costabrava.org and en.turismegarrotxa.com for more information and for other destinations in La Garrotxa, in the Pyrenees and in Costa Brava.





Map



Map Keys

- **Sant Miquel de Pineda to Joanetes**
- **Camí dels Ganxos circular route**
- **Les Preses to Olot via Montascopa and Montolivet**
- **La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone ending in Santa Pau**
- **Ruta dels Gorgs Santa Pau**
- **Santa Margarida de Bianya - Sant Pere Despuig**
- **El Torn to Besalú**

IV

History



La Garrotxa, one of the prettiest regions of Catalonia, is completely landlocked. It is set between the Pyrenees and Costa Brava, in the province of Girona and part of the Girona Pyrenees region.

The region mostly lies under 600 meters above sea level, but some peaks go well over 1500 meters.

La Garrotxa is an incredible hiking destination, thanks to its volcanic landscape (there are more than 40 volcanoes) and lava flows, the gorgeous forests and the Pyrenees mountain chain. The beautiful medieval villages and the hidden Romanesque churches, some of which at the top of a mountain or hidden in the crater of an extinguished volcano, add to this idyllic setting.

Many long distance hiking routes go through La Garrotxa. One of them is Itinerannia, a network of trails with more than 2500 km of paths.

Itinerannia aims at recovering the old trails found in La Garrotxa, L'Alt Empordà and El Ripollès, and to connect the towns of the Pyrenees to those of the Mediterranean. The reasoning behind Itinerannia is that anybody walking the trails can pick and choose any and design their route to move around the region and thus visit the places they are interested in. All trails are bound to combine a walk in the nature with breathtaking views and visits to places of historical, cultural or religious significance.

The trails of Itinerannia are marked in yellow, by way of vertical signs placed at crossroads and which indicate the



nearest villages; the walking distance (yellow sign with red tip) by way of time; the thematic itinerary (yellow sign with green tip); or horizontal signs by way of yellow marks painted on tree trunks or rocks.

Itinerannia trails occasionally coincide with GR trails. GR is an abbreviation of Gran Recorregut. The GR is an extensive network of trails across Europe. They are usually long distance (typically longer than 50 km) and marked in red and white.

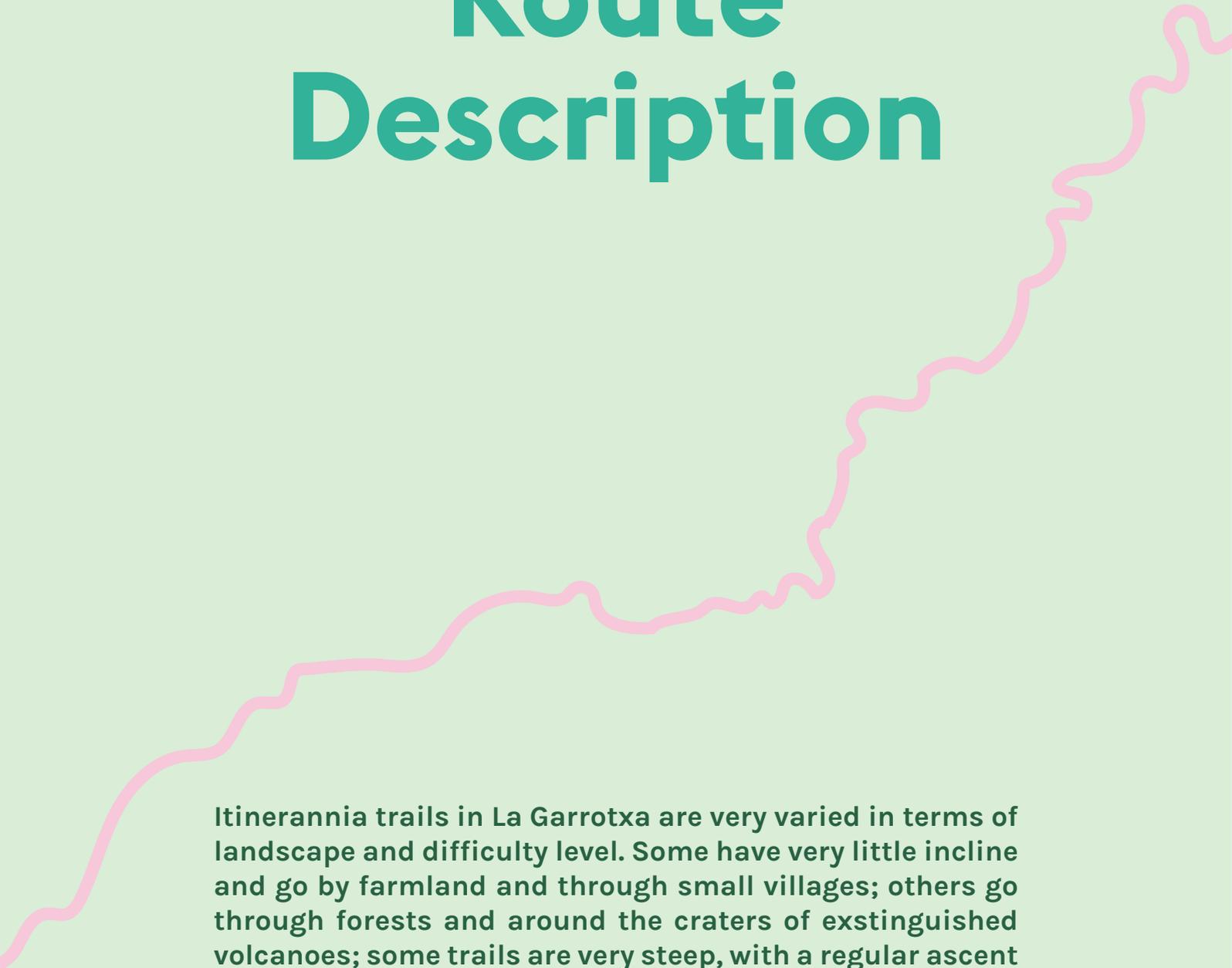
The hiking trails of Itinerannia are of various difficulty level. While some are easy enough for families with children, others are challenging and suitable only for more experienced hikers.





