



Route attractions

1 | Rossinyol bridge



Architectural heritage

The bridge crosses the Rossinyol stream and provides an elegant welcome to the historical site of Sant Miquel del Fai. In 1576, Gregory XIII joined the priory of Sant Miquel del Fai with the major archdeaconry of Girona Cathedral, for which Jaume d'Agullana was at the time responsible. Thus, the priory of Sant Miquel del Fai was secularised, although the papal bull demanded it be dignified. Archdeacon Agullana, striving to fulfil this order, therefore built Rossinyol bridge as well as La Foradada passage, the fortified gateway and the Gothic-style priory house. The bridge was erected in 1592, facilitating access to the monastery, which until then had been reached via the Sant Miquel stairs, consisting of wooden steps made from stakes driven into the wall, a means of entry that even in the 14th century caused protests from some parishioners.

Rossinyol bridge is in the Romanesque style and, if you look at it closely, you can appreciate the camber in the roadway and its segmental semicircular arch. The roadway's slope is less steep on the entrance side of the bridge and more accentuated on the opposite side, where the historical site is accessed. The soffit, i.e. the lower,

concave surface of the bridge's arch, is made up of fairly regular stones. The road surface is mixed, with stretches of river pebbles, stone slabs and cobblestones. If you look closely, you can see squinches on both sides of the base of the arch. Squinches are small vaults that help to support the arch.

Vegetation and flora

Before crossing the bridge, let's take a look at the stream from which it takes its name. Rossinyol river or Roca Gironella torrent rises in the municipality of Sant Martí de Centelles (Osona) and is part of the drainage basin of the Besòs river. Its waters flow into the Tenes river, just below Sant Miquel del Fai. Both rivers comprise the river landscape that makes the area unique.

Grey willow forests (*Salix atrocinerea*) are the most common riparian forests along the watercourse. Many deciduous woody species grow in hollows and along the banks of the Rossinyol river. Due to their rarity in the local region, particular highlights include isolated stands of field maple (*Acer campestre*) and European aspen (*Populus tremula*).

In the pools near the river, capitalising on the abundance of carbonates, a genus of green algae (*Chara* spp.) grows, although the area that these populations cover fluctuates and they are always subject to the variability of water flows and the risk of downpours. Its presence is a sign of clean water.

With a little luck, near the Rossinyol bridge you may find a stand of a rupicolous plant, such as the Pyrenean violet (*Ramonda myconi*). This species is abundant in the Pyrenees but is quite rare in the Besòs river basin, where it is limited to the limestone mountains of the Prelitoral range, specifically shady and mossy rocks.

Fauna

Riparian vegetation favours the presence of different species of fauna associated, to a greater or lesser ex-



tent, with damp environments. Thus, the presence and abundance of butterflies such as the olmera (*Nymphalis polychloros*), the comma (*Polygonia c-album*), the southern white admiral (*Limenitis reducta*) and the lesser purple emperor (*Apatura ilia*) are particularly notable. In terms of amphibians, the marsh frog (*Pelophylax perezi*) is the most abundant species, while aquatic ophi-dias such as the viperine snake (*Natrix maura*) and the ring-necked snake (*Natrix natrix*) can also be found in the Rossinyol river.

Thanks to the abundance of insects typical of river environments, aquatic bats—which capture them by flying non-stop over the water surface—are very common.

The common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), the white wag-tail (*Motacilla alba*) and the river warbler (*Cettia cetti*) are some of the bird species associated with aquatic environments that can be seen or heard near the Rossinyol river. Recently, some specimens of redwing (*Turdus iliacus*), a wintering species not uncommon in damp northern Catalonia but rather scarce towards the south, have also been detected.



