

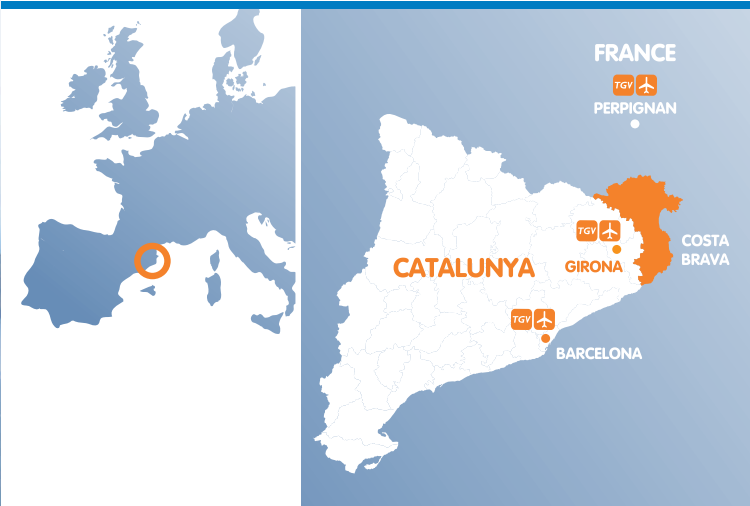
# Short Guide El Montgrí, les Illes Medes i el Baix Ter Natural Park

Parc Natural  
del Montgrí, les Illes Medes  
i el Baix Ter

Generalitat  
de Catalunya

EUROPARC  
Turisme Sostenible en  
Espais Protegits

## LOCATION



### EMPORDÀ COSTA BRAVA



#### Location

The Natural Park is located between the Alt (Upper) and Baix (Lower) Empordà, in north-east Catalonia, about 50 km from the French border and in the heart of the Costa Brava.

It extends from L'Escaló in the north to Pals in the south, and covers over 8000 ha, 2000 of which are marine coast. The name indicates the variety of landscapes and unique elements that can be found there: the Montgrí Massif, les Illes Medes (both the islands and the submerged areas) and the Baix Ter plain. It is made up of 8 municipalities which are rich in heritage, nature and history, some of them markedly tourist-oriented.

#### MONTGRÍ, LES ILLES MEDES I EL BAIX TER NATURAL PARK

<b>Protected surface</b>
Land: 6155.20 ha   Marine: 2,039.99 ha
<b>Municipalities</b>
Torroella de Montgrí, Pals, Ullà, Gualta, Palau-sator, Bellcaire d'Empordà, L'Escaló, Fontanilles
<b>Regions</b>
Baix Empordà and Alt Empordà
<b>Population</b>
26,866 inhabitants (Source: Idescat 2016)
<b>Structural dependence</b>
Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia
<b>Acknowledgements</b>
Natura 2000 network including SACs (Special Areas of Conservation) and SPA (Special Protection Area) SPAMI (Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance) ECST (European Charter for Sustainable Tourism)
 
<b>Creation</b>
LAW 15/2010 of 28 May declaration of the Montgrí, les Illes Medes i el Baix Ter Natural Park as two partial nature reserves and one full nature reserve.
<b>Web</b>
<a href="http://parcsnaturals.gencat.cat/ca/illes-medes">parcsnaturals.gencat.cat/ca/illes-medes</a> Montgrí, les Illes Medes i el Baix Ter Natural Park
<b>Management Headquarters</b>
Passeig del Port, s/n · Espigó de Llevant · 17258 L'Estartit Tel. 972 75 17 01 · Tel. 972 75 20 04 · pnmmbt@gencat.cat
<b>Interpretation and documentation centre</b>
Can Quintana, Mediterranean Museum C/ Ullà, 27-31 · 17257 Torroella de Montgrí · Tel. 972 75 51 80 · Fax 972 75 51 82 info@museudelamediterrania.cat · <a href="http://www.museudelamediterrania.cat">www.museudelamediterrania.cat</a>

## THE MUNICIPALITIES OF THE PARK

### 1 Bellcaire d'Empordà



Perched atop a small hill and crossed by the Rec del Molí Canal, the medieval Castle-Palace and the former lake, now mainly dedicated to the cultivation of rice, are the highlights. Good restaurants and rural tourism facilities are also available.

### 2 L'Escaló



L'Escaló is a historic fishing village. One of the town's attractions is the Mac-Empúries, a universally renowned archaeological site. It is full of fish and seafood restaurants and is famous for its traditional salted anchovies. Sport and leisure activities available.

