

## SHORELINE



## THE MED: SECRETS OF SPAIN'S COSTA BRAVA

CRUISERS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN ARE a lucky bunch. Everywhere they have their pick of coastal anchorages, marinas, beaches, coves, and caves, but that's especially the case along the Costa Brava, northeastern Spain's Wild Coast. This coastline is often overlooked or discounted by cruisers who may be put off by its formidable name or by the horror stories of summer tourism gone rampant. But there's a carefully guarded Catalan secret: Go north!

The Costa Brava runs 80 nautical miles, from the resort town of Blanes, in the south, to the port town of Portbou, just beneath the French border. The entire stretch boasts dozens of ports and hundreds of anchorages nestled among stunning, steep rock formations, pine-studded cliffs, and protected beaches. The annual mean temperature is 60 F, with the heat of high summer tempered by the *tramontana* and the local *garbi* winds. Fickle wind conditions challenge sailors, especially in the fall and spring. Winter is invigorating, crisp, and often sunny, sharpening the blues and greens of the sea into a dazzling collage. And at that time, there are no tourists.

To avoid the crowds, begin your landings just north of the town of Palamós, where the main road runs inland and away from the coast. Careful navigation around submerged rocks near Palamós and the Islas Formigues will reward you with pretty anchorages and some very private coves. If you harbor a passion for sea glass, do pay a visit to the sweeping

beaches of Blanes. You'll find a treasure trove of multihued glass through which to sift while you're walking on the sand or snorkeling.

The town of Llafranc is nestled around a lazily sweeping bay. No ugly high-rise hotels or annual visitors jealously guard this town of quiet sophistication. Sophia Loren, Rock Hudson, Salvador Dali, and Kirk Douglas once frequented the splendid Hotel Llafranch, where they danced



until the fishing boats set sail. The town has an elegant marina with guest berths. Nearby, Cala de Aiguablava is a well-protected anchorage. This is reputedly the most charming area of the Costa Brava.

Anchor in Cala dels Pins on the Begur coast and explore the sparkling Aiguafreda creek, near Sa Tuna, on foot, in peaceful isolation. The medieval town

**In the town of Palafrugell, just south of Llafranc, fishermen's shelters built into the seawall mark a seafaring heritage; it's just one of many authentic sights spanning 80 miles along the northeastern coast of Spain.**

of Begur is an experience even for those who aren't history buffs. Walking these ancient streets will conjure images of its inhabitants and their struggle to survive against nature and frequent invaders.

The port of L'Estartit, whose town finds fame with tourists in the high season, has a marina with 120 guest berths. Like many marinas here, availability is excellent, even in the summer months. The Les Medes islands lie just south of L'Estartit and are a must for cruisers and divers. The seven islands in the archipelago offer spectacular protected undersea life as well as exceptional flora and fauna.

Northward lies Empuries, a town founded by the Greeks in 500 B.C. and later inhabited by Romans, Visigoths, and Moors. Cadaqués, a town at the tip of a mountainous peninsula, has been home to artists and writers; it's full of museums and art galleries dedicated to their works. Dali made his home in nearby Port Lligat, where he drew inspiration from the unusual light of the peninsula.

If you're looking to escape the beaten path and explore the heart of Med life as it once was, when fishermen ruled supreme and, as local myth has it, the ships of lovelorn Moorish captains turned to rock, don't forget the Costa Brava.

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