2 | La Foradada passage

Once you have crossed Rossinyol bridge, you will find La Foradada passage. It consists of a natural passage between rocky walls where an arch was built as an entrance to the monastery site. Like the bridge, the arch was built in 1592 and is round, with ash-lars and a central voussoir, known as a keystone. A keystone is a wedge-shaped centre stone at the apex of the arch. In the upper part of the arch, on its north face, there is a straight crown with rectangular ash-lars. In the central part there is a sculptural element featuring the ecclesiastical coat of arms, with a hood and two tassels on each side, and the following inscription: 'EXITUS HUIS... RUS JOPIIS-SDOS SAN PUJOLAR-1790 HIERONIMUS MAURI SCULPIT MAGISTER BARCHINONE.' The text includes the name of its sculptor, Hieronimus Mauri, a master from Barcelona. On the opposite side there is a lintel with another inscription: 'DURANTE VENEPLACI-TO ARCHIDIACHONI MINORIS SEDIS GERUNDENSIS, DOMINI MEI, SUM APERTUM, 1592.' These words remind us that the arch was built under the supervision of the major archdeaconry of Girona Cathedral. At the time, the person responsible for it was Jaume d'Agullana, which is why three needles are depicted under the inscription, typical of the heraldic coat of arms of the Agullana family.



3 | Fortified gateway

The opening of La Foradada passage forced the closure of the northern entrance to the site. It also led to the



construction of the fortified gateway, which was possibly built in the late 16th century and underwent many successive alterations. In the 19th century, there seems to have been a bell located on the upper floor of the tower above the door, while in the early 20th century there was a protruding machicolation that was later turned into the current window. Next to the machicolation there had been a niche with an image, possibly of St Michael.

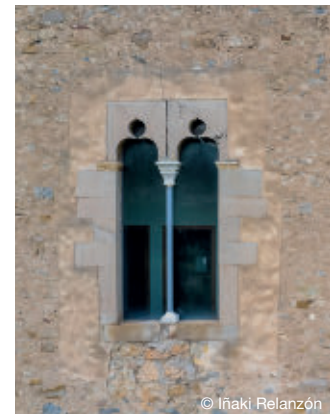
After passing through the fortified gateway, you will find a square in front of the priory. The square is wedged between the rocky walls that act as a supporting wall for the square itself and the priory. Next to the square, there are several channels that form pools and carry the water through the rock.



4 | Priory

Located on L'Abadia square, the priory housed the prior and the quarters in which a community of Benedictine monks lived. It consists of a Gothic-style manor house, with a more or less square structure and a gable roof. The building has not undergone any major alterations throughout history and is considered to have been built between the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

It is worth noting that the construction was initially believed to date from the 15th century, following the publications of Antoni Pladevall (1991), although this is still debated. Different architectural and situational features lead us to formulate the hypothesis that construction would have begun during the priory of Jaume d'Agullana in the late 16th century and finished during the mandate of his successor, Bernat de Cardona, in the first third of the 17th century. Evidence that gives strength to this hypothesis is the Pia Almoina building in Girona, currently the College of Architects, which was significantly altered during the archdeaconry of Agullana. The façade of the Pia Almoina bears a strong resemblance to the priory. For example, the arched windows, that is, windows divided into two or three openings separated by columns, have the same structure and design as those in Sant Miquel del Fai. This leads us to believe that Jaume d'Agullana could have been inspired by this building when planning the Sant Miquel manor house or was even responsible for the repairs in both buildings simultaneously.



The current two-story rectangular structure attached to the north and west sides has not been accurately dated. It is believed to have been added between the 17th and 18th centuries. This attached building initially had a single slope roof.

With respect to the house's uses, thanks to a notarial inventory in 1717, a large amount of information is available to us on the functions of its various rooms. Starting at the bottom and going upwards, there would first have been the semi-basement, including a room for the servants, a small cellar and the stable for the animals. Above, on the ground floor, there was the kitchen, located in the middle in order to heat the entire house. Around the kitchen was the dining room, the entrance hall, including the staircase up to the first floor, and a series of rooms that were used as storage and work areas. One of these rooms, known as 'the woodshed', was accessible from the kitchen and was used as a bedroom. In the woodshed, the coffered ceiling has been preserved, with decoration consisting of painted thistle flowers, maintaining a great resemblance to the paintings in the Molí de Blancafort chapel in La Garriga, from 1674. The staircase up to the first floor from the main entrance was admired by many architects



from the time during the visit that Víctor Balaguer paid to Sant Miquel del Fai. The reason for this was the lack of a buttress at the top of the staircase, which led many to demand that it be disassembled to find out how it had been built. It currently has three cantilevered beams that were installed in order to reinforce the stairway vault.