V

Route Description



Itinerannia trails in La Garrotxa are very varied in terms of landscape and difficulty level. Some have very little incline and go by farmland and through small villages; others go through forests and around the craters of extinguished volcanoes; some trails are very steep, with a regular ascent and lead to beautiful hidden hermitages. Some trails have excellent terrain conditions, and in others the terrain is a bit rougher – rocky, or muddy and slippery.



The walking route from Sant Miquel de Pineda to Besalú is around 87 km and can be divided in 7 stages. I preferred breaking up the hike in short sections to make the most of each place I visited, but you can easily combine two stages together and walk this trail in 5 or 6 days.

One important thing to keep in mind is that on certain stages the starting point of the trail can be distant from the arrival point of the previous stage. In this case, you may have to arrange transportation to get there.

The walking distance for the various stages varies between 8 km and 18. Accommodation at the end of each stage can be found in rural houses, boutique hotels and hotels. For some stages you will be crossing small villages where you will find restaurants or coffee shops to buy lunch. For others, you will need to bring along a packed lunch which you can often order at your accommodation.



The trail from Sant Miquel de Pineda to Joanetes is mostly flat and on easy comfortable terrain until you reach Hostalets d'en Bas. From there, it's a steady ascent, mostly through the forest on a trail that can get muddy and slippery after heavy rainfall, until the Hermitage of Sant Miquel de Castelló, which is located at 942 meters above sea level. From there you will descend to Joanetes.

The circular trail that from Joanetes takes to Santa Magdalena Hermitage is the most challenging one of this itinerary, with a steady ascent on uneven terrain until the Hermitage, including an almost vertical climbing wall with hooks and steps of around 100 meters. The highest altitude for the day will be 1514 meters above sea level. There is the option of taking an alternative route back to Joanetes instead of the circular route. This goes through the forest and at times the trail is quite narrow.



The trails around Olot volcanoes and in La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park are on good terrain and there is some ascent, though the incline is little.

Ruta dels Gorgs is an easy hike, with generally good terrain. However, you have to cross the river in a few places and the stones can get slippery. Similarly, the Santa Margarida de Bianya - Sant Pere Despuig circular route is an easy trail that goes through a beautiful forest and along some local farms.

The Itinerannia trail that connects El Torn to Besalú coincides with that of the GR2: both the yellow marks of Itinerannia and the white and red ones of the GR trails will be visible. The trail, which is on easy terrain (though beware of mud after heavy rains) is mostly through the forest, initially flat and with a final descent to Besalú.

Throughout the hike, you will often stop to admire the incredible views, visit small hermitages and explore the villages. On some occasions you will walk through villages and small cities, so you can stop for a drink or a meal along the way.

The day by day trail description chapter provides plenty of information on what you can expect in terms of sights, challenges and technical information for the various stages of the hike, and the next chapter provides a series of practical tips on orientation and trails.

You can walk Itinerannia trails independently, though it's recommended you don't walk them alone, especially the most difficult ones. If you want a reliable tour operator to organize everything for you – accommodation, transportation, and guides – check out Trescàlia at:

www.trescalia.com.

Itinerannia website:

www.itinerannia.net



VI

Practical Tips



To make the most of your
time in La Garrotxa

Best time to hike around La Garrotxa

Spring and Autumn are the best seasons to hike in La Garrotxa. That's when the temperatures are mild and pleasant. Though it has become increasingly hard to predict the weather, and heavy rain can actually occur even in the best season, the months of April and May in the spring, and September and October in the fall remain the best ones to visit the region, if anything because there are less tourists.

Summer is definitely nice, and the days longer. While on the one hand this means more time to walk, the heat makes it uncomfortable to hike, and you have to carry even more water than usual - besides it's harder to find accommodation. On the other hand, it may be too cold and rainy in the winter.

I hiked in October, and mostly enjoyed sunny days - though Southern Europe, including La Garrotxa was hit by a wave of terrible storms from the day before I arrived until the second day I was there, which resulted in very muddy trails for a couple of days. Temperatures in October are pleasant - between 15° and 25°, with temperatures being higher at the beginning of the month, and dropping towards the end.

Whichever season you decide to hike in La Garrotxa, make sure to be prepared for rain with rain gear and boots.

How to get to La Garrotxa

To travel to La Garrotxa you have the option of either flying to Girona or to Barcelona. The latter is the second biggest airport in the country, connected via regular and budget flights.

Once in Barcelona or Girona, you have the option of renting a car, hiring a private transfer, or using public transportation. Teisa runs several daily buses that go from Barcelona, Girona and other villages in La Garrotxa.

There is no train service to any of the smallest villages of La Garrotxa.

Difficulty level

The majority of Itinerannia trails in La Garrotxa - with the exception of the Camí dels Ganxos - are easy or, at most, moderate. While I recommend to work out as a general lifestyle tip and to be fit and prepared for the hike, you don't have to be a hiking junkie in order to walk the majority of Itinerannia trails.

If long days of walking scare you, worry not. Most trails are no more than 15 km long, and you can easily alternate them with the shorter ones.

Another way to do it is to take a day of rest between the longer hikes. There is plenty to see and do in La Garrotxa, even if you don't feel like hiking - medieval villages, small but interesting museums, excellent food, and even hot air balloon flights.

On the other hand, the short trails can be combined if you feel you can push it further.

Trail Markings

Itinerannia trails are marked in yellow. You will see vertical signs at the most important intersections, usually indicating the nearest villages, the walking distances (yellow signs with a red tip), or even the thematic itinerary (yellow sign with a green tip). In other places, you will see horizontal signs and marks, usually painted on tree trunks or rocks.

At times, next to the yellow markings of Itinerannia trails, you will see other markings such as the red and white markings of the GR trails. This happens when two or more different trails overlap.

A yellow X placed at an intersection indicates where NOT to go.

Although the trails are well marked, I recommend carrying a GPS or downloading an app that also works offline such as ViewRanger, where you can upload the gpx trail, as well as a paper map and a compass.

Do not rely on Google Maps - provided that trails are marked on Google Maps, you'd still have to rely on mobile coverage, and this is often not available along trails.

Dangers and annoyances along Itinerannia trails

To be fair, there isn't much to worry about when you hike around La Garrotxa. You won't really encounter dangers and annoyances along Itinerannia trails. I didn't see any snakes, and I did not encounter any wild animals along the trails, nor ticks, fleas or mosquitoes. I occasionally met dogs and cats living in the farms nearby. Dogs are often tied, and at times they guard the farms and may growl or bark at you for crossing their territory - but it is nothing to worry about and if anything, pretending to throw a rock at them does the trick and makes them stop. At times dogs aren't tied but in this case they are very friendly - some even followed me for a while, until I invited them to go back home.

