



Xàbia, tuff stone and dry stone

ROUTE SP 6

Presentation of the route

The municipality of Xàbia, located halfway between the cities of Valencia and Alicante, belongs to the comarca [small administrative division] of La Marina Alta, which is characterized by sharp landscape contrasts of great beauty: mountains and valleys inland; beaches and cliffs on the coast.

Its strategic location in the western Mediterranean has given it high relevance throughout history not only as a traditional fishing port but also as the entry and exit of peoples and a wide range of goods/products, e.g. fish, oil, cereals, wine, raisins... At present, commercial activity has fallen into decline, but its reconversion into a nautical and maritime leisure port continues to make it attractive to residents and visitors alike.

The total route length is nearly 14 kilometres, 5 of which are on foot, and with 190-meter difference in level; and it takes about five hours, considering a break to enjoy Xàbia's excellent gastronomy. Using a vehicle will be necessary to move between some points.

The proposed route focuses on two of the most representative elements both in the urban area and in the surrounding territory: tuff stone and dry stone.

The starting point for this route will be the coastal strip that bathes the Mediterranean Sea, known as Muntanyar. Here stand the quarries from which tuff stone—a key element in the ethnographic heritage of the whole area— was extracted. This is a kind of stone about which we can acquire greater knowledge in the nearby old town, which features the most emblematic buildings decorated and finished with this easily carved rock.


The second part of the route will focus on dry stone, a traditional construction technique recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. We will be able to see the dry stone “terraces,” the windmills and the impressive views of the Mediterranean Sea from Cape San Antonio [Saint Anthony], a magnificent natural balcony overlooking the coast.

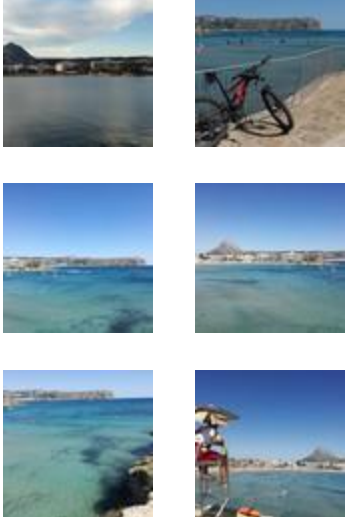



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Archaeological site	Acequia de la Noria [Waterwheel Irrigation Channel]
	<p>Tuff stone is a sandstone rock composed of calcareous sands and remains of molluscs that became compacted ca. one hundred thousand years ago forming fossil dunes. Precisely one of these dune formations is the Muntanyar site, a coastal barrier that extends into Xàbia Bay. Muntanyar is known to have served as a quarry for stone extraction at least since Roman times. Both the strata of the fossil dunes and the lines followed by stonemasons to extract the stone blocks still remain clearly visible in the toscar [tuff stone quarry]. The tuff coastal range is divided into two parts, and we start the route in the Second Muntanyar (located further south). A channel of about 200 m in length —known as Acequia de la Noria— opens up here. Romans devised this solution to bring the water from the sea to the Saladar [Saltmarsh] two millennia ago, flooding the place and obtaining one of the most precious products: salt. The name of this ditch refers to a “noria”, a large vertical wooden wheel that must have been installed here to introduce water at will into the channel when the sea stopped reaching a sufficient level for it to enter by itself.</p>

Waypoint	Mirador del Arenal [Arenal Viewpoint]
	<p>Walking north we reach Mirador del Arenal (sandy area), where San Martin Castle —which defended Fontana Cove— once stood. At this point, the mountain splits into two parts: on the north, from Cape San Antonio to Arenal Beach, the First Mountain or Muntanyar Baix (max. height: 7m); on the south, from the viewpoint where we find ourselves to Cape La Nao, the Second Mountain or Muntanyar Alt (max. height: 17m). In the background we can make out the imposing profile of Montgó —the mountain that gives its name to one of Xàbia’s three natural parks— which will be visited at the end of our route.</p>