Above, the first floor was divided into four rooms. On one side of the hall were two of them as well as the latrine, which emptied directly out of the building on the west side. One of the rooms was the prior's room, reserved for when the archdeacons of Girona visited Sant Miquel del Fai. On the opposite side of the hall were two more rooms, of which only one remains due to the dividing wall having been demolished. One of these, the south-easterly facing room, was called 'the painted room', most likely because of some artistic decoration that no longer exists. In this room slept the priest of Sant Miquel del Fai and the priory's archives were also housed within it. The other room, now merged with the painted room, was used to accommodate those who asked to spend the night at the priory. It is believed that the top floor of the priory consisted of an attic, although we have no information about its purpose, as it is not mentioned in the notarial inventory of 1717.

The history of the priory of Sant Miquel del Fai ends in 1841, with the disentailment spearheaded by General Espartero. It was then that the priory became state property. This led to the suppression of worship in the churches of Sant Miquel del Fai, while the priory was converted to provide lodging and as a restaurant for visitors.

5 | Cliffs and caves



There are two key features that make up the landscape of Sant Miquel del Fai: the cliffs and the caves. Cliffs are vertical walls formed by sedimentary rocks such as sandstone, marl and conglomerate. Caves, on the other hand, are natural cavities formed by the erosive effect of water.



Despite the sheer size of the cliffs in this area, rupicolous plants—that is, those that live on rocks—are not particularly diverse, possibly due to the lack of north-facing walls and the type of soil in the region. Thus, except for some common ferns such as the maidenhair spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) and the common polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*), strictly rupicolous plants include *Sarcocapnos enneaphylla* and the wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*). In terms of endemic species of interest, the malling toad-flax (*Chaenorhinum origanifolium* spp. *cadevallii*) and the Pyrenean violet (*Ramonda myconi*) can be found. In contrast, the flora growing on scree, flat areas and rocks is more diverse. The abundance of two species that are rare in Catalonia, the giant fennel (*Ferula communis*) and *Centaurea intybacea*, is particularly noteworthy. These are also environments where numerous species of cat's claw (*Sedum* sp.), bastard hyacinth (*Dipcadi serotinum*), round-headed garlic (*Allium sphaerocephalon*), *Arenaria serpyllifolia*, Montpellier Coris (*Coris monspeliensis*) and red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) grow.

The rocky walls are the chosen environment for many birds, which make up the most interesting faunal community in the area. The list of species related to this habitat is extensive, with birds such as the Bonelli's eagle (*Aquila fasciata*), the alpine swift (*Tachymarptis melba*), the common raven (*Corvus corax*), the blue rock-thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), the Eurasian crag martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*), the rock sparrow (*Petronia petronia*), the stock dove (*Columba oenas*) and the wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*), a wintering species.



The rocky walls that make Sant Miquel del Fai unique are the chosen environment for many birds, which make up the most interesting fauna community in the area. The list of species related to this habitat is long, with birds such as the Bonelli's eagle (*Aquila fasciata*), the alpine swift (*Tachymarptis melba*), the common raven (*Corvus corax*), the black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), the blue rock-thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), the common house martin (*Delichon urbicum*), the Eurasian crag martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*), the rock sparrow (*Petronia petronia*), the alpine accentor (*Prunella collaris*) and the stock dove (*Columba oenas*). This shows how important good management is to the Sant Miquel del Fai site to guarantee the protection and conservation of the ornithofauna. In addition, recent surveys have also confirmed the presence of the Eurasian hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), the tawny owl (*Strix aluco*), the European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) and wintering species such as the wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*).

6 | Sant Miquel church



Everything seems to indicate that, in the year 1006, the Romanesque church of Sant Miquel was already consecrated, although there are no documents to verify this. If this were true, construction of the church would have begun during the previous nine years. The church is built under a large cave and has a nave linked, at the eastern end, to an irregular semi-circular apse. The current south-facing entrance consists of a semi-circular arched doorway with a simple archivolt and two columns on each side with bases and capitals decorated with floral motifs. The roof of the church is formed by the cave itself.

