

CYCLE TOURISM **IN TERRES DE L'EBRE** *DOSSIER FOR PROFESSIONALS*



Index

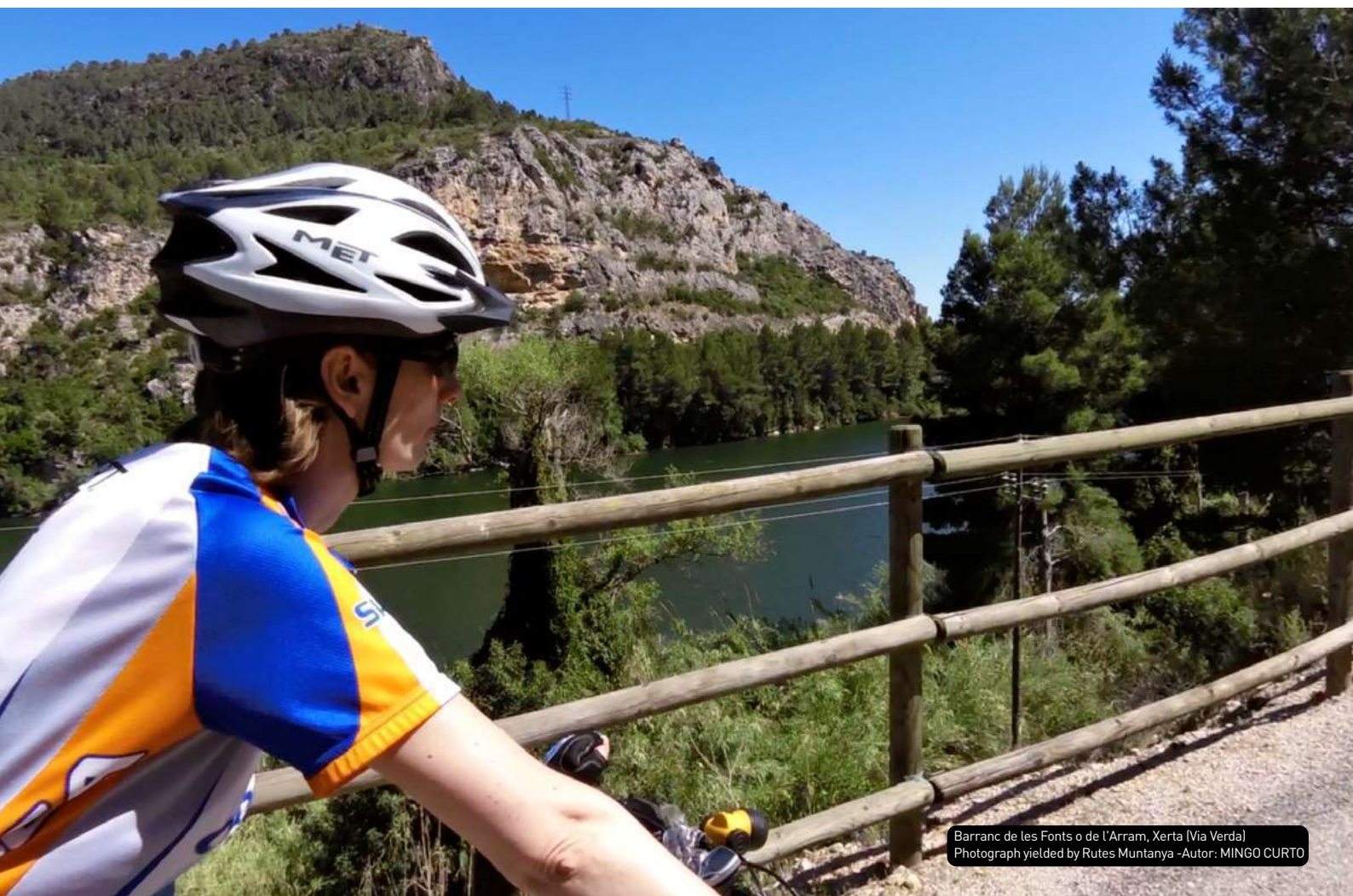
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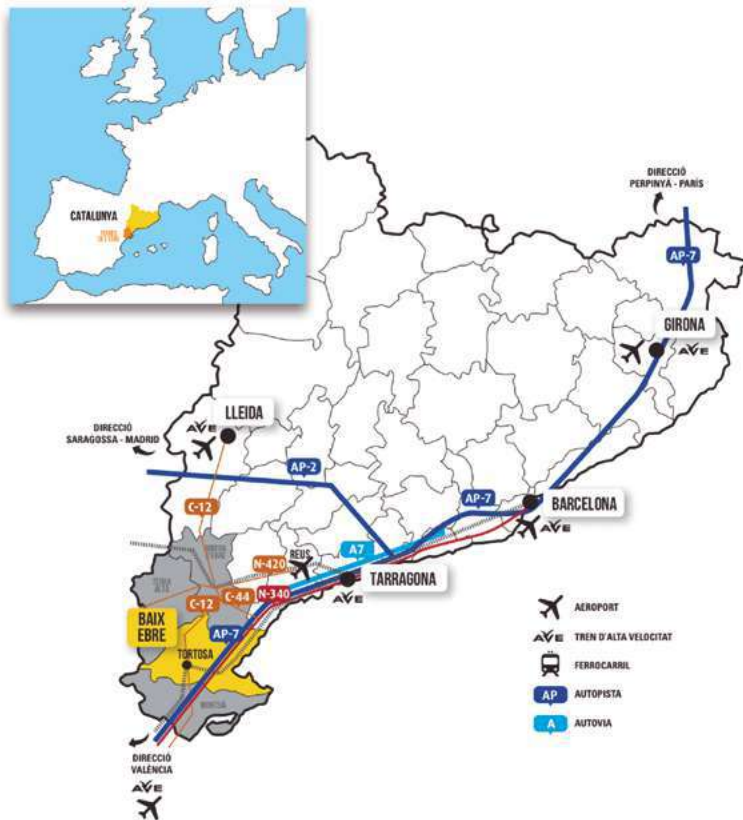