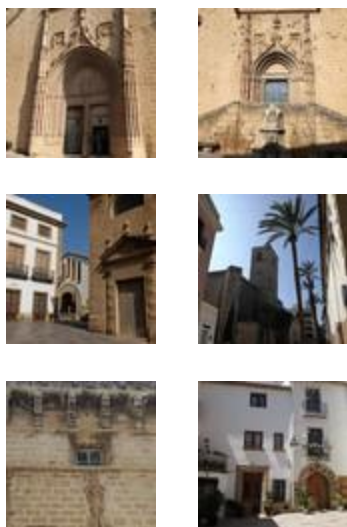
Archaeological site	Punta del Arenal [Sandy Area Point] and tuff stone quarries
	<p>Tuff has been the type of rock used in local architecture since ancient times. The oldest example can be found in the Roman Villa of Punta del Arenal, a luxurious property that was located in the area of First Mountain/Muntanyar Baix closer to the beach. Although the villa was in use for 600 years, only a few tuff stone architectural elements have been</p>

		<p>preserved to this day, among them bases and capitals of different styles or pieces of column shafts that suggest the existence of large open patios. Pieces for the estate's wine or oil presses were carved from tuff stone, blocks of the same rock being additionally extracted to open the large adjoining ponds used as nurseries. The person who ordered the construction of this villa with views of the breathtaking scenery of the Mediterranean and equipped with all sorts of luxuries, undoubtedly belonged to Roman aristocracy. Two thousand years later, this same place was chosen by another influential Spanish politician to build his summer residence—which came to be popularly known as the “Chalet del Ministro” [The Minister's Villa]. Tuff stone also accompanied Romans at the time of death. Numerous tombs were excavated in the “toscar” [tuff stone quarry] rock near the town of Punta del Arenal. Although the site has not survived, one of the tombs was extracted from the quarry and is currently kept at Soler Blasco Archaeological Museum.</p>
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Parking	Car park
	<p>We travel by car to the car park at Plaza de la Constitución [Constitution Square] and then walk along Carrer de Bon Aire [Bon Aire (Good Air) Street].</p>

Archaeological site	Xàbia Walls
	<p>The Christian town of Xàbia was founded in the early 14th century on a small fortified mound, at some distance from the port, to protect itself from pirate attacks. At the beginning of the 19th century, the limestone masonry wall was reinforced to stop the advance of Napoleonic troops during the War of Independence. Despite having been demolished in 1874, remains of the wall base and buttresses built in that last stage with tuff stone blocks are still visible in Avenida del Príncipe de Asturias [Prince of Asturias Avenue]. Calle San José [Saint Joseph Street] leads us into the historic centre of Xàbia, one of the oldest and best preserved in Alicante's coastal towns and whose urban layout has been maintained for centuries with few alterations. Its extension is well defined by the current roads. At Calle San Pedro Mártir 18 stands one of the so-called “Gothic houses” — characterised by their medieval elements in tuff stone that enhance the architectural aesthetics and give the old town a golden colour, additionally endowing it with a unique atmosphere. We will arrive at Church Square following Calle de San Bartolomé [Saint Bartholomew's Street].</p>
	
	
	
	
	

Religious site	Iglesia de San Bartolomé [St. Bartholomew's Church]
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Only the apse or chancel —which maintains the square-shaped structure of its first tower— of the original fourteenth-century Christian temple dedicated to Saint Bartholomew has survived to the present day. The building was enlarged two centuries later due to the growth of the population and to its deterioration as a result of the attacks carried out by pirates who arrived from the African coast for centuries. These raids actually shaped a large part of medieval and modern history, and influenced not only architecture but also festive, religious and gastronomic customs and traditions. Its nature as a fortress becomes evident at the mere sight of its solid smooth walls, made up of tuff stone ashlar weighing between 30 and 40 kg and with hardly any ornamental elements. To this must be added the belfry arrow slits and the machicolations —perforated overhangs which made it possible to defend the entrances without being exposed to the enemy's attacks. The enlargement supervised by D. de Urteaga in 1513 is in the Plateresque Gothic style, albeit resembling the Levantine Gothic typical of these lands due to its inner and outer exterior austerity. This church has been declared a Historic-Artistic Monument too. Likewise built in tuff stone —though already from the 20th century— are the works of the tuff stone master Vicent de Gràcia, namely: the baptismal font, the pulpit, the statue of Saint Bartholomew that presides over the church entrance, and the fountain on the Gothic staircase which commemorates the bringing of water to Xàbia in 1922.