The interior underwent many alterations, especially in the late 16th and 19th centuries. A low bell-gable is mounted on the south side, since the way the church is built into the cave made it impossible to place it on top. By the middle of the 18th century, the vaults in the chancel and that of the chapels (from the 14th and 15th centuries three are documented) had already been built. The vaults are Renaissance inspired and the points where they meet feature two keystones. The cloister of Sant Miquel forms a corridor right in front of the church's façade.



7 | Rossinyol waterfall

The Rossinyol waterfall is formed by the river of the same name, whose waters rush down from the Bertí cliffs, near the priory. At the base of the cliffs there is a large cave known as Sant Miquel cave.

The Rossinyol is a river of the Besòs basin that rises in the





district of Sant Martí de Centelles (Osona), crosses Sant Quirze Safaja (Moianès) and drains into the Tenes, in the municipality of Bigues i Riells (Vallès Oriental). It is precisely between these last two municipalities that the water descends the cliffs of Bertí, forming one of the emblematic waterfalls of this area, the Salt del Rossinyol. The cascade is close to the Priory House and at the base opens under a large cliff overhang known as the cave of Sant Miquel.

From the top of the cliff to the Sant Miquel valley, the Rossinyol drops down a hundred meters in a series of falls. The waterfall or “*falla*” (from the Latin *fallium* or water falling from a cliff) is the etymological origin of Sant Miquel del Fai.

In dry years, the landscape is very different, with a waterfall reduced to a sliver, sometimes non-existent, which contrasts with the photographs from the seventies, where the pool under the waterfall was used as a swimming pool.

8 | Sant Miquel cave

Sant Miquel cave, also known as the ‘dark cave’ or the ‘dragon cave’, was discovered in 1836 and consists of a single gallery running in a north-east/south-west direction, parallel to the cliffs. It has practically no slope and a total length of roughly 50 to 60 metres. The cave is formed from calcareous tufa, produced by calcium carbonate precipitated out of ambient-temperature water that often contains micro-organisms. It has often been used erroneously and as a synonym of the term travertine, which refers to carbonates that precipitate in hot hydrothermal waters that usually do not contain micro-organisms.

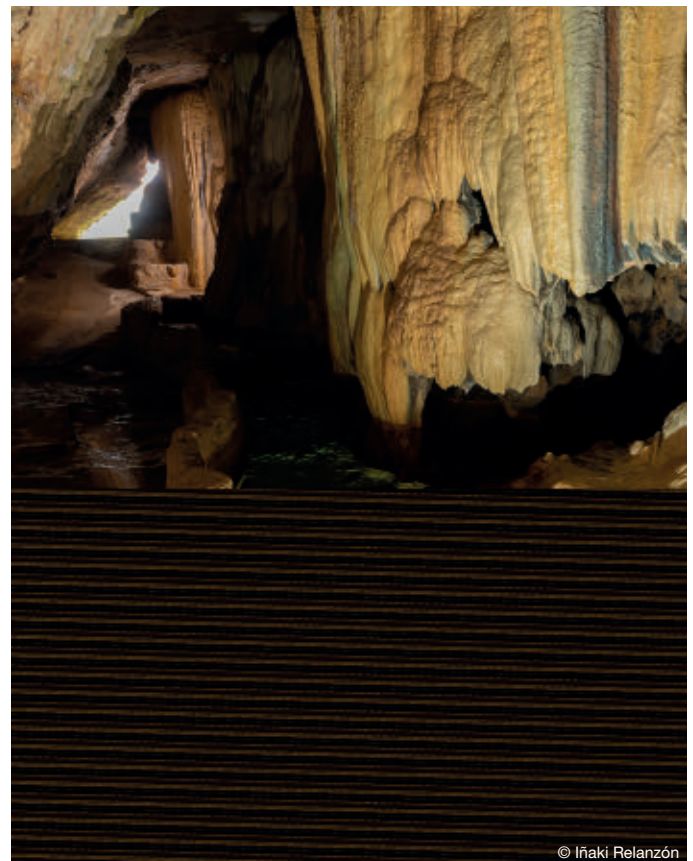
Within the calcareous tufa deposits in the Tenes valley, two types of caves have developed: caves formed within tuffaceous masses and caves formed from caverns. The former are a consequence of the irregular growth of tufas and their high porosity, which allows cavities to form within them. As tufas are rocks that can be cut easily, such cavities are often expanded by human activity and, in them, galleries and rooms have been excavated in order to create spaces for various uses.