1. Terres de l'Ebre: destination cycling enthusiasts

“You name it, here you have it” seems to be the case in these lands, and make them quite exceptional if not unique. Terres de l'Ebre is a mosaic, between the Mediterranean sea and the southern most part of the coastal Catalan ranges, whichever way you look at it, whether you are admiring its scenic beauty or its cultural and culinary life. Nor far removed from more frequented tourist resorts and built up areas, this relatively small area is criss-crossed by backroads, lanes and paths, opening it up to the walker, cyclist and motorist alike. There really is a bit of everything in Terres de l'Ebre:

- ▶ First and foremost, the calm waters of the River Ebro, that have shaped this land on the last stage of its journey to the sea.
- ▶ Mile upon mile of largely unspoilt deserted beaches give way to a coastline carved out into lovely, isolated coves.
- ▶ Imposing mountains like Massís dels Ports, the Montsià and Llaberia ranges, the Cardó range or the hills of Tivissa-Vandellòs.
- ▶ Fruits, cereals, rice, wine and olives are all harvested here, feasts for the eyes as well as for lovers of good food.
- ▶ Fishing villages like L'Ametlla de Mar, L'Ampolla or les Cases d'Alcanar and inland, towns like Paüls, Horta de Sant Joan, Arnes, Miravet or Ulldecona, each with its own special charm.
- ▶ Caves and World Heritage cave paintings bear witness to the fact that Man has always lived here, cultivated the lands and lived well.
- ▶ The episcopal and Renaissance city of Tortosa, an example of once powerful, ancient cities.
- ▶ Grassroots culture steeped in tradition and extraordinary festivals.
- ▶ High quality and varied cuisine borne out of local produce.
- ▶ Above all the Ebro Delta marks out Terres de l'Ebre, a marvel of Nature where the mightiest river in Spanish territory surrenders itself to the Mediterranean.





Hardly surprising then, that Terres de l'Ebre has been home to many and varied cultures down through the centuries: Iberians, Romans, Muslims, Jews and Christians have all settled here because of the prevailing strategic and trading conditions. They have left their mark on everything from the folklore and monuments to the language and character of the people.

Much to the delight of its inhabitants, in 2013 Terres de l'Ebre was honoured to be declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, conferring a status that has become key in launching the area onto the world stage.

Terres de l'Ebre, with its more than 1.000 kms of routes of different types, has a huge range at the disposal of cyclists of all shades and ability. Cycle tourism could be at a leisurely pace to enjoy the scenery, a safe place to try out road biking or MTB trails of varying levels of difficulty.