Another thing to be aware of is the barbed wire and electrified fences. This is a common thing in La Garrotxa, and it is usually done to prevent livestock from running away. Make sure to never touch the fences and if you come across one that you need to trespass, hold it by the rubber handle - the shock won't kill you, but it's not pleasant either.

Luggage transport

I carried my own backpack for most of the hike through La Garrotxa, though on certain days I didn't have to take it with me as I was returning to the same place. You can do the same, or hire a company to take your backpack from one hotel to the other. Taxitour Garrotxa is a local company that can help you sort out luggage transportation and logistics. You can get in touch with them at taxitourgarrotxa.com/en/.

Where to stay

Itinerannia trails cross lots of nice villages so there won't be shortages of places to stay. Olot and Besalú have a wider selection of accommodation options for all budgets and tastes, whereas the choices are more limited in places like Joanetes, Santa Pau and Vall de Bianya. In most hotels and rural houses they also offer meals so you won't have to go far to find a good, earthy meal after a long day of hiking.

I have included my chosen accommodation in the day-to-day section of this guide.

Where to eat

Much like with accommodation options, eating options are generally wider in bigger cities, whereas in the smallest villages you will have a limited choice and will likely have to eat at your accommodation.

Most restaurants offer a set menu for both lunch and dinner, with prices that vary from €12 to €15 for lunch and from €15 to €18 or €20 for dinner. Set menus normally include a “primer” (a starter, usually a soup or a salad, but it can also be cold meats); a “segon” (can be a fish or meat dish, with side dishes – vegetarian and vegan options are limited); and a “postre” (dessert). Water and house wine are usually included in the price, and at times even coffee.

Hotels, rural houses and restaurants are usually very helpful with dietary requirements and willing to accommodate vegetarian and vegan guests. Make sure to let them know in advance if you intend to eat there.

While on some days you will be able to eat lunch in a city or village, at times you will find a restaurant only at the point of arrival. Make sure to warn the hotel in advance and they will be happy to prepare a packed lunch for you, and always carry some snacks and fruits to keep fuelled throughout the hike.

Tap water in restaurants, hotels and guest houses is safe to drink and very good in La Garrotxa. However, it is hard to find a fountain or a water source along the way when you hike, and though at times you will be crossing streams, there is no guarantee that water is safe to drink. A filter water bottle or purification tablets are recommended in this case.

In general, make sure to always carry enough water for the day. You can refill your bottle or buy some water in restaurants and bars in villages you pass along the way.

I have included recommendations on where to eat in my day-to-day section of this guide.

Toilets

Public toilets are hard to come by when hiking in La Garrotxa. The only ones I encountered are those in La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park. You will be able to use the toilets in the restaurants and cafés you will be crossing, but keep in mind that these are for customers only so you may want to order something before you ask to use the toilet.

For the most part, you will have to find a secluded spot in the forest. Make sure to carry a small bag to hold your garbage, toilet paper or wipes, and to take it back to the hotel with you.

Laundry

You will find public laundromats only in larger towns. Hotels and rural houses usually offer laundry service, but it will be virtually impossible to rely on it if you are staying for just one night.

Make sure to pack a good laundry soap bar and to carry quick dry items that you can easily wash in the sink and that will dry overnight. A valid and less messy alternative is to use a Scrubba Washbag, a dry bag that also works as a washing machine and which allows you to easily wash your hiking clothes.

Internet

Hotels and rural houses in La Garrotxa generally have free wifi for guests. The speed and overall quality varies from place to place, and even from room to room. If you have a EU Sim card you can use it to navigate freely, as well as to make phone calls at no additional fee than what you'd normally pay at home.

While on the trails that connect the villages the coverage is good, don't expect to have much coverage along this route or when you are deep in the forest. That's why you should not rely on online maps but use a GPS and download apps that also work offline such as ViewRanger.

