

## Getting to know the Vinalopó

The Vinalopó river valley and surrounding lands are a harmonious combination of mountains and plains in unique contrast. Contributing to the attractions are the natural habitat itself and man-made constructions, offering a rich and scenic landscape. The best ways to discover these enchanting lands are on foot, by bicycle or even on horseback.

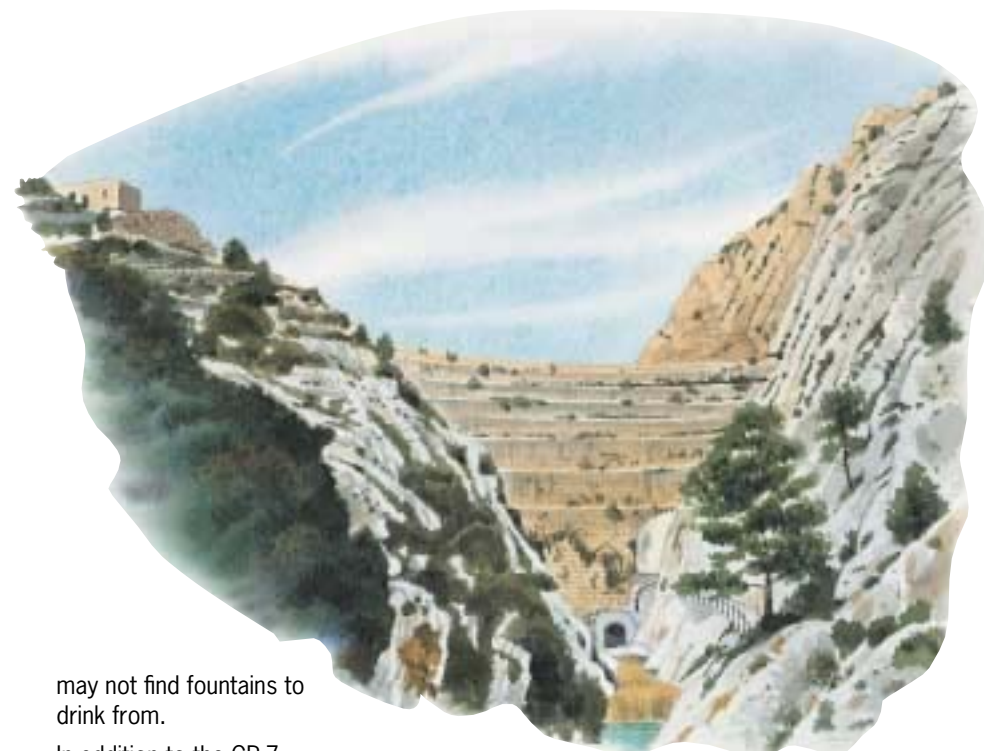
Please remember that Mediterranean mountains are fragile and need respect and care: do not light fires or leave rubbish behind; respect plant and animal life in general. Your reward is knowing that you have been kind to the environment.



All visitors to the area are advised to consult detailed maps. The district covered by this brochure is included in the following 1:50,000 scale maps: Caudete 27-32 (819); Onteniente 28-32 (820); Yecla 27-23 (845); Ibi 28-23 (846); Pinoso 27-34 (870); and Elda 28-34 (871).

## Hiking routes round the Vinalopó

Crossing the area from NE to SW is the Long-Distance Hikers' Route No. 7, known in Spain as a "Sendero de Gran Recorrido" (GR). These are traditional trails signposted in red and white paint by hiking groups to facilitate orientation. For further details, see the publication: Topoguía del sector Alcoy-Elda-Pinoso (Diputación de Alicante-FVM, Alicante, 1994). Always take water with you when hiking, as you



may not find fountains to drink from.

In addition to the GR-7, there are some thirty Short-Distance Routes (PRs), which are secondary routes or branch sections signposted in white and yellow and identified with a letter and a number. Among the possibilities for hiking trips in this area we can recommend the following: PR-V-52 Beneixama-Caseta Castelló-Beneixama; PR-V-55 Biar-Biar; PR-V-155 Serra del Frare; PR-V-35 Bañeres-Biar-Elda; PR-V-26 Ibi-Ibi; PR-V-81 Barranc dels

Molins-Ibi; PR-V-82 Ibi-Alto Martina-Ibi; PR-V-83 Alto Martina-Peña Roja; PR-V-127 Ibi-Folladeretes-San Pascual; PR-V-128 Ibi-Refugio de Montaña; PR-V-129 Ibi-Senda Xixon-Font de Vivers; PR-V-170 Ibi-Ibi; PR-V-87 Onil-Revolcador-Castalla; PR-V-88 Onil-Reconco-Onil; PR-V-89 Onil-Collado Chocolatero-Onil; PR-V-86 Castalla-Revolcador; PR-V-85 Portell de Catí-Planises; PR-V-84 Tibi-Pinar Maci-Maigmo-Planises; PR-V-6 Parque

