

# IRTA

## MOUNTAIN RANGE



Badum Tower

The Serra d'Irta (Irta mountain range), situated in the north of the Community of Valencia, is a line of mountains which reaches a maximum height of 573 m with 15 Km of coastline. The absence of important historical human settlements and the progressive abandoning of agricultural and cattle farming, which have existed for centuries, have all played their part in producing an area of enormous value as regards nature and ethnology. For this very reason the Serra d'Irta was protected as a Natural Park.



Trail of Irta

The most common type of environment in Irta is the coastal environment, symbolised by cliffs measuring 40 m in height, as well as other smaller cliffs, which lie side by side with small coves where sandy beaches and small sand dunes can be found. Rocks, which are submerged or beaten by the waves, are home to well preserved sea communities, and on the highest cliffs many sea birds can be seen such as the shag, the rare leonaras falcon and the audouins seagull. In the low-lying areas, vegetation which is typical of sea environments can be found. There are several botanical species exclusive to this stretch of coastline which grow together with other more widely distributed species. The action of the sea breeze shapes them all into strange forms.

Areas which are less exposed to the sea are made up of bushy vegetation, which is dominated by typically Mediterranean species such as the dwarf fan palm tree and the prickly juniper. On extremely rare occasions, it is possible to find the cashew tree, the kermes oak, the wild olive tree and wild carob tree, in addition to other scrubland species such as the montpelier rock rose and the gorse bush, whose spectacular blooms colour the landscape white in spring and yellow in winter. There is also an abundance of aromatic plants such as rosemary, thyme, sage, old English lavender and French lavender which, especially during the first few hours of the day, impregnate the air with their aroma. As for trees the aleppo pine and the holme oak stand out, although the latter is not as common.

In the sierra, it is a common occurrence to find partridges, hoopoes and spectacled warblers, and it is also possible to see black wheatears, turtledoves, bonelli/s eagles and kestrels, amongst many other birds. It is also possible to see the European lizard, as well as various snakes and other kinds of lizard. Except for rabbits, it is difficult to see the evasive mammals, although Irta is home to hares, hedgehogs, foxes, weasels, genets and wild boars, amongst others.

Being next to the sea, the dramatic changes from high to low ground favour the wide panoramic views with intense contrasts in colour, and the spectacular landscape of Irta is scattered with the perfectly integrated remains of ancient human occupation. The rural and military architecture of the sierra has always used elements from the surrounding area, especially uncut limestone, in its dry-stone constructions such as the incredible terraces of the groves, the shelters and stone huts. On other occasions the stones are joined with mortar made from a base

of sand and quicklime: in the sierra it is not unusual to come across there mains of ancient lime ovens, where the quicklime was manufactured, using a calcination process, from the limestone itself. Stone and mortar form the basis for the construction of the variety of temporary dwellings so common in Irta, such as the casetas de terrat plà (flat-roofed cottages) and the casetas de volta (stone cottages) exclusive to this territory, both of which are adapted to collect rainwater which falls on their roofs and which is stored in small water tanks positioned next to the wall (cocòs).

Stone, which has in this case been worked, is also the raw material used to construct the sierra's defence system. This defence system is made up of the fortress of Peñíscola, the fortresses of Polpis and Xivert (which are now abandoned as a result of population migration to the plains), and watchtowers which, like the Almadum and Esbrí towers, made it easier to detect pirate raids and communicate using signs between the fortresses and inhabited settlements of the region.

Peñíscola is also a logistic point for visiting other nearby nature areas, amongst which we can point out the Delta del Ebro and the Prat of Cabanes-Torreblanca, as both have a large nesting and over-wintering population of aquatic birds. At a short distance there is also Tinença de Benifassà, an ancient Benedictine property with important natural resources, which is set in the most extensive natural area of mountain passes of Morella and Beceite. From Castellón it is possible to visit the Columbretes Islands, which are volcanic in origin and of great natural interest.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PATH PR.V-194



The Sierra d'Irta

### ACCESS TO THE TRAILS

Leaving from Peñíscola, we take the road that runs from the roundabout in front of the former town hall towards the south coast, following signs for Parque Natural Sierra de Irta. A kilometre further on, there is a track on the right with a signpost pointing to Sant Antoni and the beginning of the trails. We also have the option of continuing along the main road until we reach a housing estate, from where the start of the trails is likewise signposted.