2. Internationally recognised distinctive landscapes

—Biosphere Reserve:

The Ebro River is the soul and the backbone of Terres de l'Ebre, to whom it owes its very name. The might of a river like the Ebro has made its mark on the landscape and its inhabitants since time immemorial.

That doesn't mean that its value as a tourist attraction is derived solely from the charming nature of the river. In fact, if this area pleasantly surprises its visitors, it is because of its contrasting diversity.

The Terres de l'Ebre Biosphere Reserve takes in two of the most spectacular protected areas in Catalonia: the Ebro Delta Nature Reserve and the Ports Nature Reserve, among others like the Serra de Cardó.

These natural environments, with their diverse ecosystems and habitats are ideal for all sorts of open-air activities, every type of cycle tourism, walking, horseriding or birdwatching.

Contrasting scenery is all within a short distance, from the most southerly beech trees in Europe, in the Ports Massif, to the miles of dunes in the Ebro Delta.

As if that wasn't enough, the culture, history and cuisine of Terres de l'Ebre have played a fundamental role in its selection for international recognition.

Some examples are the cave paintings given World Heritage status by UNESCO in 1998, architectural heritage gems like the Roman road Via Augusta, the dam at Xerta, Suda castle, the city walls and cathedral at Tortosa, the Templar castle at Miravet, modernist wineries, Renaissance buildings at d'Horta de Sant Joan...

However you look at it, Terres de l'Ebre is clearly a special place: Nature, art, culture and, of course, excellent food. Local produce gets all the credit, and bears quality certifications, such as Designation of Origin (DO) or Protected Geographical Indication (IGP). Some of the most well known examples of locally produced food are: rice, wine, citrus fruits, honey, olive oil, oysters, prawns, mussels, eels and fish sourced in river, sea or lagoon. A treat for those who like to live well.



Tivissa
Photograph yielded by Patronat d Turisme de
la Diputació de Tarragona - Terres de l'Ebre

—The Ebro Delta Protected Area

Everyone says the Ebro Delta is one of the loveliest and most delightful areas in Catalonia. It is the third most important wetland in the western Mediterranean after Doñana and Camarga in France. It was declared a Nature Reserve in 1983.

These days it is a nature reserve of the first order and the richest array of flora and fauna are found here. The 7.802 hectare area falls between the counties of Baix Ebre and Montsià. The mouth of the river as it meets the Mediterranean is made up of: bays, beaches, dunes, salt marshes, riverbank woods, coastal lagoons, river islands, springs, rice fields, mirages...

All this provides a real paradise for very many living things (birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates...), each adapted to the different habitats. Although 65% of the Delta's land is intensively farmed, this rich biodiversity lives harmoniously alongside the human activity.

Devotees of birdwatching are certainly in no doubt about the Delta's importance, but you don't have to be an expert in birds to enjoy gazing at nesting birds and to be impressed by the sight of flamingos among more than 340 species that are found here. This is especially true when you consider that in Europe as a whole there are only 700 catalogued species.

The Delta is the ideal place to take to the saddle and start pedalling; in fact cycling has always been the traditional way of getting around here. There is no better way to enjoy the natural surroundings than from the seat of a bicycle on the network of lanes and tracks that have been adapted with cycle tourism in mind.

— Els Ports Protected Area

Such was the biodiversity of this area, that protecting it was put forward way back in 1932. It was hardly surprising, given land conservation factors present there, that in 2014 it was declared a Special Conservation Zone (ZEC), in recognition of the importance of its habitats at a European level. Today The Ports is the largest conservation area on Catalonia's Mediterranean coast.

The Protected Area is part of a massif which extends through Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia before merging with the Iberian Mountain Range. Its vast 800 square kms is home to more than a thousand species of flora, the most southerly naturally occurring beech forest in Europe and important species such as the mountain goat or Bonelli's eagle.

Clearly Els Ports open up many opportunities to the visitor, most notably to Nature lovers, walkers, hikers, climbers and cavers. Among certain groups of Catalan walkers, the area stands out as the range where all the different Mediterranean mountain environments come together. From its highest point at Mont Caro, (1.441 m) you can see both the Pyrenees and Majorca on a clear day.

Eventhough Els Ports are largely unknown to the general public, their immense, wild expanses undiscovered, it does not mean that they are only of interest to the most experienced of walkers and mountaineers. While it is true that challenging cycle trails and walks are plentiful here, when the park was declared a Nature Reserve in 2001, easy paths were opened up to the general public so that even families can enjoy getting to know the area.