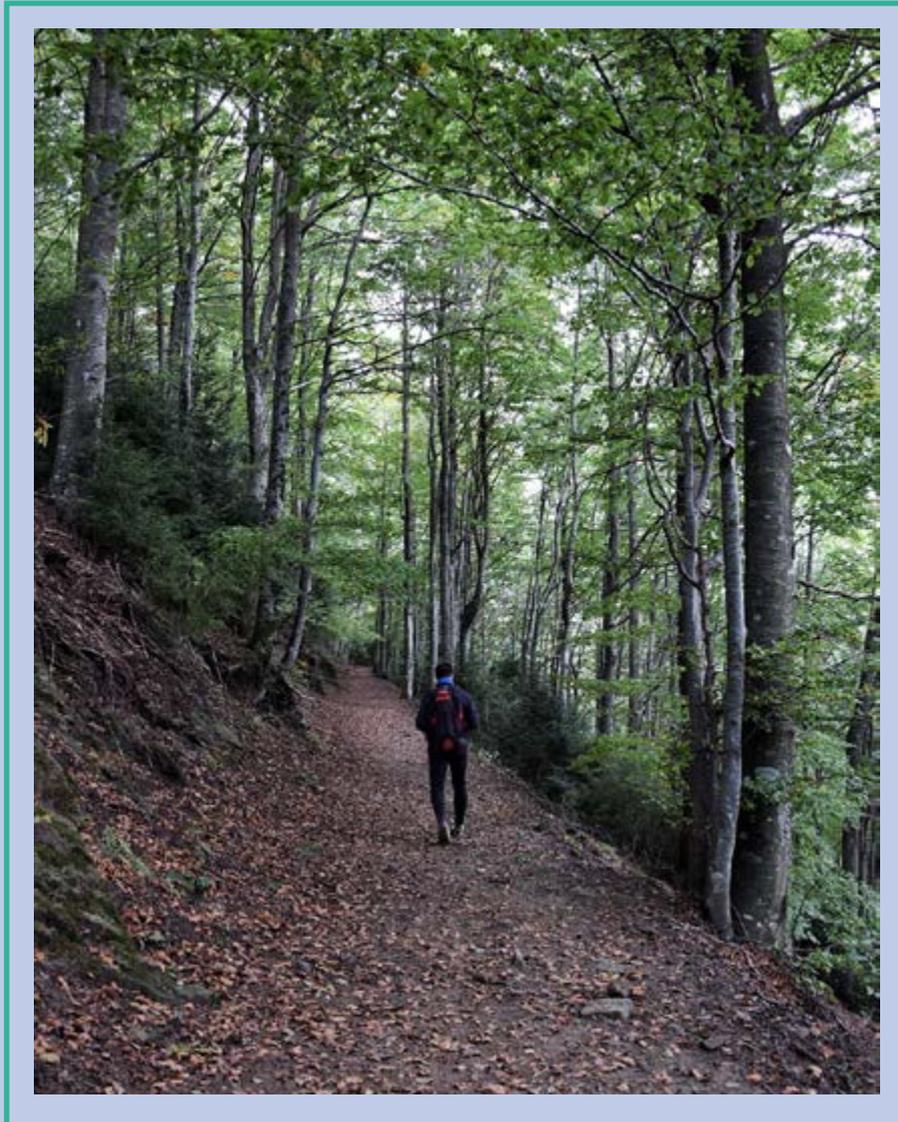
Money

Towns like Olot and larger villages such as Besalú or Santa Pau have ATMs where you can withdraw cash. Though hotels and restaurants usually accept credit card payments, it is good measure to always carry enough cash, especially if you are sleeping in more remote villages, just in case they don't.



VII

Packing Tips



Before getting into the details of the actual packing list, it's important to share some generic advice about packing for a long distance hiking trip.

Pack Light

As a general rule of thumb, and even more so if you intend to carry your backpack all the way during your hiking trip, make sure to keep your packing list essential and travel as light as possible. The last thing you need when you are walking up a mountain is a heavy backpack.

Be prepared for the rain

Rain may come at any time of year in La Garrotxa, and you are likely to get it at some point during your hike. Make sure to be prepared for that with appropriate hiking gear and clothes and shoes that are suitable even for rainy weather.

Wear Layers

This is applicable for any hike, unless you are hiking in the summer. Make sure to wear layers that you can take off or put on along the way, as you warm up from the walk or once you get cold when the temperatures start dropping towards the end of the day.

Pack quick dry items

Remember that unless you stay at the same hotel for a few nights, you won't have a chance to do laundry and will have to rely on washing your clothes in the sink or using a Scrubba Washbag. Quick dry items are generally easy to wash and dry faster than regular cotton clothes, so you can safely wash them at night to have them ready in the morning, by the time you set to hike again. They are very convenient, and will help you pack even lighter.



Essential Packing List

Backpack

I carried my backpack for most of the hike, so opted for a 40 liters one. Make sure to pick a backpack with comfortable shoulder straps, a waist band, check straps and back ventilation. Opt for one that opens from both the top and the bottom, and with easy reach side pockets where you can keep small items and a water bottle. I used a Osprey Tempest 40.

Hiking boots

Though most of the Itinerannia trails around La Garrotxa are easy or moderate, some are actually quite hard and you may want to opt for a good pair of hiking boots that provide good ankle support, keeps your feet warm and comfortable and, quite importantly, dry in case of rain. Make sure to wear boots that provide a good grip on the soil as occasionally you will be walking on uneven, rocky terrain.

Hiking poles

I am not a fan of hiking poles - I generally prefer to have my hands free to grip on the ground or on rocks if I need to. Having said so, there are occasions during which these may be useful. It's your choice to decide whether you want to carry a pair or not.

Technical shirts or t-shirts

Take no more than 2 or 3 t-shirts in technical material and that are quick dry, so you can easily wash them and wear them again.

Hiking pants

Pick a pair of zip off hiking pants so that you can turn them into shorts if it gets hot. Carry an extra pair of pants. Both pairs have to be quick dry.

Sweater of fleece

A micro-fleece is perfect as it packs light and dries quickly if you wash it. Also take a heavier one in case the temperatures drop.

Rain gear

Always pack a good Gore-Tex jacket or a rain poncho, in case it rains.

Hiking socks

Hiking socks will protect your feet from blistering. Alternatively, you can use a good pair of compression socks.

Comfort wear

Make sure to pack an extra t-shirt and a pair of leggings or tracksuit pants or comfortable pants; some spare socks; and a pair of flip flops or sandals (like Teva or Birkenstocks), so that you can wear something comfortable and cozy at the end of a long hiking day. You can even sleep in the t-shirt.

Water bottle

Make sure to bring a refillable water bottle. If you prefer, you can even opt for a camelbak-style reservoir. Make sure to also pack a water filter or purifying tablets in case you need to refill at streams.

Underwear

Swimsuit

Sunglasses

Hat

Sunscreen

Camera gear

Smartphone with navigation apps

GPS

Powerbank / spare batteries

First aid kit

Essential toiletries

VIII

Day by day trail guide



Itinerannia is a network of trails with more than 2500 km of paths and that goes through La Garrotxa, L'Alt Empordà and El Ripollès, connecting the towns of the Pyrenees to those of the Mediterranean.

Itinerannia aims at recovering the old trails and the reasoning behind it is that anybody walking the trails can pick and choose the various places they want to visit along the route. Itinerannia trails usually combine a walk in the nature with beautiful views and visits to places of historical, religious or cultural interest.

I walked roughly 90 km of the 2500 km of Itinerannia, and found this to be a fantastic introduction to La Garrotxa and all that it has to offer, especially its volcanic landscape and its beautiful medieval villages.

I walked in October, and had a mixture of gorgeous sunny and warm days with days of heavy rain, during which I was forced to find alternative activities other than hiking. At that time of year, there are very few hikers along the trails, even on a national holiday weekend. The only exception was La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone National Park, and even then it was hardly crowded.

Only on very few occasions the trail went along the main road, and since Itinerannia is meant to connect villages, I never had to sleep in camping sites but could always find a room in a small hotel or a local rural house.

I stopped walking in Besalú, but Itinerannia trails go much further and it is up to you for how long you want to hike.

One great thing about Itinerannia is that it connects and at times overlaps with other trails such as the GR, allowing you to be completely flexible in building your own itinerary.

I'd love to return one day and hike another good section. In the meantime, here's my guide for the section that goes from Sant Miquel de Pineda to Besalú.