Monument







Town Hall









The main façade of Xàbia's Town Hall is opposite the fountain and the San Gil door of Saint Bartholomew's Church. Its structure follows the characteristics of stately homes, with smooth, whitewashed walls as well as door and window openings made of stone taken from local toscares [tuff stone quarries]. It started to be constructed in the 17th century and also occupied the adjoining Capilla de San Cristóbal [Saint Christopher Chapel] in the late 18th century. The chapel was built on top of an old fourteenth-century Christian cemetery —the fossar— from which twenty-five graves were excavated. The site remained in use for more than a century but stopped being utilised after the extension of Saint Bartholomew Church. Some of the aforesaid tombs can be seen under the floor of the Tourist Information Office.

Monument

Municipal Food Market

		<p>Bordering Saint Bartholomew Church and on the site of the seventeenth-century Old Convent of the Discalced Augustinian nuns, stands the Municipal Food Market. The building, erected in the late 1940s, was inspired by Gothic-style civil works, such as the Valencia shipyards, thus successfully preserving the medieval appearance of its surroundings. The market is a rectangular-shaped nave. The stone of the entrance arches, alongside the windows and staircases deserve a special mention when it comes to the white outside walls. The roof is built on wide pointed tuff stone arches, while the windows at the ends and in the lateral galleries illuminate the interior in a natural way. The stalls offer us tasty traditional products of local gastronomy: seafood and fresh fish —appreciated for their deliciousness and flavour— caught at Xàbia Bay and sold daily at the fish market; rosemary, thyme or lavender honey from Montgó Natural Park; figatell, made with lean meat, pork liver and spices, and wrapped in gut; the homemade sobrassada [raw cured and spicy pork sausage] that Majorcan people began to prepare after the expulsion of Moors in 1609; “cocas”, made with bread dough and roasted vegetables from the nearby orchards, Mediterranean salted fish and cold meats, cooked in a wood-fired oven; and raisins or the traditional mistela —sweet wine made from muscatel grapes.</p>
		
		

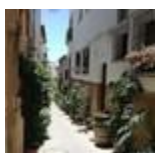
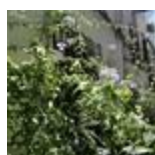
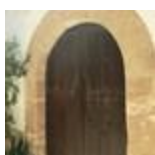
Monument	Casa de los Xolbi [Xolbi Family's House]
	
	
<p>We leave the market at the exit of Sister Mary Gallart Street, dedicated to the Augustinian nun who founded the convent on whose site the market was subsequently erected. At number 7 of this street we find Casa de los Xolbi, built in 1797 with splendid tuff stone ashlars. The small niche on the façade to house a religious image is a common feature of many houses in the Marina Alta area. The Spanish fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga stayed in this house when he retired from the haute couture world in 1968. We walk along Les Roques Street as far as Llotjeta Street, where we turn right until reaching Plaça de Baix.</p>	

Door	Plaça de Baix [Lower Square]
	
<p>We find ourselves at the back of the City Hall. This rear façade shows five walled-up arches corresponding to the arcades of the medieval fish market which used to exist at the square. Unlike those we see now, these arches or porxens were open, forming a porticoed gallery that allowed the market to be held outdoors, but under shelter from the weather. The stone arch that connects Plaça de Baix with the church must have been one of the gates in the first town wall.</p>	



Religious site

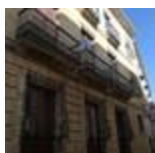
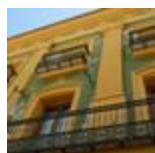
Capilla de Santa Ana [Saint Anne Chapel]



When you reach San Francisco [Saint Francis] Street, turn left and walk straight to the end. On the right begins Carrer d'Avall [Lower Street], through which we continue as far as Saint Anne Chapel. At the end of the 14th century, the Kingdom of Valencia was hit by several plague epidemics. That situation encouraged the Marquis of Denia —and Lord of Xàbia— to order the construction of a hospital to care for the sick of the town; fortunately, its 900 inhabitants did not seriously suffer from the effects of this disease. With the passing of time, the old hospital stopped being used and all that remains of it is Saint Anne Chapel, which has an outward opening with a wide round arch made of golden tuff stone. The inner nave is covered with a ribbed vault. In 1973, this chapel was home to the first museum collection that would later become Soler Blasco Museum.