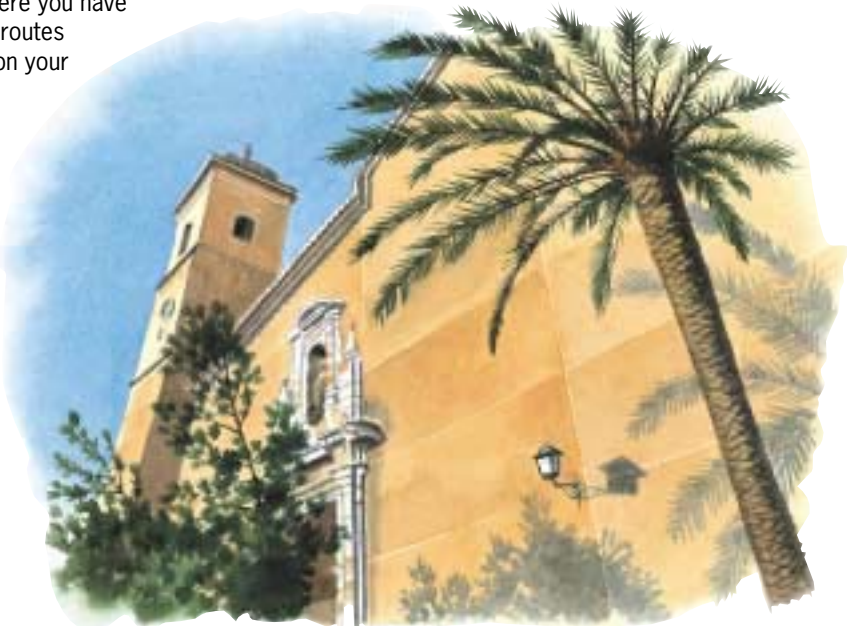
de Montaña de Rabosa; PR-V-36 Petrer-Cumbre del Cid; PR-V-25 Elda-Salinas-Elda; PR-V-3 Pinoso-Tres Fuentes-Pinoso; PR-V-159 El Plano-Salinas; PR-V-165 Salinas-Alto de Don Pedro-Ermita; PR-V-144 Naranjal-El Plomo; PR-V-107 Chinorlet-Xirivella-Chinorlet; PR-V-166 L'Almorquí-La Cavafria-Les Tres Fonts.

## Cycling trips

Road cyclists have a wide choice of asphalted roads in the area. Avoid the major throughways (Autovía N-330) with their heavy traffic, and head for the hills and the quiet byways, where you have a choice of routes depending on your abilities.

Mountain bikers have a range of tracks and trails over the hills and sierras. The climbs to the Sierra del Sit, the Maigmo, Peña Rubia the Cabezo de la Sal, or even the Sierra Mariola, are well worth

the effort because of their panoramic views from the top.



## Useful Tips

The easiest access route to the Vinalopó Valley from Alicante, Valencia, Albacete or Madrid is along the N-330 and secondary routes. From Xàtiva and Valencia it can be reached via the N-344, turning off at Font de la Figuera and continuing to the N-330 or via the CV-81 from Ontinyent. To access the area from Orihuela, Elx and Murcia, use the N-325 through Crevillente and Aspe. From Elx, head towards Aspe too along the CV-84. The N-340 runs through the eastern part of the area to connect to Valencia, Xàtiva, Alcoi and Alicante. Finally, the CV-81 and CV-83 connect the district to the nearby Murcia and Albacete provinces. Should you require further information concerning the area, contact the local town councils in the district or:

## Tourist Information Offices

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From the peaks of the Mariola mountains, the river Vinalopó starts its journey through the lands of the districts to which it gives its name. It winds its way through valleys cut through the tall mountains. An area like this is best visited on footpaths, strolling through the medieval streets of local towns, and sightseeing at the many castles in the district.

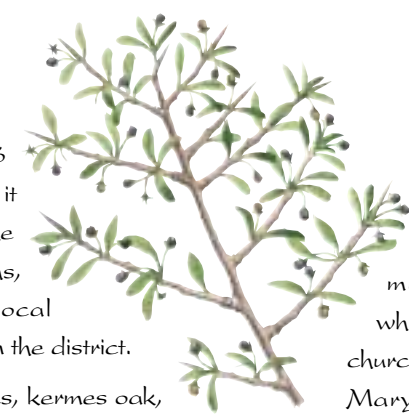


The landscape changes at each turn. Pines, kermes oak, black briar and rosemary cover the mountain slopes, which are the haunts of foxes, hares, partridges and birds of prey. In contrast with the mountains are almond and olive plantations, alternating with extensive vineyards.