I have included the distance, the overall walking time, the highest point, the sights and the main difficulties that you can expect on the trail, as well as daily tips on how to make the most of your time while hiking in La Garrotxa, practical information on how to get to the starting point of the hike if different from the arrival point from the previous day, and recommendations on where to stay and eat for each day of the hike.

Day 0

Sant Feliu de Pallerols



The rectory of Sant Miquel de Pineda in Sant Feliu de Pallerols is where I started my hike through La Garrotxa. The main village is located at around 45 minutes drive from Girona and Girona airport, while it's another 10 minutes drive (or a 45 minutes walk) to reach Sant Miquel de Pineda.

Things To See

Sant Feliu is one of the nicest medieval villages in La Garrotxa, where you'll have a chance to see beautifully kept bridges on the river Brugent, antique homes, a mill and even Art Nouveau buildings. You can even see the lava flows from the eruption of volcano El Traiter along the Brugent river, and reach volcano Sant Marc, which is at just 20 minutes walk from the center.

Various trails depart from the village taking to the nicest places to visit in the immediate surroundings.

Sant Miquel de Pineda is a Romanesque church, now part of the architectural heritage of Catalonia. A rector's house was built right next to it. This has been recently restored and turned into a small boutique hotel.

Where to sleep and eat

La Rectoria is a former rectory attached to a lovely church. It's been completely renovated to become one of the few places to stay and eat in Sant Feliu de Pallerols and by far the best. With comfortable, cozy rooms and located in an idyllic setting, this small boutique bed and breakfast is in and of itself a good reason to spend a night or two in Sant Feliu. Visitors can enjoy a gourmet dinner prepared using local ingredients and sipping a good glass of wine. Breakfast is just as scrumptious.



How to get to Sant Feliu de Pallerols and Sant Miquel de Pineda

There are 3 daily Teisa buses connecting Barcelona to Sant Feliu de Pallerols, and 6 daily buses from Girona. If you are traveling from Barcelona, make sure to get the bus that goes to Olot via Amer. The bus from Girona leaves from the main bus station.

Sant Miquel de Pineda is on the Olot - Girona Via Verda route. You can walk or bike there from Sant Feliu. Alternatively, you can take the Teisa bus from Barcelona or Girona and ask the driver to drop you off at the intersection for Sant Miquel de Pineda, from where it is another 10 minutes walk to La Rectoria.

Day 1

From Sant Miquel de Pineda to Joanetes

Overall walking distance: 16.4 km

Overall walking time: depending on your walking speed, around 5.5 hours, without breaks

Highest point: 942 meters above sea level

On this day you'll walk from Sant Miquel de Pineda to Joanetes. The trail starts right outside La Rectoria and goes through the forest along Via Verda to Sant Esteve d'en Bas and Hostalets

Walking time between La Rectoria and Hostalets: about 2 hours

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#).



Once in Hostalets, make sure to walk through the pretty, tiny village along the main road until you reach the church. Once there, go right following the signs to the old cemetery, from which you'll have to follow the G63 trail to Sant Miquel de Falgars until reaching a sign indicating Sant Miquel de Castelló.

From Sant Miquel de Castelló, you'll have to follow the GR2 trail (red and white signs) towards Joanetes. It'll take you about one hour to walk down and another 30 minutes to get to the entrance of the village, from where you'll reach your accommodation.



Things To See

The sights on the way from Sant Miquel to Joanetes are beautiful. You will initially go through the forest, next to some pastural land and by some old, eerie looking country houses.

One of the villages you will walk through is Sant Esteve d'en Bas, one of the many beautiful medieval villages of La Garrotxa. Even the tiny Els Hostalets d'en Bas is pretty, and so well kept it's been declared a National Historic-Artistic Monument. Make sure to observe the lovely wooden balconies full of colorful flowers on the main street, and the church.

The highlight of the day is the hermitage of Sant Miquel de Castelló and the views you'll get from up there. Once used as the chapel of the castle of the Viscount of Bas, first mentions of the church date back to the 14th century. Unfortunately, the church is usually closed so you'll likely only see it from the outside. The unique location and the views of the Vall d'en Bas from there make this a unique place to visit.

Challenges

The walk from Sant Miquel de Pineda to Hostalets is easy and pleasant; the trail is well marked and you will occasionally meet some locals walking their dogs or biking.

The second part, once you leave Hostalets, is significantly more challenging and you'll need to pay attention to follow the trail and watch your step if it has been raining and the terrain is muddy. You won't meet people along the trail, especially if you walk it during the week. It's a steady uphill walk to the Hermitage, and downhill on the way to Joanetes.

Daily Tip

If hiking during the fall, when the days start getting shorter, make sure to set out to walk nice and early so that you reach Sant Miquel de Castelló when it's still light out and you'll be able to enjoy it in its full splendor and to have great views of the valley, as well as enough time to walk down to Joanetes.

You can carry your backpack with you, or arrange to have it carried to your hotel in Joanetes.



Where to sleep and eat

There are a couple of good restaurants in Hostalets, which you will reach right by lunch time.

Ca l'Esteve is a very popular place where you can have a full set menu for €12, including a drink and a coffee.

In Joanetes you can sleep at Casa Rural El Ferrés, a basic rural house with large comfortable rooms, or at Hotel de la Vall de Bas, a beautiful boutique hotel. Both places also offer meals – home style food in the case of Casa Rural El Ferrés, gourmet dining at Hotel de la Vall de Bas.





Day 2

Circular Route via Santa Magdalena (Camí dels Ganxos)

Overall walking distance: 14.4 km if following the official circular route; 15.5 km on the alternative route I followed

Overall walking time: depending on your walking speed, around 7 to 8 hours, for either routes

Highest point: 1514 meters above sea level

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#).



The trail that from Joanetes takes to the Hermitage of Santa Magdalena, on Les Agulles mountain, and then back to Joanetes is meant to be a circular one. Despite being considered a moderate trail, it actually is a difficult one. I didn't follow the circular route in its entirety, so the below instructions are based on the alternative trail I followed.

The trail starts just outside Joanetes and goes all the way up to the Hermitage of Santa Magdalena, one of the prettiest hidden churches in La Garrotxa, via the Camí dels Ganxos and via the Puig del Soi ("Puig" is Catalan for "mountain") and El Barret.

Once you reach the iron footbridge, you will find the "ganxos" (hooks) that will help you climb the vertical wall and reach the Canal Fosca (Dark Channel) from where you can walk to a viewpoint of the Vall d'en Bas and, past a wooden fence, reach the Hermitage of Santa Magdalena del Mont.