A second type of cave is formed as a result of the growth of a tufa curtain right in front of a cavern. The cave of Sant Miquel is a good example of this. In this cave, the tufa has

ended up covering the entire cave. It consists of tufa growths that expand vertically in the direction of gravity, forming walls that eventually isolate the caverns from the outside, leaving behind a cave. Once the cave is shut off from the outside, a karst environment develops, forming stalagmites and stalactites that cover the inside of the walls.

The cave has no archaeological potential, since it has been completely modified with modern structures and infrastructures so that it can be visited by the public, although it is of great educational interest due to current geological processes concerning the formation of calcareous tufa.

One of the most interesting zoological groups to inhabit Sant Miquel del Fai cave are bats. Species living in the cave include the most vulnerable, mainly cave-dwelling species, such as the common bent-wing bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*), found in Sant Miquel cave, the three horseshoe bats (the greater, *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*; the Mediterranean, *R. euryale*, and the lesser, *R. hipposideros*) and some species of myotis bats, such as the greater mouse-eared bat (*Myotis myotis*), the long-fingered bat (*M. capaccinii*), the Daubenton’s bat (*M. daubentonii*) and the Geoffroy’s bat (*M. emarginatus*). These strictly cave-dwelling bats provide us with information about possible colo-





nies inhabiting other caves and caverns in the natural area of Sant Miquel del Fai. Identification of the Mediterranean horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus euryale*) is particularly important, as few potential roost sites are known for this species, currently one of the most endangered.

9 | El Repòs square



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The serenity of this quiet corner in Sant Miquel del Fai means the square's name is more than deserved ('repòs' is Catalan for 'rest'). The place invites all those who visit to enjoy a moment of stillness, in the company of Josep Pla, who is remembered with a bronze statue by the artist Tomàs Atienza. The sculpture, seated on a stone bench, reminds us that these landscapes were a source of inspiration for some of Pla's writings. It is difficult not to sit by his side and meditate, reminisce or simply remain captivated.

In 1971, Josep Pla referred to Sant Miquel del Fai in his *Guia de Catalunya* and, with his usual sharp, mocking tone, noted:

In Sant Miquel del Fai there is a building that was a monastery and a waterfall. This feature is formed by the Ternes river, which rises in La Collada, near Collsuspina, 935 metres above sea level. Up to the Molí de Llobateres, downstream from Sant Quirze Safaja, it flows through a relatively open valley, but from this point on, it enters a deep gorge, forming one of the most abrupt landscapes in the region, and, after being joined by a tributary, the Rossinyol, ends up cascading down the waterfalls of Sant Miquel del Fai. In the lower part of Catalonia, waterfalls are not found in abundance. However, as we must have everything, Sant Miquel del Fai is responsible for producing the waterfall, which is a very unusual attraction.

The region is unexpected. It is a deep V-shaped incision sunk between vertical walls of a magnificent height. We left the road and, on foot, via a (bad) path, we reached this unforgettable place. An old bridge led us to an open lookout point in the living rock. From there, we saw the old monastery, which today is a hotel perched on the mountain, some open holes in the rocky wall and, in the background, a very narrow valley, with many swallows flying over it. What we did not see anywhere was the waterfall. Faced with such contrariness, we questioned a local woman, who told me:

—The waterfall exists, but it only works on Sundays. Today is Wednesday. Do you understand? You have come on the wrong day.



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I was stunned. I would never have suspected the existence of waterfalls with fixed, intermittent and weekly schedules. The impetuous description of the waterfall made by Victor Balaguer, I think, was very bad.

—So this is a weekly waterfall, like illustrated magazines and football games— I told the woman.

—If you were a teacher and had come with the boys or girls from your school, they would have shown it to you. They usually do so when children come with their teachers. Otherwise, the waterfall only works on Sundays, when there are people, because it would be a pity if those who come up to see it were left wanting to do so.

—This is therefore a weekly waterfall adjusted by the requirements of pedagogy. Very amusing...