View of the City from the Natural Park



The Sierra d'Irta



Cliffs of Irta

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The trail is circular, and therefore starts and finishes at the same point. It is a good idea to follow the trail in an anti clockwise direction, starting at the Sant Antoni hermitage. This way, the incline is more progressive, and is dealt with at the start of the journey.

The trail passes by the Sant Antoni hermitage on the way to the high part of the Sierra. After a short stretch along the watershed, from where we have the option of visiting Pulpis castle, we take a steep path down towards the middle of the Sierra and the Mas del Señor rest area, where we can catch our breath. The path then turns towards the coast and arrives at Pebret beach, passing by the spectacular cliffs at the foot of the Abadum tower (Badum) and the varied coves of the Punta del Mabre, before leading back to the starting point.

The walk takes approximately six hours, or seven if a visit to Pulpis castle is included. If we add two or three hours for stopping at various points, then the trail can be completed in a total of eight to ten hours.

There are no reliable springs or places to buy food along the way, so you will need to take your own provisions. You should also wear suitable shoes and use sunscreen, as there is little shade on the trail.



Cliffs of Irta



Trails of Irta



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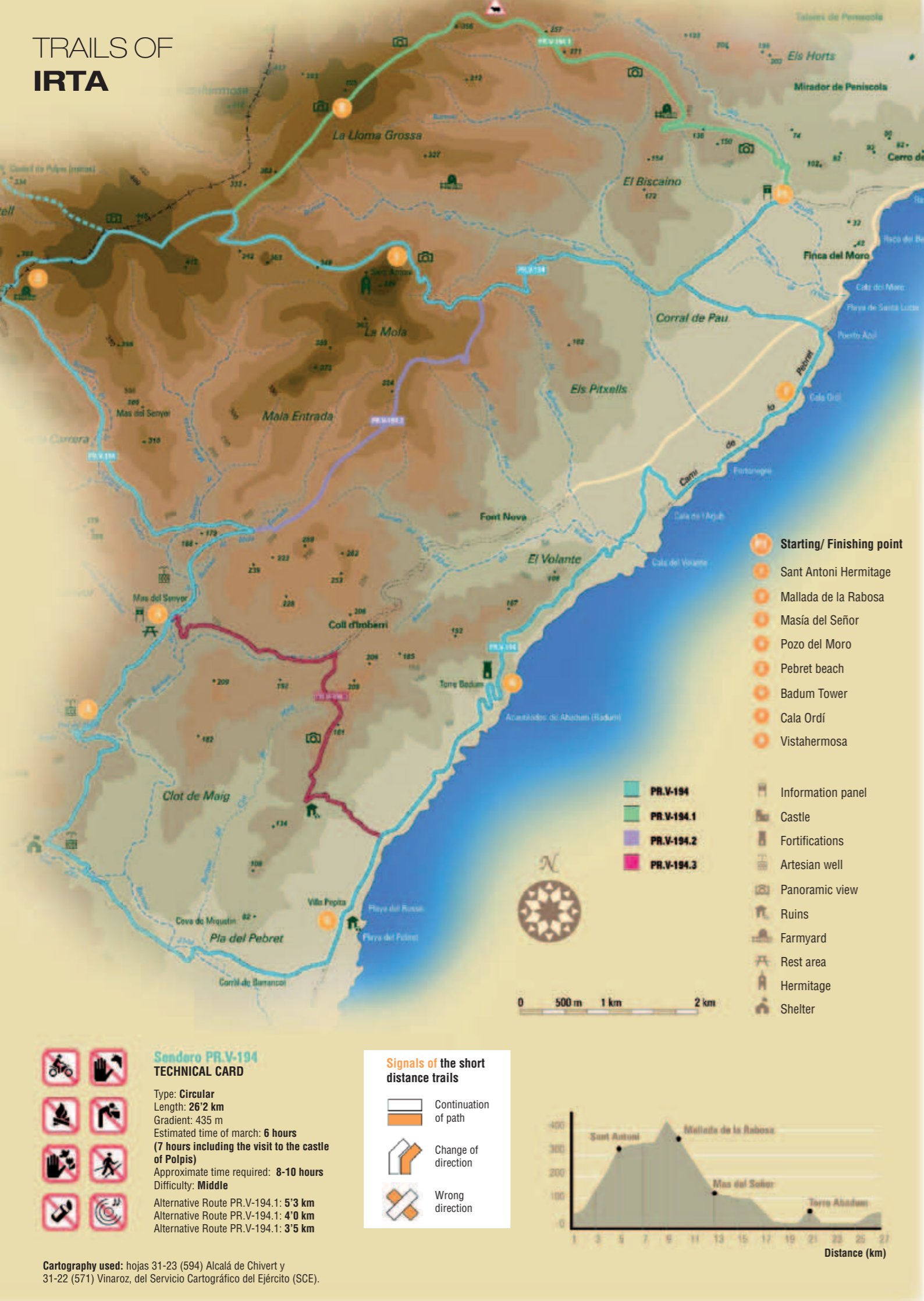
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Badum Tower