The Vinalopó basin has historically been a natural communications route between the tablelands above and the Mediterranean below. During the Middle Ages, its importance was further enhanced due to its role as a frontier zone between the Almohades in the south and the Christians in the north, and later between the crowns of Castile and Aragón. Paying testimony to these times are the impressive castles presiding over the pueblos nestling in the valleys.

Our tour starts in **Beneixama**, a village sitting in the broad valley between the Fontanella and Solana sierras on the natural route between the El Comtat district and the Villena river valley near the town of Agres.

Beneixama has a uniform town design set amidst olive and irrigated fruit production areas, among which are their famed apple orchards. The same valley is home to the small villages of **Cañada**, on the skirts of the Sant Cristòfol sierra, and **El Camp de Mirra**, at the foot of the Sant Bertomeu mountain. The latter has a noteworthy church erected on the site of an ancient castle, with a belltower apparently sitting atop an ancient fortress lookout tower. A ceramic plaque commemorates the treaty on the demarcation of frontiers signed at this site in the 13th C by



Alfonso X of Castile and Jaume I of Aragón.

**Villena** is a town that lies at the foot of a hill crowned by the majestic Atalaya tower. From the keep, we can enjoy a panoramic view of the municipal area. On lower ground, among the narrow streets and whitewashed houses of the ancient town centre, are two handsome Gothic churches: the 15th-C Archpriest's Church of St James and the Church of St Mary from the 16th C. The Town Hall building houses the Municipal

Archaeological Museum José María Soler, where an impressive Iberian horde called the "Treasure of Villena", dating from the end of the Bronze Age, can be viewed. Outside the town is the Gothic sanctuary of the patron saint, Nuestra Señora de las Virtudes. The nearby Las Salinas recreation area has facilities for enjoying a day out in the country.

To the east lies **Biar**, a village that values its cobblestone streets, coats of arms and ancient stone walls. The silhouette of its castle, with a double wall protecting the keep, vies with the beautiful belltower of the Church of the Assumption and its plateresque portal. From here a variety of excursions can be made: to the Nature School of the Cova Negra, or "black cave", near the sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace; to "Casetes de Gil" (Gil's little houses); or to the three nearby Gothic hermitages of the Rosary, Santa Lucía, and the Saints of the Stone (Santos de la Piedra).



Behind the mountains is an area known as the Foia de Castalla, with three towns. To the east is **Jbi**, located near the Alcoi

Canal, with the Menejador sierra as its backdrop. This town grew by leaps and bounds in the late 20th C due to its toy manufacturing industry, not without preserving its interesting medieval quarter and an 18th-C new quarter featuring the Church of the Transfiguration, a large 19th-C construction. The surrounding mountains contain ancient snow wells once used to store ice for the local ice-cream manufacturing business, a long tradition. To the west comes **Onil**, with an architectural heritage including the Gothic Municipal Palace building and the



parochial church, preserving a beautiful 15th-C altarpiece. The mountain attractions here include scenic sites such as Favarella, Santa Ana, Les Penyes Roges and the sanctuary of Our Lady of Health (Mare de Déu de la Salut). To the south is the fortress town of **Castalla**, standing tall above the valley.

The Town Hall, the Convent of the Franciscans, the parochial church and the Hermitage of the Holy Blood (La Sang) pay testimony to the important role played by this town in the past.

In the distance the peaks of the Maigó mountains dominate the horizon, leading the way to **Tibi**, a town offering some of the most scenic spots in the mountains. This is the town with the oldest dam in Europe still in use (16th C), distributing irrigation waters to

Alicante orchards. Travelling round the Maigó mountain slopes, we come to **Agost**, a centrepiece for ceramics. At the entrance to the town, factories and artisan workshops display traditional style pottery juxtaposed with more modern designs. The town's Ceramics Museum provides an overview of ceramic techniques and displays a selection of fine pieces.

The scene changes as we leave Agost, with the mountains giving way to extensive terraced vineyards producing the famous bagged Vinalopó valley dessert grapes, one of the pillars of the economy in neighbouring **Monforte del Cid**. Standing tall above the spider's web of streets in the ancient town centre is the silhouette of the parochial church of Our Lady of the Snow. In the environs, visits can be made to the outlying Orito village and its Capuchin monastery, to which people of Monforte make an annual pilgrimage in mid-May. After crossing the Vinalopó river, we reach the so-called River Castle of **Aspe**, the remains of an ancient fortified settlement, built in the 13th C on the backbone of a hill.