You will climb for about 100 meters, and though the distance is short, the climb can be challenging if you aren't very strong or if you are short. My advice is not to attempt to climb the ganxos by yourself.

The way back to Joanetes is meant to be via a steep trail that follows the G61 trail to Sant Privat d'en Bas.

Alternatively, you can follow the Puigsacalm Pas dels Burros trail, going through the Puig dels Llop for beautiful views, and then walking back down via the Pas dels Burros. This trail actually goes around the Puigsacalm and you'll have to go through more hooks, but the presence of an iron rail and the distance between them makes it overall much easier to climb.

Once you make it past the hooks, you have to walk to El Barret and to the Puig del Soi again, from where it's an easy, although a bit steep, downhill walk back to Joanetes.

Things to see

The views along the trail to Santa Magdalena / Camí dels Ganxos are breathtaking.

For the most part, the hike will be through a thick forest, and if you happen to walk it in the fall, you'll have a chance to see the incredible foliage colors.

Once you'll make it to the various panoramic points, you'll get beautiful views of the valley below, and feel rewarded for the challenges faced to get there.

The nicest place to visit during the hike is the Hermitage of Santa Magdalena del Mont, which was founded by the monks of Santa Maria of Besalú between 977 and 988 and is currently administered by the municipality of Sant Privat d'en Bas.

Challenges

Camí dels Ganxos is classified as a moderate hike, but I believe it deserves a place among the most challenging hikes in La Garrotxa.

The terrain along the trail - uneven, muddy and slippery after heavy rains - represents only one of the challenges. The first part of the hike is spent going up a very steep trail, at times not easy to follow as the marks on trunks and rocks have been eroded. You have to frequently stop to check the trail on your GPS and to find the yellow marks nearby.

The part with the hooks (the “ganxos”) is completely exposed, so only go up if you feel confident you can do it, and do not attempt to go alone, for obvious safety reasons.

This trail isn't always easy to follow, and it is often necessary to stop and look for the yellow marks which at times are not easily visible. There are parts, like the hooks, that you won't easily go through without the help of others.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the trail timings in the vertical signs and even on the website of the local tourism board are highly underestimated: they both indicate an overall walking time of around 5 hours and 30 minutes, when in fact, whether you walk the Camí dels Ganxos in all its length or follow the combination of trails I did, you will be walking between 7 and 8 hours.



Daily tip

Do not walk this trail by yourself. Make sure to join a group, better if led by a local expert guide, as it is significantly more challenging than it is made out to be.

Give yourself plenty of time to complete this trail, starting as early as possible so that you can complete it in daylight.

Make sure to carry enough food and water (at least 2 liters) for the day, as there are no restaurants, coffee shops or even kiosks, fountains or water





Day 3

From Les Preses to Olot City Center via Montsacopa and Montolivet

Overall walking distance: 15 km

Overall walking time: around 4 hours at a leisurely pace

Highest point: 527 meters above sea level

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#) and [here](#).



The third stage actually starts right by the church of Sant Pere de Les Preses, which is a bit far away from Joanetes. It will take you an hour and a half to reach Olot, where you will be hiking Volcà Montsacopa and Volcà Montolivet, and where you will be spending the night.

From the church, follow the signs to Olot Pocafarina that will take you behind the municipal pool, and you'll soon find yourself on the crater of El Racó volcano. Continuing on the trail, you will head downhill towards Pocafarina, a nice suburb of Olot.



Keep walking along the beautiful lava flows and the dry volcanic stone walls in the area known as El Bosc de Tosca until you reach Olot. You will enter the city via the Parc Nou, and crossing the city center you will reach the trail to Volcà Montsacopa. You can follow two different routes to get to the crater: walk one up and the other one back down. However, make sure to pick the trail that goes through the center of town and then behind it. It will take you around 20 minutes to walk all the way to the crater, and then another 20 minutes to go down on the other side, by the cemetery.

Once you get to the cemetery, it is an easy walk to the church of Sant Pere Màrtir. This can be easily spotted thanks to the massive carving of the saint's head on façade. You'll find a beautiful, airy square right behind the church, and a nice viewpoint to admire the city from. The trail to Volcà Montolivet begins there.

From Volcà Montolivet, you'll walk back towards the other side of Olot, and end up walking by the river, through an area known as El Tossols. Once you get to the Font de la Gruta, you'll be able to easily reach the city center.

Things To See

The highlight of this stage is the beautiful views of Olot you'll get from Volcà Montsacopa crater, as well as those you'll get from the viewpoint of Plaça de Sant Pere Màrtir. Having said so, you will have plenty to see and do throughout the day - other than walking, obviously.

During the first hour, you will be walking along the crater of Volcà El Racó, though you will hardly realize this used to be a volcano as the crater is completely covered by a thick, beautiful forest.

One of the nicest things to see during this stage is Parc Nou, considered one of the nicest parks in La Garrotxa. Inside Parc Nou you will find the Volcano Museum, located in a beautiful 19th century villa. It is an excellent place to learn about the formation and activity of volcanoes, with a strong focus on those of La Garrotxa.

You will also have the opportunity to walk through the center of Olot. I recommend to spend one extra day in the city, to rest from hiking and to take the opportunity to explore the center, which is packed with interesting small museums such as the Museu dels Sants, where you will find a very good exhibit about the production of statues of saints that Olot used to be famous for and which is housed in a beautiful neo-gothic building.

Other good museums in Olot include the Museu de La Garrotxa, which has a good temporary as well as permanent exhibit of local history and art pieces of the School of Olot.

Olot is packed with good examples of Art Nouveau. The most famous building is Casa Gassiot, on Carrer Sant Rafel. The Firal (market place) is where the Solà-Morales House (which in 2000 was included in the European Art Nouveau Route) and the Gaietà-Vila House are located.

Challenges

The initial part of the trail to Olot is actually quite easy, on very good terrain that hardly presents any challenge.

The combination of various trails on this stage make this a long walking day. However, the only challenge (if any) will be walking up the craters of the volcanoes. This part of the Itinerània trail is easy to follow, with very clear vertical signs. The only place where the directions get somewhat confusing and you may need to consult your GPS ViewRanger is once you reach the crater of Volcà Montolivet - the way to get back to Olot isn't marked as well as the rest of the trail.