## TRAILS OF IRTA





DETAILED  
DESCRIPTION OF  
**PR.V-194** TRAIL

The trail begins on the Camino de Sant Antoni, where there is an information board and a signpost that directs us towards either the hermitage or Vistahermosa (alternative route 1). We continue along a dirt track that becomes progressively steeper, until we reach the starting point of alternative route 2 (La Mola). From here, the sides of the gully can be seen, covered in narrow terraces which were built using the dry stone walling technique that is typical of this area. The Sant Antoni hermitage is a modest building, which has been modified over the last five centuries, and certain parts of it are permanently open to visitors. Its huge circular chimney with stone benches set into the walls is of particular interest. The patio in front of the hermitage offers a magnificent view of the coast and the shoreline.

Continuing along the trail, we circle the hermitage and take a path leading along the edge of the Sant Antoni gully, which later levels out in the direction of the Sierra watershed, passing *Avelanencs* on the way. Here, if you look carefully, you can see the marks left on the landscape by the area's traditional activities, namely livestock farming and the extraction of lime (traditionally used in construction for preparing plaster and for whitewashing walls) through the process of limestone calcination.

The path then takes us to the Sierra watershed, from where we have the option of following the track to Pulpis castle, which is not included in the PR and is only marked as an alternative route. The castle, built in the tenth century, is of Moorish origin and subsequently became the property of the Templars and their heirs in the region, the Montesa Order. The village of Santa Magdalena de Pulpis is accessible from the castle.

Following the main route, we come to Mallada de la Rabosa, where we find an old farmyard that shows evidence of the livestock farming that took place there in the past. Even today, cattle may occasionally be found grazing in the area; if so, it is not advisable to try to walk through the herd as the animals may become aggressive. Those who are not used to shooing them away should try to find the cowherd who is usually nearby, and as a last resort, we would recommend turning back and taking one of the alternative routes instead. The track that begins at Mallada leads directly to Santa Magdalena de Pulpis.

From Mallada, we take a path that goes down a steep slope along the edge of the Carreres gully. We then find ourselves on a cattle track. The track is rather difficult to follow, so it is important to pay close attention to the signposts.

The path leads to a dirt track, from where we follow the signs and turn right towards the nearby Mas del Señor rest area.

At Mas del Señor there is a leafy elm grove by a spring, wooden chairs and tables, litter bins and an information board.

Continuing along the dirt track, we pass the *Pou del Moro* and then come to the Irtà crossroads, where there is a recently built barraca de volta (a rural storehouse). This is a replica of the rural dry stone refuges, with a false dome, something that is



Badum Tower

typical of the Maestrazgo area. Turning to the left, we continue down towards the coast until we reach the Pebret cattle track that runs along the region's coast line. The only unpaved stretch of this track runs between Pitxells, in Peñíscola, and the approach to Alcossebre.

Taking the cattle track to the left, we soon arrive at Pebret beach, where we find the remains of the customs officers' headquarters. Together with their counterparts at Torre Nova and Prat de Cabanes, these officers controlled smuggling on this sparsely populated stretch of coast up until the middle of the twentieth century. A small range of dunes can be seen next to this building, the last remaining part of this ecosystem on the coast of Castellón.

Continuing along the path, we can see the unique structure of the coastline, with alternating headlands and coves, the result of erosion caused by the sea. A little further on, we come to the cliffs of Abadum, which soar to heights of around 40 metres, making them the highest on the Valencian coast. At the top of the cliffs sits Abadum Tower (Badum), one of several that was used to keep watch for the Berber pirates, who raided the villages on the western side of the peninsula for centuries.