### 3 Fontanilles and Llabia



On the banks of the river Daró, these towns sit on an alluvial plain of gentle hills, highlighted by the Church and Castle. Alfalfa, grain, vegetables and fruit trees are the main crops, plus livestock and poultry. Rural tourism accommodations and restaurants also abound.

### 4 Gualta



The Rec del Molí canal runs through the centre of the village, which is centred around the Church. It has a flour mill dating from the 17th century and a 16th century bridge crossing the river Daró. Golf, lodging accommodations and restaurants are available.

### 5 Pals



An exceptional, well preserved medieval town, it surrounded by wetlands where high quality rice has been cultivated since the 15th century. It is noteworthy for its rice dishes and its accommodation services, shopping, and active tourism, such as golf and water sports.

### 6 Palau-sator



This municipality includes the villages of Sant Feliu de Boada, Fontclara and Sant Julià, Palau-sator, and the Pataleu district. It stands out for its medieval architecture, typical of the villages of Baix Empordà. It also offers a wide range of rural accommodation and restaurants.

### 7 Torroella i L'Estartit



This was once a Royal Town, evident in its historical heritage. Its agricultural and livestock-based economy remains to this day. Industry, commerce and tourism now play a more important role and L'Estartit offers a wide variety of nautical and nature activities.

### 8 Ullà



The arid lands of the Montgrí Massif and the fertile part of the plain make for quite a contrast in this town on the banks of the Ter. The economy is agriculturally based: vineyards, olive groves, vegetable cultivation and orchards, along with a few industries, not to mention rural tourism and restaurants.

## DISCOVERING THE PARK

### Nature Tourism

The wealth of landscapes of this area provides a wide array of sports and leisure activities on land, sea and air. Hiking, cycling and mountain biking trail networks, along with sporting activities managed by specialist companies, provide a wide range of nature activities. Visitors can go on walking or cycling excursions with varying levels of difficulty, or go horse riding, take a ride in an ultralight or a hot-air balloons, or enjoy a boat trip and other nautical and underwater activities.

### Not to be missed!

#### Scuba-diving free-diving and boat trips

The best way to discover the biological richness of the sea and the spectacular coastal scenery is going diving and/or taking a boat trip to Illes Medes and the Montgrí coast. The beaches of L'Estartit, Pals and L'Escaló are especially well known for sailing sports.

#### The view from the Castle

A privileged view from the towers of the Montgrí castle overlooking the park provide panoramic scenes that can be admired from all angles.

#### The coast, by land and by sea

Views from the cliffs or the defence tower at Montgó, going for a walk along the coast, discovering the coves and natural ports... all make for a lovely a visit to the coast or the sea.

#### The plain and the rice fields

Go horse riding, walking or cycling over the flatlands among the fruit trees, grain fields and vegetable gardens, or take a stroll beside the rice paddies, discovering the farmhouses and defence towers dotting the plain.

### Gastronomy

The apple, anchovies from L'Escaló, Argudell del Montgrí olive oil, rice from Pals, not to mention the fish and seafood from the coast and the meat raised right here in the Empordà all form part of some of the finest quality food products found anywhere.

## ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE

There are a wide variety of companies that offer many ways to explore, discover and enjoy the protected area, its culture and traditions.

- ✓ Interpretative hiking
- ✓ Guided tours
- ✓ Birdwatching
- ✓ Cycling and MTB tourism
- ✓ Horse riding
- ✓ Golf
- ✓ Nautical sports
- ✓ Scuba diving, snorkelling and free-diving
- ✓ Sailing
- ✓ Kayaking
- ✓ Boat rental
- ✓ Coastal walks
- ✓ Ultralight flights
- ✓ Nature school
- ✓ Visit museums and places of historical and cultural heritage
- ✓ Music festivals, culture and shows

Web sites of interest for your visit to the Park

[parcsnaturals.gencat.cat/ca/illes-medes](http://parcsnaturals.gencat.cat/ca/illes-medes)  
[www.visitestartit.com](http://www.visitestartit.com)  
[www.visitescala.com](http://www.visitescala.com)  
[www.visitpals.com](http://www.visitpals.com)  
[www.naturalocal.net](http://www.naturalocal.net)  
[www.museudelamediterrania.cat](http://www.museudelamediterrania.cat)  
[www.visitemporda.com](http://www.visitemporda.com)  
[www.empordaturisme.com](http://www.empordaturisme.com)














<https://www.facebook.com/pnmmbt/>

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## PROTECTION SCHEMES

	Natural Park		GR 92		Ruta del Ter
	Full Nature Reserve (FNR)		Pirineus		Baix Empordà cycling tourism network
	Partial Nature Reserve (PNR)		Natural Park Information Office		Tourist Information Office
	Partial Marine Nature Reserve		Park Interpretation Centre		Museum
	Peripheral Area Marine Protection				

