



Cala Baladrar

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Benissa is an attractive area of the Marina Alta that reaches from the Sierra Bernia mountains to the Mediterranean Sea.

By Karen Marco

Benissa town

Stop awhile and discover the fascinating historic centre - the city was walled in the medieval age to protect the townsfolk from marauding pirates although little evidence remains today. Walk around the charming back streets and pretty plazas where time seems to stand still.

The notable historical legacy includes remarkable buildings such as the Town Hall (originally a hospital, 1790), Marina Alta University (XVIII century noblemen's homes), Sala del Consell (XVI wheat grain warehouse), the Abargues Museum (XVIII-XIX century palatial residence and chapel), Library and Cultural Centre (XVI century palace), Franciscano Convent with a beautiful bell tower (1613) and the adjacent Franciscano Seminary (1915), and the Puríssima Xiqueta Church (1902) known as the 'Cathedral' of the Marina Alta.

Benissa is renowned for its excellent cuisine and there is a great choice of restaurants in town, on the coast and out in the country. A long list of cultural events and local festivities includes an agenda of concerts. A celebrated three-day multicultural festival featuring colourful parades, traditional dancing and music, folklore and craftwork, and typical food tastings is held biannually by international residents over the first weekend in October (September 30 to October 2, 2016).

Beaches from north to south

A short drive away you can enjoy the four kilometres of Benissa Coast, pine clad hillsides with picnic areas, abrupt cliffs with panoramic views, sandy bays and pristine pebble coves. Look out for turnoff signs to the various beaches on the Moraira to Calpe coast road. You can walk from one beach to another paddling through shallow water and

scrambling across rocks, or following the coastal footpath most of the way.

Cala Baladrar is an attractive pebble cove protected by cliffs and divided from smaller Goleta cove by a rocky ledge. A picturesque setting with green pine trees reflecting on the clear aquamarine sea it's an ideal place for relaxing or snorkelling. There's a restaurant set among shady pines on the cliff top with marvellous views overlooking the beach - which is reached down a flight of stone steps - and also a picnic area.

L'Advocat beach is not far away - you'll recognise it by the jetty and the small esplanade. The sandy beach is great for children and there's a beach bar café in summer. **Cala de la Llobella** is a small, quiet pebble cove where pine trees reach down to the sea, great for nature lovers and snorkelling. **Cala Pinets** is 10 minutes walk away - a rocky cove with pebble and sand. Just before



Eco trail coastal walk

you reach this beach you'll see the 'dead sea' below the coastal path, a long shallow rock pool running parallel to the sea.

La Fustera is Benissa's most popular beach – a sheltered sandy bay with blue flag status, it's a child-friendly beach with amenities for all the family: play zone, picnic areas under the trees, beach bar, seafront restaurants, lifeguards and tourist info booth. You can drive to the beach or walk down from the footpath which continues either side of the bay.

Les Bassetes is sheltered by a ridge of sandstone which forms part of a natural leisure harbour. Bassetes yacht club and the diving school offer a range of nautical activities. A waterfront restaurant has terraces with panoramic views across the transparent turquoise sea, towards the Peñon de Ifach in Calpe.

Walks

A scenic 'eco trail' path starts in Cala de la Llobella, following the coastline southwards towards neighbouring Calpe; a pleasant walk for all the family past shady picnic areas and rock pools. Information panels describe the local flora and fauna. The yearly 'Trobada D'art a la Mar' is a most unusual exhibition – artists paint different views of the seascape from the vicinity of Fustera beach, which are then on public display beside the coastal path (approx. September 20 till October 20).

The surrounding countryside surrounding Benissa is ideal for walking – mountain hikes, nature trails and a number of routes through rural areas where you learn about past traditions.

Walk to the chapels in outlying hamlets and villages within a 9 kilometre radius of the town centre; six were built in the XIX century, while Santa Ana

chapel dates back to 1613.

PR-CV 340 Sierra de Olta – 2 hour, 7km circular route, beautiful mountain and sea views.

PR-CV 7 Sierra de Bèrnia 3 hours 30 min., 8km. Medium to difficult walk around the Bèrnia Mountain south of Benissa. Takes in the Font de Bèrnia natural water spring, Forat 'tunnel' (a natural hollow in the mountain-side through to the southern face) then the path continues to the ruins of Bèrnia Fort. It's a wonderful hike with stunning views over Altea, and most of the Marina Baixa.

PR-CV La Solana 5.5 horas, 19.5km - easy walk, can be done in stages. Itinerary through Vall de Pop includes the rural towns of Benissa, Senija, Llíber, Xaló, Alcalalí, Parcent, Murla, Benigüema and Castell de Castells. Discover the traditional rural way of life which evolved over the centuries along the banks of the Xaló River.

PR-CV 388 Ruta dels Riberers (old road to Valencia) 4 horas, 14km. Enjoy the stunning views over the Marina Alta, as you walk along the Mallà Verda to the



Purissima Xiqueta Church

Font de la Mata natural spring.

SL-CV 136 Ruta del Molí del Quisi - easy 3 hour walk, 8.7km. The Molí del Quisi is a restored water mill (XV century). Other interesting sites along the way include: the public washing house Llavador del Pou d'Avall, Santa Ana Chapel, El Riurau del Tio Joan de Vallesa, and the Quisi bridge.

Getting there:

AP-7 motorway (exit 63), N-332 main road; Alicante to Denia TRAM; ALSA bus service Alicante-Valencia; nearest airports: Alicante 80 km, Valencia 110 km.

You can see more features about the Costa Blanca on my personal travel blog: www.kalitravel.net

Photos courtesy of Benissa, Town Hall, Tourism Department



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