—You seem to be very easily amused—the woman said to me. There is little water here and what little there is we need for irrigation and to generate a bit of electricity. These days you cannot live without electricity. But the fact is that the rain does not come, so there will be no waterfall on Sundays or for school children. If it doesn't rain, there is no waterfall...

And so I could not see the waterfall of Sant Miquel del Fai. It is a geographical feature that is dying.

10 | Les Monges lake



Near El Repòs square, half hidden under the rock, there is a small pond of stagnant water known as Les Monges lake. The lake is a flooded cavern with crystal-clear waters. In order to see it, you must get very close and crouch down.

The name of the lake is related to a local legend, which tells of a convent of nuns that was destroyed by a lightning strike during a terrible storm. This was punishment for a night of debauchery that the nuns had shared with some gentlemen who had taken refuge in the convent after a hard day's hunting.

11 | Tenes waterfall





The Tenes river makes its presence felt in Sant Miquel del Fai with a 300-metre-high waterfall. Although it belongs to the municipality of Bigues i Riells, the upper part of the waterfall is located at the point where the municipalities of Bigues i Riells, Sant Feliu de Codines and Sant Quirze Safaja meet. The waterfall is formed by the Tenes river cascading down from El Fitó cliff. Behind the water curtain, a gallery allows you to pass through. There, you will find stalactites, stalagmites and stone walls.

Some of the unique geological features found alongside the Tenes waterfall include calcareous tufas, which are in a process of permanent formation. They can be identified by abundant calcareous deposits with distinctly vertical structures.

The waterfalls are surrounded by plant communities of great interest. Mosses abound with populations of fern species such as the black maidenhair fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*).



12 | Old entrance gate

Once past the Tenes waterfall, the path that leads to Sant Martí chapel begins. Along the path, interesting features include the gate that formerly provided access to the priory site before the current entrance was opened thanks to the construction of the Rossinyol bridge and La Foradada passage. The gateway has a semicircular archway on the right-hand side built with cut, regular ashlars and has preserved part of the hinges of the now non-existent door. Meanwhile, the part of the gateway to the left of the door is made from natural stone and there is

nothing to suggest that ashlars were previously in place. Continuing along, before reaching Sant Martí chapel, the path passes under a large rusty iron conduit covered by vegetation. The pipe was used to carry water from the Tenes river to the power plant at the bottom of the valley.



13 | Sant Martí chapel

Sant Martí chapel, which has a nave with a pointed barrel vault, a semi-circular apse and a gable roof, is a Romanesque building. The semi-circular arched doorway faces a southerly direction. The chapel has retained the initial part of a bell-gable, in which there are still two wooden crosspieces to support the bells, which no longer remain. It is precisely the nave's pointed vault which allows the construction to be dated, from anywhere between the 12th to 13th centuries. However, in the year 877, a place of worship with an unknown date of foundation that could correspond with Sant Martí chapel was documented for the first time.

The interior is covered in plaster and mortar, except for the apse, which features exposed stonework. Behind the altar there is a reproduction of part of the original paintings depicting scenes from the life of St Martin and the figure of the winged ox symbolising St Matthew. The chancel is separated from the nave by spear-topped railings and the paintings belong to the very early Linear Gothic style.

In 1576, the priory of Sant Miquel del Fai joined together with the major archdeaconry of Girona Cathedral, for which Jaume d'Agullana was at the time responsible. It would appear that this union did not bring about significant changes to Sant Martí chapel.



Finally, in the middle of the 19th century, the Church lost its property, most likely during the disentanglement spear-headed by Espartero in 1841.



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man. The existence of scribbles made in the early 20th century, now covered by calcite that is still translucent, informs us that it has taken a century for this layer of material to form. Unfortunately, the alterations that the cave has undergone have caused it to lose its archaeological potential.



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14 | Les Tosques cave

Les Tosques, El Bon Pastor or Sant Martí cave has a cumulative depth of 22 metres and a length of 120 metres. The cave has been formed within tufas, which are porous materials that allow the formation of cavities in their interior. Since tufas are rocks that are easy to cut, the cave has undergone various artificial alterations (stairs, galleries, rooms, etc.). Calcite precipitation does not stop and the growth of tuffaceous masses continues to this day. In certain areas of the cave, calcite growth can be observed on rock surfaces carved by

Route attractions map