**Novelda**, on the right bank of the Vinalopó river, has a number of architectural points of interest. In the town is the Modernist Museum and various houses in the Art Nouveau style. Three kilometres from the town is the sanctuary of the Magdalene and the Castillo de la Mola, with a peculiar triangular tower – the only example of this style of construction in the entire Land of Valencia.

Elda and Petrer are two towns that have fused into each other in recent years due to constant economic development. **Elda** has broad avenues flanked by numerous parks and gardens. The palace/castle at the topmost part of town has recently been given a facelift to reveal its original structure. The town's Archaeological Museum provides a full account of the history of Elda, with examples of numerous finds made in the district. **Petrer** harmoniously combines its old quarter with more modern areas where industry has flourished. The church of St Bartholomew, the hermitage of St Bonifacio Ferrer, a 16th-C aqueduct and some Roman mosaics preserved in the Ayuntamiento, together with the medieval castle, are fine examples of local stages of history up to the modern age. Within the municipal district are charming little nature areas such as Caprala, El Arenal, Racó Xolí and the mountain park of Rabosa.

In **Monóver**, the modern town surrounds the steep streets of the ancient quarter, dominated by the slim silhouette of the Clock Tower and the blue-tiled cupolas of the archpriest's church. This was the birthplace of turn-of-the-century man of letters Azorín, and his family home is now a museum. There is also a Wine Museum, and an Arts and Crafts Museum in town.

To the west is an interesting "wine route" where visitors can taste the local vintages at major bodegas, or wineries. **La Algueña** and **La Romana** are modern villages laid out on the croplands on the southern skirts of the Sierra del Reclot and facing the Algayat sierra that juts up from the plain.



To the north of Reclot, **Pinoso** spreads out over a flat plain bordered on the southeast by the Sierra del Coto. This is clothed in pines trees, and shelters the municipal recreation zone called Las Tres Fuentes ("three fountains"), with modern installations for nature lovers. Starting near the town is a route leading to the "salt mountain", Cabezo de la Sal, which offers handsome vistas over the town.

To the north **Salinas** lies on the plain, flanking the Sierra de la Umbría and the attractive Salinas Lagoon, where salt was mined till the year 1960, giving its name to the town.

The road continues, reaching the banks of the Vinalopó river once again, until a craggy peak looms into view on the horizon, site of the town of **Sax**, commandeered by its castle on a rocky crag. Nearby are the scenic areas of La Torre and Santa Eulalia, peaceful havens for the enjoyment of nature.

The booming footwear industry of Elda and Petrer, toys from Jbi, Onil and Castalla, or marble from Novelda coexist with traditional local arts and crafts, such as pottery in Agost, glazed ceramics in Biar and bobbin lace from Monóver.

The cuisine in the district wisely combines local products. "Gazpacho" (game stew with wafer-thin pastas), "gachamiga" (breadcrumbs), "fassegures" (dumplings), "giraboix" (a stew with a spicy sidedish) and "ajo tonto" (mashed cod, tomato and potato) are typical dishes, accompanied, perhaps, by the well-known wines from the area, such as the aromatic Fondillón. Worthy of note are the fine table grapes, the dry anise from Monforte del Cid and the widely-sold saffron from Novelda.

Local festivities include the splendour of the Moors and Christians feasts, a sight not to missed in the lands of the Vinalopó.







- Carreteras
- Curso de agua
- Itinerario excursionista señalizado
- Ferrocarril

- menos de 500 m
- 500 - 800 m
- 800 - 1.100 m
- más de 1.100 m

- Cima
- Zona de escalada
- Árbol monumental
- Pozo de nieve
- Ermita
- Castillo
- Monumento / Museo
- Vino
- Cerámica
- Tonelería
- Juguetes
- Piel
- Área recreativa
- Área de acampada
- Refugio
- Alojamiento Rural
- Albergue
- Hotel / Pensión
- Restaurante
- Golf
- Centro de Salud 24 h.
- Gasolina
- Información Turística



S<sup>a</sup> DEL SERRAL

S<sup>a</sup> DE SALINAS

Carche 1.372 m  
S<sup>a</sup> DEL CARCHI

S<sup>a</sup> DEL RECLÓT

S<sup>a</sup> DE BENEIXAMA

S<sup>a</sup> DE LA FONTANELLA

S<sup>a</sup> DE LA PEÑA RUBIA

S<sup>a</sup> DE L'ARGUENYA

S<sup>a</sup> DE LA PEÑA ROJA

S<sup>a</sup> DEL MAGMO

S<sup>a</sup> DELS CASTELLANS