Following the path along the coast, we pass several coves until we finally reach the Puerto Azul cove, where a housing estate has been built. We turn off to the left here, taking the paved road as far as the crossroads, where we can choose to either continue along the main road until we arrive at Peñíscola again, or return along the dirt track that faces onto the crossroads. This is a cattle track known as the *Colada de Pitxells*, which leads to the Camino de Sant Antoni and the information board that marks the beginning of the trail.

**Sendero PR.V-194**  
**TECHNICAL CARD**

Type: Circular  
Length: 26'2 km  
Gradient: 435 m  
Estimated time of march: 6 hours  
(7 hours including the visit to the castle of Pulpis)  
Approximate time required: 8-10 hours  
Difficulty: Middle

Alternative Route PR.V-194.1: 5'3 km  
Alternative Route PR.V-194.1: 4'0 km  
Alternative Route PR.V-194.1: 3'5 km

**Signals of the short distance trails**

- Continuation of path
- Change of direction
- Wrong direction



## ALTERNATIVE ROUTES

The PR trail offers three alternative routes, which vary in both length and difficulty, and which give us the opportunity to visit other parts of the Sierra.

### Alternative Route PR-V. 194-1 «Vistahermosa»

This offers an alternative route towards the high part of the Sierra. Combined with the first stretch of the PR, it provides a short route of 12'2 km, with many points of interest and magnificent views along the way. A potential problem is that there is a high probability of encountering cattle on this route and if so, the precautions mentioned previously should be taken into account.

The first stretch of the path runs along the bottom of the Pitxells gully, where a wide range of the area's typical flora can be seen. Following the signs, we soon come across an incline to the left, which brings us to an old cart track with stone walls, where we can see marks left over the years by the wheels of passing carts. The path rises steeply up to the beautifully built Corral de Baltasar, used until the middle of the twentieth century as an

enclosure for the herds of merino sheep that grazed in the high parts of the Irtà area during winter.

Next, we turn left and follow the path over the hilltops, paying close attention to the signposts. On a clear day there are splendid views of the shoreline and the delta of the river Ebro. The track leads to a pool formed by rainwater, and we may find the herd of the cattle referred to earlier nearby.

Continuing along the path, there is a long slope that leads up to the top of Vistahermosa, a disused farming area. From here, there is a view of the rocky coastline, and on clear days, the Columbretes islands can be seen out on the horizon of the blue sea.

Walking up to the top of the Sierra, we come to the crossroads with the Camino de Sant Antoni. Here, we can either continue along the PR in the direction of Mallada de la Rabosa or return to the Sant Antoni hermitage, which can be seen to the southwest.

### Alternative Route PR-V.194-2 «Senda de la Mola»

This alternative route allows us to reach the end of the PR, but avoids the climb up to the top of the Sierra, making this a less difficult route, which is 20 km long and rises to a maximum height of 370 m.

The route begins to the left of the Camino de Sant Antoni, one kilometre before reaching the hermitage. This is a poorly marked path, so it is necessary to pay close attention to the signposts. It runs along the slope of La Mola at mid-height, and then through agricultural dry stone terraces that plunge down towards the Font Nova housing estate, way below.

The path continues over the hilltops before dropping down to the Malaentrada gully, where the numerous remains of old country buildings can be seen amongst disused farmland. The path ends at a dirt track, which leads off to the left and takes us to the Mas del Señor rest area, where we join the PR.

### Alternative Route PR-V.194-3 «Senda del Pebret»

This route avoids the southern part of the PR, providing a route of 23'5 km, which includes both the high part of the Sierra and the coastline. This route, together with alternative route 2, also serves as a starting point for visiting the coastal and middle areas of the Sierra, a route of 18'3 km, which rises to a maximum of 370 metres.

The route begins at the Mas del Señor, following a broad dirt track until we reach a turn off to the right, which soon turns into a narrow path leading up to a rocky overhang, from where we can enjoy the view of the Pebret plain. The path continues over rocky ground, where close attention should be paid to the signposts.

This leads us to a group of ruins, thought to be the remains of the medieval town of Irtà, which is referred to in certain ancient chronicles. We continue along a cart track, which zigzags down towards the coast where it meets the Pebret cattle track next to the beach with the same name.