#### Credits

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## INTRODUCTION

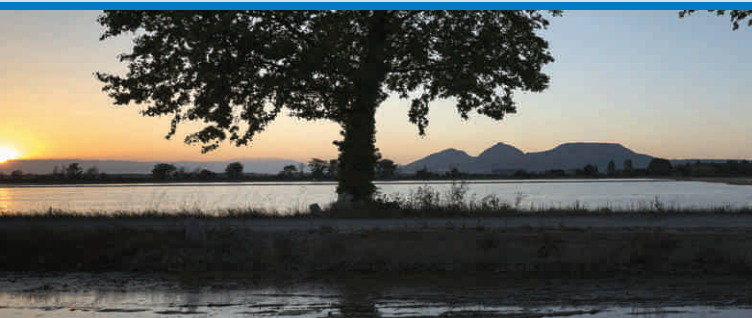


Photo: Vicenç Rovira - NP Photography contest

Take the coastal paths, the trails of the Montgrí Massif, the by-ways criss-crossing the plain and the historical routes. Enjoy the rich cultural heritage of the towns surrounding the Park, not to mention the local cuisine.

### Introduction

Three landscapes in one park, although in reality we could say there are a few more than that. The Montgrí Massif, the Illes Medes and the Baix Ter provide us with a constant of this Natural Park: its diversity. This can be seen in the scenery, the habitats, the species, the towns, and the array of possibilities and ways to get to know the park and grow to love it.

Discover the Montgrí coast from l'Escala to l'Estartit, walk along the fine sandy beaches between l'Estartit and Pals which separate the sea from the wetlands, marshes and tidal salt marshes just a stone's throw away. You will also delight in seeing a rare continental dune, a unique phenomenon in which a forested island rises amidst the limestone massif with remarkable biological and geological peculiarities. Another must is scuba-diving immersion around the Illes Medes and the Montgrí coast, or take advantage of the natural view points offered by the Park, especially the Castle and Roca Maura where you can marvel in the patchwork of farmland that surrounds the park and the final stretch of the river Ter.

In the park there are 38 natural habitats, 17 of European interest and 4 considered a priority for their conservation. The Park includes 32 heritage sites which have been declared as a BCIN (Bé Cultural d'Interès Nacional - Cultural Heritage of National Interest). We recommend a visit to Can Quintana Mediterranean Museum, home of the Natural Park's Interpretation Centre, and that you discover the Park by taking advantage of the nearly 180 km of signposted walks and/or cycle routes. You are sure to enjoy yourselves and fall in love with the area!



The dolphin cave - Photo: Xavier Salont Mox



Dusky grouper - Epinephelus marginatus

European crested tit - Lophophanes cristatus

Common bottlenose dolphin - Tursiops truncatus

Violet sea-whip - Paramuricea clavata

## THE MONTGRÍ MASSIF



Photo: Josep Pascual - NP Photography contest

### Unique geology

The Massif is like an island of limestone between the plains of the Alt and Baix Empordà, known locally as the "dead bishop" for the shape of its silhouette seen from north and south.

### Eagle-owls, orchids and dry meadows

In the dry grasslands, the variety of orchids, the eagle-owl, Bonelli's eagle, the European shag and the bats are just some of the living treasures of the Massif.

### The castle and dry stone architecture

Crowned by the medieval castle (13th century), Montgrí has been home to Palaeolithics (Eagle-owl Lairs), Iberians and Romans, and has an extensive dry stone architectural heritage.

Eagle owl - Bubo bubo - Photo: Albert Burgas



### Recovering the patchwork of areas

The Natural Park aims to bolster the patchwork of wooded and open spaces, as habitats of interest, the sustainable use of its resources and the enjoyment of its visitors.

### Extra virgin oil made from the Argudell variety of olives

Recovering the olive groves with the Argudell variety of olives has enabled the area to produce a top-quality agri-food product directly linked to its heritage of dry stone architecture.

### Ecotourism, year round

The Montgrí offers an ideal setting for active, outdoor and ecotourism all year round. Various itineraries and suggestions are available.

The Montgrí traditionally served as a major food source to local inhabitants, but at the end of the 19th century the exploitation of its resources dwindled.

Now, management tasks include the recovery of the patchwork of different spaces and measures to conserve habitats and species of interest.

Photo: Laia Martínez - NP Photography contest



## ILLES MEDES AND THE COAST



Photo: Matias Marc - NP Photography contest

### Geology

The high coastal cliffs are the best example of limestone rocky coast in Catalonia. These cliffs clearly show the geological phenomena that have created the Massif.