Keep in mind the trails can get quite muddy after heavy rain.

Daily Tip

Make sure need to arrange transportation to get to Sant Pere de les Preses, as this is quite away from Joanetes.

You can even ask for your backpack to be taken at your hotel in Olot, or drop it off yourself as soon as you arrive there, before continuing to the volcanoes.

You will be arriving to Olot right around lunch time, so you'll have an opportunity to eat at one of the many good restaurants.

Where to sleep and eat

There are several excellent restaurants in Olot, many of them adhering to the Cuina Volcanica movement and with a heavy focus on local ingredients.

La Quinta Justa is located in a beautiful building in the center of Olot. It serves delicious dishes of volcanic cuisine, which are prepared using locally grown ingredients. Make sure to make reservations during the weekend.

La Cuina del Mercat is a small restaurant in the center of town, right by the covered market.

Ferrer Xocolata is a fantastic patisserie and chocolaterie located in an art nouveau building where you can gorge on delicious pralines and even attend a chocolate making workshop.

Olot has several good accommodation options. I stayed at Hotel La Perla, which has clean, comfortable rooms and an onsite dining room.





Day 4

From La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park ending in Santa Pau

Overall walking distance: 13 km; 19 km if you decide to walk all the way to Santa Pau

Overall walking time: around 4 hours and 30 minutes at a leisurely pace

Highest point: 439 meters above sea level

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#).



La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park ought to be included in any hiking trip to La Garrotxa. The park, most of which is actually privately owned land, has 40 volcanic cones and more than 20 lava flows, and a great number of excellent walking routes that overlap Itinerannia trails.

You can mix and match several trails in just one visit, and get to see a good portion of the park this way.

I recommend following a circular route that starts at Can Serra, one of the two parkings right outside the park, and goes to the Fageda d'en Jordà, Volcà Santa Margarida, Volcà Croscat, and allows you to take in beautiful views of Volcà del Puig de la Costa. Alternatively, you can start in the Santa Margarida parking lot.



Things to see

La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park is a very interesting place to visit, and while hiking you will encounter several places of natural, historical, cultural and religious interest.

To make the most of La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park and all that it has to offer, I suggest hiring a local guide who will share information on the points of natural and historical interest you'll come across. I hired a guide via Corriol Serveis and was very pleased with his service.

Make sure to stop at the Fageda d'en Jordà, which sits on the lava flows of Volcà Croscat. This is a beautiful beech forest with several volcanic hummocks (tossols) that originate from the volcano. The forest is a fantastic place for a walk, especially in the fall when you'll have a chance to see the foliage colors.

At the center of the Fageda d'en Jordà you can visit the dairy factory "La Fageda", where you can even buy yogurt, milk and cheese. It's a popular place for families with children.

The highlight of the day is the crater of Volcà Santa Margarida, a volcano which had several eruptive phases of both the strombolian and the phreatomagmatic kind. At the

center of the crater you will find the beautiful Romanesque church of Santa Margarida de Sacot. This was destroyed during the earthquakes of 1427-1428 and finally rebuilt in 1865. Unfortunately, it is only visible from the outside as the church is only open for special functions.

Another nice church in the park is that of Sant Miquel de Sacot. In this case, the original Romanesque building was enlarged in the 18th century with an addition in the neoclassical style.

Volcà Croscat is one of the most interesting things to see. This is a strombolian volcano that reaches an elevation of 160 meters above sea level. It's supposed to be the youngest one of La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park. Volcà Croscat was used as a quarry to extract volcanic material. Extractions have stopped now, but the results of the excavations can still be seen.

Challenges

Most of the trails in La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park are moderate, and some easy or very easy, so suitable for families with children. The trails are easy to follow, marked by way of cream color vertical signs with a purple tip. The terrain is good for walking. As you will be mostly walking through the forest, you'll be in the shade most of the time.



Daily Tip

Make sure to arrange transportation to one of the car parks that mark the entrance to La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park. Teisa has buses that go from the center of Olot to both Can Serra and Santa Margarida parking lots, and from there to Santa Pau.

The hiking itineraries for La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park can be downloaded from the website of the tourism board of La Garrotxa, but please be advised that information is only available in Catalan. This is the trail I followed.

Most trails in the park are also suitable for mountain bikes.

Where to sleep and eat



There are a couple of restaurants along this walking route in La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park: Restaurant de Santa Margarida and Restaurant Masnou. If you would rather walk and save time, make sure to pack some lunch and plenty of water for the day. You can eat lunch in one of the rest areas right inside the park, where you will find tables, benches, toilets and even fountains.

Santa Pau is one of the smallest medieval villages of La Garrotxa, and accommodation and eating options are limited. I stayed at Pensió Hostal Can Menció, which is run by a lovely local family. The rooms are basic, but clean and comfortable and if you are lucky you may get a view of the main square and the church. The owners also have a coffee shop downstairs, where you can get some basic meals and snacks. Otherwise, you can go to Cal Fesol, which serves the famous white beans of Santa Pau, or the fancier Cal Sastre, on the main square. Please beware that restaurants are closed on Sunday evenings and all day on Monday.



Day 5

Santa Pau Circular Route -Ruta dels Gorgs-

Overall walking distance: 8 km

Overall walking time: no more than 3 hours, including various stops

Highest point: 491 meters above sea level

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#).



Stage 5 of this hiking trip around La Garrotxa is all around Santa Pau. Here, you will find the Ruta dels Gorgs and Ruta de les Fonts. Both of them leave right from the center of the village, and will take you to some scenic natural pools which, in the hottest months, will give you the opportunity to take a break from the heat.

Both trails are circular routes that start and end in Santa Pau.

I followed Ruta dels Gorgs, a nice easy trail that doesn't see many people during the week, especially in the fall.



Things to see

Despite being a short hike, the Ruta dels Gorgs offers some beautiful views. The name of the trail (gorgs in Catalan means “pool”) indicates what you can expect to see during the hike.

Among the natural pools you'll be able to see there are the Gorg de Caga-Rates and the Gorg Blau. Gorg de Can Cutilla is right by the camping site of Mas Pautxet, though it is a bit more difficult to reach as once you get to the camping site the marks are more difficult to follow.

Once you walk back towards Santa Pau, you'll get a chance to visit the Santuari dels Arcs, a small countryside church which origins are still uncertain (some sources date it to 496 AC, others to the 9th century).