3. The bicycle is the ideal means of transport to get to know Terres de l'Ebre

Terres de l'Ebre and especially Baix Ebre, have great potential as a mecca for cycle tourism, whatever the state of fitness of the cyclist. A firm favourite with Europeans, for whom it is their go to method of transport, the bicycle is also a great way to get around on holidays and weekend breaks and is an increasingly popular form of leisure. A growing trend can be seen in the numbers of people taking up cycling and in the range of tourist offers available.

Cycle tourism is a relaxing way to discover Terres de l'Ebre and its varied scenery. The converted train track "Via Verde de la Val de Zafán" which goes through Terra Alta to Tortosa is ideal for families and groups of friends to cycle along together, taking in the scenery on the way. The same can be said for various stages of the "Camí Natural de l'Ebre". In fact the bicycle will take the visitor to some of the most out-of-the-way spots on the Delta Ebro Nature Reserve. Here lanes lead to quiet beaches past lagoons and fields of rice.

To sum up, the area has a network of more than 1.000 kilometres of lanes and quiet country roads apart from the "Via Verda" which is over 100 kilometres and completely free of traffic.

The Ports Nature Reserve and the mountainous parts of Terra Alta and Ribera d'Ebre have a network of routes for Nature lovers and mountain bikers. Montsià is also good MTB territory with its paths winding around hilltops, past ravines, olive groves and tiny towns rich in history.

One of the great things about the lanes, trails and cycleways in Terres de l'Ebre is that they link the two nature reserves (The Ports and the Delta), and the most interesting agricultural areas in the region too.

Combining cycling with visits to local attractions and cultural sites is made easy by the interconnectedness of all this in Terres de l'Ebre, and stays can be repeated or lengthened accordingly. Themed breaks designed for the special interests of the visitor result from this proximity: excursions to fruit orchards, vineyards and olive groves, or to see traditional fishing practices, cultural events and learn about heritage and historical memory are all within easy reach.

Some of the best known cycleways in Terres de l'Ebre are:

— Via Verda de la Val de Zafán (Puebla de Híjar-Alcañiz-Tortosa)

Without a doubt the flagship of cycleways and an excellent railway conversion for the purpose of cycling. The Via Verda tourist route makes use of the old train track of Val de Zafán, which linked Tortosa with the counties of Matarranya and Aragon.

The track originated at the end of the XIX century, when the Aragon government sought to create a route to a seaport to export its goods. The railway was opened in 1942 and functioned for 31 years until it closed on 17 September 1973.

The conversion to cycle route has been very successful as it is ideal for the general public and many continue pedalling to the mouth of the Ebro. It goes over bridges, under tunnels, between valleys and steep-sided rock faces before reaching the rice fields.

Forty-nine kms of the cycleway fall inside the Terres de l'Ebre Biosphere Reserve. From la Puebla de Híjar to Tortosa the Via Verda passes through

the towns of Arnes, Horta de Sant Joan, Bot, Prat de Comte, Pinell de Brai, Benifallet, Xerta, Aldover, EMD Jesús, and Roquetes and is 100kms in total. The very slight climbs on the route which only varies by 400 metres accumulated, make it easy and suitable for those on foot and on horseback too. It includes a section for the disabled.



Pont de l'Arc, Bot (Via Verda)
Photograph yielded by Rutes Muntanya -Autor: MINGO CURTO

The track passes through tunnels some of which are lit, and takes in bridges, aqueducts and former railway stations. Some stations have been restored and offer bike hire, accommodation and restaurant facilities.

— Camí Natural de l'Ebre - GR 99

The Ebro is the longest and mightiest river on Spanish soil, as well as the only big river in the Iberian peninsula to have its mouth in the Mediterranean. Much has been written about the Ebro and it has become emblematic.

It passes through the autonomous regions of Cantabria, Castilla and Leon, la Rioja, the Basque Country, Navarra, Aragon and Catalonia where it ends its journey, forming the geographical feature of the Delta. It is spectacular as it flows through Catalonia, passes the Sebes Nature Reserve and winds its way past Riba-roja, Miravet and Flix, three intriguing riverside towns.

The "Camí Natural de l'Ebre", links up with a number of other ancient pathways on its way through Catalonia which together provide excellent walking. They are Camí de Sirga, Camí de Sant Jaume, la Via Augusta, the GR 7 as well as the GR 171 and the GR 92 that take in the coast.

