

## **Costa Brava: the land where Ferran Adrià and the Roca brothers are reinventing world cuisine**

Girona cuisine did not come about by chance. It is not a new development created as the result of the success, ingenuity and innovativeness of contemporary chefs, but rather a cuisine with a long and extremely rich past. It incorporates an ancient legacy that started with the Iberians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Jews...evolving over the years to include modern Asian, African and American influences. Catalan and Girona cuisine are both heir to all Mediterranean cuisines and a fusion of contemporary cuisines from around the globe.

Today, in the early twenty-first century, the Girona region is one of the world's major wine and food destinations. The Costa Brava is arguably at the forefront of culinary innovation as the world's greatest creative hub, just as it was once the epicentre of surrealism as the home of genius Salvador Dalí. The innovative power and brilliance of the cooking at El Bulli pioneered a new era in gastronomic innovation, first influencing Catalan chefs and later spreading throughout Spain and Europe, eventually taking over the entire world. El Bulli has recently decided to reinvent itself with elBullifoundation, which will be launched in 2017 with the aim of vaulting the legacy of Ferran Adrià into a new endeavour. The evolution of the Roca brothers' creative lab La Masia has helped to keep the region at the cutting edge of culinary technological innovation.

Any great cuisine hinges on the quality of its local raw ingredients. And the Girona region is set against a backdrop favoured by nature, a place where the sea, the plains and the mountains meet, home to outstanding products including L'Escala anchovies; Palamós, Roses and Blanes prawns; Pyrenees beef; Girona apples; DO Empordà wines; Santa Pau beans, as well as an entire range of cold meats and sausages, cheese, oils... Many of these products carry the Girona Excel·lent label.

Girona has always been home to excellent cuisine, which has been matched by equally fine wines for quite some time now. While the region boasts a centuries-old winemaking tradition, Girona's wineries have experienced thrilling growth over the past few decades, turning a wine tourism tour along the Costa Brava and the Empordà DO Wine Route into a journey to discover the world of Empordà wine and the surrounding region. Covering an area of 2,000 hectares, the Empordà wine region includes 330 growers and 50 wineries, 26 of which can be visited for the opportunity to experience the province's wine, *terroir*, north wind and winemakers first-hand. Few places on earth are home to grape varieties with such authentic and distinguishing tastes as the Empordà, a region that produces wines that are best discovered and tasted through wine tourism activities.

But the region's equally important cuisine would have been impossible without a centuries-old tradition, without first-rate products, without its own unique dishes and without cooperation between restaurants. The Girona region boasts over 2,000 restaurants that offer guests more than simply food, combining outstanding cuisine with a pleasant and memorable dining experience; Girona is also home to a network of public markets where product quality is the prime concern, a priority reflected when dealing with farmers. Up to 10 restaurants associations across the region are dedicated to promoting local cuisine by working with a combination of *territory* and *product*.

This is a land of UN Ambassadors and Michelin stars. The UN appointed the Roca brothers Goodwill Ambassadors to advocate for the fight against poverty and hunger, choosing the owners of the world's best restaurant –according to Britain's prestigious Restaurant Magazine– because they support local food sourcing, use food in a sustainable and environmentally-friendly way, and promote a healthy diet.

The Roca brothers' three-Michelin-star El Celler de Can Roca in Girona, which twice picked up Restaurant Magazine's World's Best Restaurant title (2013 and 2015), is not the only critically-acclaimed restaurant in Girona: 13 of the region's restaurants boast a total of 17 Michelin stars, including Llançà Miramar restaurant, where Paco Pérez holds rank as the chef with the most stars in the region (five), and the two-star Les Cols in Olot, where chef Fina Puigdevall serves the highest expression of La Garrotxa's volcanic cuisine. Altogether, Girona is the region with the most Michelin stars per capita in the world.

Numerous books, cookbooks, and documents serve as the culinary corpus of Catalan cuisine, including the *Llibre de Sent Soví*, a book of medieval recipes written in Catalan and considered one of the oldest of its kind in Europe. Personalities and figures like writer Josep Pla, journalist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and a host of food critics have helped raise Girona cuisine to the echelons of literature.

Seasonal products are promoted throughout the year through gastronomic campaigns and events that showcase the rockfish, the *garoinada*, the *suquet*, the Norway lobster, rice, game and mushrooms, etc., as well as festivals that celebrate the cherry, ratafia liqueur... The region expresses its pride in the efforts of its farmers and wine makers through these festivals, honouring its regional products by sharing them with both local fans and guests.

The combination of sea and mountain is the flagship of Girona cuisine, the fusion of the region's culinary techniques and character. A cuisine that has substance and identity, not merely a style of eating and drinking but a way of life that has grown in popularity among visitors to become one of the region's main tourist products.

There are endless gourmet options year-round in the Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees, from routes with a range of themes, paces and lengths to individual, customised tours organised by companies specialised in bringing together the region's cuisine, nature and culture to offer once-in-a-lifetime food and wine experiences.

Catalan cuisine tells the story of a country, a region and an idiosyncrasy, which is why an application has been submitted to have UNESCO recognise it as Intangible Cultural Heritage; Catalonia has also been awarded the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2016.

#### The Girona region's Food and Wine Club is born

Girona's farmers, restaurants, wineries, culinary associations, gastronomic spaces and classrooms, caterers, tourist accommodations, activity organisers and many others have been able to call the Food and Wine Club their own since November 2015; backed by the Costa Brava Girona Tourist Board, the club is a platform that aims to position the Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees as a one of the world's leading wine and food destinations. [www.costabrava.org](http://www.costabrava.org)