Needless to say, visiting Santa Pau is a must. This is one of the best preserved medieval villages of La Garrotxa, built around a Baron's castle dating back to the 13th century.

Since today's stage is quite shorter, you'll have a good opportunity to fully explore Santa Pau and its medieval center, with the porticoed square and the church of Santa Maria. For an incredible view of the old center from afar, go to the terrace right by Can Pauet coffee shop.

Challenges

Most of this stage is easy with no major challenge, but keep in mind you'll have to cross the river in several places and the stones may be slippery. Also be advised that the trail gets confusing once you arrive to Mas Patxet camping site: the signs stop and you'll need a GPS to get to the nearby natural pool.

Daily Tip

The trails of stages 5 and 6 are rather short, and you can combine them (provided you have previously arranged transportation to get to the starting point of stage 6). A good way to make the most of your time if you don't want to hike more is to delay the hike and go on a sunrise hot air balloon ride. Daily rides depart from Vol de Coloms. The views of the volcanic region of La Garrotxa from the sky are simply stunning.







Day 6

Santa Margarida de Bianya - Sant Pere Despuig circular route

Overall walking distance: 2.5 km

Overall walking time: 1 hour

Highest point: 480 meters above sea level

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#).



The starting point of stage 6 is the church of Santa Margarida de Bianya. This is a nice, short circular hike that will first take you through a beautiful forest, and around the lovely countryside of La Garrotxa.

The trail starts right behind the church, and soon enters an ancient oak forest. Within 20 minutes you will reach a manor house and, soon afterwards, another. Going back to the church you will be walking on the main road, and after a turn, along more farms before the church is once again visible.



Things to see

The trail starts right behind the church of Santa Margarida, which dates back to the 10th century, though it was first documented in the 12th. The rectory next to it is now a beautiful boutique hotel.

The best sight along this trail is that of the Pyrenees from the hermitage of Santa Margarida. During the walk, you will have the opportunity to experience one of the oldest forests in La Garrotxa, and will see a beautifully isolated manor house where the friendly dogs and cats on site will welcome you.

Make sure to stop at the church of Sant Pere Despuig, a beautiful Romanesque church which dates back to the 10th century, and has a well kept bell tower.

Challenges

This circular route is short and easy with no real difficulties. There aren't many signs along the way, but the trail though the forest is clear and easy to follow. Make sure to ask for a map at your hotel, or download the track as suggested on page 66.

Daily Tip

There is no public transport connection between Santa Pau and Hostalnou de Bianya. Either take a bus to Olot and then another one to Vall de Bianya, taking care to ask the driver to drop you off at Hostalnou, or ask your hotel in Santa Pau to arrange a transfer.

Since stages 5 and 6 are rather short, you may wish to combine them in one day.

Where to sleep and eat

Hostalnou de Bianya is one of the smallest villages of La Garrotxa, so eating and accommodation options are limited. I stayed at Hotel Mas La Ferreria, which is located right by the church of Santa Margarida de Bianya. The hotel has beautiful rooms with large balconies and incredible views of the Pyrenees. They serve breakfast and dinner.







Day 7

From El Torn to Besalú

Overall walking distance: 11 km

Overall walking time: 3.5 hours

Highest point: 368 meters above sea level

Download the track on Wikiloc [here](#).



The final stage of this hiking itinerary through La Garrotxa will take you from El Torn, a small village built around the church of Sant Andreu del Torn, to Besalú, the most famous village in La Garrotxa.

You'll have to follow the Itinerannia trail that overlaps with the GR2, so you'll be seeing both the yellow marks of Itinerannia, and the white and red ones of the GR.



For around 2 km the trail follows the river El Ser. You will then reach the church of Sant Fruitós d'Ossinyà and from there walk along the dirt road and then through the forest until reaching Urbanització Comtal – nothing more than a few houses – before reaching Besalú.

You'll enter the village from the parking lot located right by the visitors' center, from where you can cross the beautiful bridge that is Besalú's most iconic spot.

Things to see

Make sure to pay a visit to Sant Fruitós d'Ossinyà, a beautiful Romanesque style church that dates back to the 10th century, and like most of the Romanesque churches in La Garrotxa is completely isolated. There is a farm at the back, so you may meet someone who's working there, as well as the animals (donkeys and a couple of friendly dogs).

The highlight of stage 7 is, quite obviously, Besalú. Thought to be the prettiest medieval village in La Garrotxa, Besalú has a lot to offer to visitors and I recommend spending at least a full day there to explore it.

Right on the banks of the River Fluvià, the most iconic attraction in Besalú is Pont Vell, the bridge that was built in the 12th century in Romanesque style.

Make sure to walk down the stairs by the tourist information center before you cross the bridge: the views of the village and of the bridge itself from the bank of the river are incredible.

Other must sees in Besalú include the Church of Sant Vicenç, which dates back to 977 and is where the remains of the True Cross of the Christian faith are allegedly held; the Monastery of Sant Pere, which was founded in 977 and is located in a pretty, airy square; the nearby 12th century Casa Cornellà (also known as Casa Llaudes), built by the Cornellà family and considered one of the best preserved examples of Romanesque style civil buildings in Catalonia.

Make sure to also pay a visit to the Jewish mikveh baths, a testimony of the strong Jewish heritage of this part of Catalonia, and which once were used for religious ceremonies; as well as the Jewish Quarter.

Finally, you may also want to pay a quick visit to the Museum of Miniatures, which has an intricate collection of miniatures you'll have to observe through a magnifying lens.

Challenges

This stage doesn't present any real challenge. You will be walking through the forest for the most part, and you'll have to pay attention in case it has rained recently as there is quite a bit of mud. The trail is easy to follow and well marked.

Daily Tip

Make sure to arrange a transfer between Hostalnou de Bianya and El Torn, the starting point of the hike, as there is no public transportation. It is a 30 minutes ride by car.

Where to sleep and eat

Besalú has some excellent places to stay and restaurants. Castell de Besalú is thought to be the best restaurant in town, along with Pont Vell and Can Quei.

Casa Marcial is a great boutique hotel with views of the bridge and a nice garden.

How to get from Besalú to Girona or Barcelona

There are direct buses from Besalú to Girona every 45 minutes; and 4 buses per day to Barcelona.





Thank you

Gràcies

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