Most of the path is suitable for bicycles, especially from Benifallet onwards, where it links up with the Via Verda, and from Tortosa to Riumar. Up river, in the county of Ribera d'Ebre more sections of the path are being adapted for cycling.

— Eurovelo 8

Eurovelo 8 is one of a European network of paths. The Eurovelo project sets out to connect the whole of Europe by means of 15 long distance bicycle routes.

Also known as the Mediterranean Route, Eurovelo 8 will link Greece and Spain following the curve of the Mediterranean and going through some of its main tourist resorts. When the route passes through Catalonia and Terres de l'Ebre it follows the old Roman road, Via Augusta, a section that is likely to become one of the most popular in the network.

— Cycleways on the Ebro Delta

The Ebro Delta Protected Area has cycle routes galore to offer its visitors. The many and varied routes, covering more than 200 kilometres, explore the most important wetland in the Mediterranean and lead into hidden corners that will fascinate the visitor.

In fact, there are plenty who say that the Ebro Delta is the perfect place for some family cycle outings, even with very small children. Logical really, the delta is so flat that the wheels seem to go round on their own, leaving the rider with nothing to do but enjoy the surroundings and make sure they don't fall off!

All cycle routes are well described in leaflets that can be found on the Reserve's website.



— Trails in Els Ports Protected Area

Els Ports Protected Area is a magnificent place for mountain bikers. Local tourist information offices and the Terres de l'Ebre website can provide MTB trails which open up this majestic, untamed mountain range to MTB fans.

Those looking for challenging routes will not be disappointed. The trail that climbs up through the mountain pass that leads to Caro, at the top of the range, is only for the most able riders.

The trails above 1.000 metres altitude through the Cova Avellanes forest (Baix Ebre) or Refalguerí, towards Matarranya (Terol) or Tinença de Benifassà (Castellon), take the rider through some of most refreshing and exhilarating areas in these parts.

— Other local cycle paths

Apart from the long distance hiking and cycling pathways, all four counties that make up Terres de l'Ebre have their own local paths connecting the towns, villages and lesser known beauty spots. The following [leaflet](#) details 17 routes that can be done from the Via Verda de la Val de Zafán.

In the county of Terra Alta, the Via Verda has a network of routes added on which complement it. The network runs to a total of 266 kms between 12 towns and villages using local lanes which are shared with motor vehicles. The routes are of varying difficulty and suitable for both touring cyclists and MTB.

Even with all the existing provision Terres de l'Ebre continues to widen the scope of what is on offer for cyclists. Progress is being made by Baix Ebre council to convert an 11 kilometre stretch of former railway from Tortosa to la Cava, right in the heart of the Ebro Delta. It will be completely traffic free and will link the Via Verda de la Val de Zafán with the Camí Natural de l'Ebre.

The cycle tourism routes can be adapted according to the requirements of the user, be they are families with children or active seniors, groups of friends, seasoned MTB riders or road racing enthusiasts. Promoting cycling in particular underlines and draws attention to the excellent infrastructures that are already in existence.

It is worth mentioning that more and more offers are coming onto the table that involve the use of electric bicycles. A growing demand exists to enjoy longer rides from those who are not able to use standard bicycles.

4. Receiving the visitor

Terres de l'Ebre has plentiful high quality tourist accommodation well distributed in coastal and inland towns: hotels, campsites, country houses, guest houses, apartments, b&bs, hostels, ...

In the four counties that make up Terres de l'Ebre there are 222 different places for tourists to stay including 96 hotels, 14 campsites and 112 country houses making a total of 13.425 available bed providing for every type of budget and kind of traveller.

Accommodation providers are increasingly aware that they must look after the needs of cyclists by offering repair services and housing for the bikes. At the same time, there is a growing number of specialist tour operators and bicycle hire companies.

The Terres de l'Ebre website www.terresdelebre.travel includes information on the full range of tourist offers: accommodation, restaurants, service providers, activities, museums, shops, hire companies and tourist information offices.

Visitors are well served by tourist information points and offices, including in both Protected Areas (Els Ports and the Ebro Delta), where they can find details on everything to do with the cycleways and related services.