### Posidonia meadows and coralline

The Posidonia oceanica sea grass is one of the best preserved examples along the whole Catalan coast and serves as a refuge and a food source to a good number of underwater species.

### Mediterranean Showcase

Almost all underwater environments of the Western Mediterranean are represented here and this gives exceptional ecological value to the archipelago.

European shag - Phalacrocorax aristotelis - Photo: Alex Lorente



### Seagulls, herons and insects

The most prevalent inhabitants of the Islands are yellow-legged gulls and herons, but we can also find the European shag, the peregrine falcon and the swift.

### Complete and partial reserves

The emerged part of the Illes Medes is classified as a complete nature reserve and must not be accessed without authorisation from the Park.

### Diving and sailing

The best ways to discover the Illes Medes and the Montgrí coast are by sailing and diving, following the regulations in each area.

Red scorpion fish - Scorpaena scrofa - Photo: Yeray Delgado and Abigail Martín, MIMA contest 2015



## BEACHES AND DUNES



Photo: Esther Reig

### The dune systems

The coastal sands are of great ecological value and represent one of the most extensive and well-preserved dune systems in Catalonia.

### European beachgrass and the Kentish Plover

Typical species include the Spanish psammotromus lizard, the Kentish plover, which nests there, European beachgrass, seen atop the ridges of the dune, and the sea daffodil.

### A moving landscape

The strong northerly, south-westerly and easterly winds continually shape the appearance of the beach and the Ter estuary, where the river flows into the sea.

Sea daffodil - Pancratium maritimum

Photo: Miquel Jover



Kentish plover - Charadrius alexandrinus

Photo: Albert Burgas



### Protecting the Pletera

The dunes form a natural barrier between the sea and the wetlands of Ter Vell, the old mouth of the river Ter, and the tidal salt marshes of the Pletera; they are the subject of a Life programme to recover the natural area.

### Preserving the dunes

The Park has structured the access in order to reduce the indiscriminate number of trails which had caused the fragmentation and erosion of the dune areas.

### Enjoying the beaches

The best way to access the beaches is to follow the set paths and not to cross the cordoned off areas that protects the dunes and the species there.

Photo: Quim Arqués - NP Photography contest



## WETLANDS AND MARSHES



Photo: Francisco Surroca - NP Photography contest

### Wetlands

The freshwater wetlands, created from the interaction of the rivers Ter and Daró as well as the affects of marine currents, are ecosystems which have great environmental value.

### Reservoir of biodiversity

The wetlands are a reservoir of biodiversity and numerous species find refuge among the reeds and bulrush and also an abundant food supply.

### Marshes

The marsh is formed by a depression beyond the ridge of the beach dunes, so its low elevation causes it to flood during heavy rains or storms.

Photo: Francisco Surroca - NP Photography contest



### Rice fields

There is a long tradition of rice cultivation in Torroella de Montgrí and Pals, which is compatible with the conservation of wetlands. In the spring the fields take on the image of large sheets of water.

### Restoration of habitats

The restoration of la Pletera, the conservation of the populations of Spanish toothcarp and Kentish plover are a special objective to be managed by the Natural Park.

### Life Programmes

These programmes have been an example of collaboration between the scientific community, the Government and the private sector to recover areas and habitats within the Natura 2000 network.

Black-winged stilt - Himantopus himantopus - Photo: Albert Burgas



## FARMLANDS



Torroella de Montgrí - Estartit Town Council

### The backbone of the plain

The Ter River is both the origin and main support of the surrounding plain and together with the action of the sea, it is responsible for the creation of the water systems we find in the area.

### Vineyards and vegetable cultivation

Dry crops, such as vineyards and olive groves, are being recovered and can be found in non-irrigated areas, in the foothills and slopes of the massif.

### The Ter is life

In the final stretch of the Ter, the river functions like a typical Mediterranean estuary where freshwater mixes with the sea water, providing variable conditions of salinity and nutrients.

Photo: Pals Town Council



The Vilanera spot connects the Park and the Wetlands of Empordà, as shown by the presence of other trails along the Cinyana and Molí canals. The area is home to Mediterranean false brome, protected flora, orchids and archaeological sites.

The most characteristic feature of the landscape of the Baix Ter floodplain is the abundant crop land, a patchwork of irrigated and dry land, with farmhouses dotting the area, some with defence towers and many declared as a cultural heritage of national interest.

The moist conditions and the temperature are ideal for the cultivation of rice, a tradition which has been documented since the 13th century, especially in Torroella de Montgrí and Pals, though it is also grown in Sobrestany.

Photo: Alex Lorente