Route to the Ullals de Baltasar, Amposta (Delta de l'Ebre)
Photograph yielded by Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre
- Author: MARIANO CEBOLLA

Baix Ebre

Centre d'informació del Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre Ecomuseu
Tel. 977 489 679
C/ Doctor Martí Buera, 22
43580 - Deltebre

Punt d'informació turística Benifallet
Tel. 977 462 334
Av. Lluís Companys, 3
43512 - Benifallet

Oficina de turisme El Perelló
Tel. 977 491 021
Lluís Companys, 2
43519 - El Perelló

Oficina de turisme L'Ampolla
Tel. 977 593 011
Rda. del mar, 12
43859 - L'Ampolla

Centre de visitants del Parc Natural dels Ports
Tel. 977 500 845
Tel. 977 504 012
Av. de la val de Zafán, s/n
45550 - Roquetes

Oficina de turisme Camarles
Tel. 977 470 040
Trenta-u, s/n
43894 - Camarles

Punt d'informació turística L'Aldea
Tel. 977 450 012
Av. Catalunya, s/n
43896 - L'Aldea

Oficina de Turisme Tortosa - Jardins del Príncep
Tel. 977 449 648
Tel. 977 442 005
Pujada al Castell de la Suda, 1
43500 - Tortosa

Ebre Terra Oficina Comarcal de Turisme del Baix Ebre
Tel. 977 480 627
Carrer Sant Miquel, 1
43580 - Deltebre

Oficina de turisme Deltebre Consell de Riumar
Tel. 977 489 309 ext. 4
C/ Coll verd, s/n
Nucli de Riumar
43580 - Deltebre

Oficina de turisme L'Ametlla de Mar
Tel. 977 456 477
Av. Amistat Hispano Italiana, s/n
43860 - L'Ametlla de Mar

Punt d'Informació Turística Centre Interpretació del Renaixement
Tel. 977 444 668
C/ Sant Domènec, 13
43500 - Tortosa

Oficina de turisme de Catalunya a les Terres de l'Ebre a Tortosa
Tel. 977 585 871
Tel. 977 449 648
Rambla Felip Pedrell, 3
43500 - Tortosa

Montsià

Centre d'informació del Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre Casa de Fusta
Tel. 977 261 022
Bassa de l'Encanyissada
Partida de la Cuixota
43870 - Amposta

Oficina de turisme Amposta
Tel. 977 703 453
Av. Sant Jaume, 42-52
43870 - Amposta

Oficina de turisme Alcanar
Tel. 977 737 639
Lepanto, s/n Pg. Marítim
43569 - Les Cases d'Alcanar

Oficina de turisme Ulldecona
Tel. 977 573 394
Pg. de l'Estació, s/n
43550 - Ulldecona

Centre de visitants del Parc Natural dels Ports al Montsià
Tel. 977 576 156
Passeig de la Clotada, 23-25
43560 - La Sénia

Oficina de turisme La Galera
Tel. 977 718 339
Sant Llorenç, 36 (baixos)
43515 - La Galera

Oficina de turisme Sant Carles de la Ràpita
Tel. 977 744 624
Plaça Carles III, 13 (baixos)
43540 - Sant Carles de la Ràpita

Ribera d'Ebre

Terra Alta

Centre d'Informació de la Reserva Natural de Sebes Mas del Director
Tel. 977 265 112
Camí de Sebes s/n
43750 - Flix

Oficina de turisme Ascó
Tel. 977 406 583
Pl. de l'Estació, 3
43791 - Ascó

Centre de visitants del Parc Natural dels Ports a la Terra Alta Prat de Comte
Tel. 977 428 177
Carretera T-330 km. 27
43595 - Prat de Comte

Oficina de turisme Gandesa
Tel. 977 420 910
Av. Catalunya, 5-7
43780 - Gandesa

6. Biking holiday deals

Baix Ebre Avant is working alongside a number of enterprises in the region to bring services into line with current demands for cycling holidays in natural surroundings. More than 25 short stay and longer stay offers to spend time cycling in Terres de l'Ebre are shown as follows.

Apart from the information available in the www.terresdelebre.travel portal, extra information is available in professional guides produced by the four separate counties presenting services and resources for the tourist. These guides showcase specific offers that can be enjoyed in the region and include cycle tourism, walking, ecotourism, nautical activities, culture and ways of life, gastronomy and tasting of local produce.





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FOR MORE INFORMATION:
TEL. 977 47 17 35

INFO@BAIXEBREAVANT.CAT

PROJECT
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