Monument

Calle Mayor [Main Street] and Casa Primicies [Primicies House]



We turn right at Carrer d'Avall [Lower Street] and continue along Carrer Pastores [Shepherds' Street]. At the end, on the left corner, you will find Ca Lambert, a classicist mansion with a cushioned façade built in the mid-19th century —a time of economic prosperity in Xàbia thanks to the export of raisins. One side of the house features building elements made of tuff stone recovered from previous houses. Once again, we turn right and continue along Calle Mayor, where other magnificent examples of “Gothic houses” (e.g. No. 19, No. 11) with geminated windows, arcades with semi-circular arches or balconies with wrought tuff stone are still standing. Now we turn left at Primicies Street. On the corner, there is a stately home where the first fruits or crops were deposited: the “primicies” which locals gave as an offering to the Church.

Museum

Soler Blasco Archaeological and Ethnological Museum




Xàbia Museum is located in the house-palace that Antonio Banyuls, King Philip III's butler, had built in the first half of the 17th century. Its structure matches the typical one of three-floor urban palaces: ground floor to access the house; first floor with enclosed balconies, for the owners' use; and penthouse with a gallery of semi-circular windows, or porxens, for servants. The use of tuff stone as the only construction element stresses the majesty of this building. The palace came to be used as Soler Blasco Museum headquarters in 1975, and some renovations were made that allowed the initial staircase and the floors to be successfully recovered. This museum's collections cover a wide range of areas such as Archaeology, Natural Sciences and History but, on this route, we would like to highlight the ethnographic materials related to work with tuff stone—the most representative architectural material in Xàbia. We leave the museum and take En Grenyó Street towards Virgen del Pilar Street, where we turn right. We go straight ahead and we cross Avenida Príncipe de Asturias and reach Carrer del Bon Aire, at the end of which is the car park.


World Heritage Site

Dry stone constructions



Now we take CV-7362 road to Camí de les Pedres, a dirt track on the right. Following the path, we will reach La Plana de San Jerónimo. Xàbia has managed to maintain numerous traditional buildings based on an age-old architectural technique: dry stone. Its endurance over time together with its integration into landscape history and culture led to the recognition of dry stone architecture as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2018. Taking advantage of the abundance of rock in the surroundings, and without using any type of mortar, the superimposition of stones blocked by their own weight has served to build corrals for livestock, wells, shepherds' huts and wells to store snow, among other things. Dry stone walls have been part of houses and defensive walls in this area since the Bronze Age. In the Middle Ages, Muslims and Moors used them to increase the dry farming surface in mountainous inland areas. However, cultivation terraces—made up of artificial platforms arranged in stands that cover all the slopes of the valleys surrounding the town—began to proliferate from the eighteenth century onwards, when population growth made it necessary to produce more food; and in the nineteenth century, when they were dedicated to grow vines for the production of raisins that they exported all over the world. These techniques of cultivation in stands sought a number of essential objectives: building land plots where there was no space to grow crops; capturing rainwater, which was scarce and highly prized; and containing the speed of rainwater, manifested throughout this area through heavy downpours and floods. The landscape thus forms an integral part of the natural heritage that our ancestors shaped, not only to survive but also to protect their natural environment and live in harmony with it.

Monument	La Plana Mills
	<p>According to historical documents, there have been windmills in this area at least since 1391. It is an ideal place for their location due to the continuous presence of the south-west lebeche wind. Mills were a key element for grinding the cereal that was cultivated in the surrounding fields and for making bread in a self-sufficient way in this area. They remained operational until the early 20th century, when the export of raisins had already taken a prominent role in the local economy. All mills feature a similar structure: a cylindrical body of limestone masonry locked with lime mortar, erected according to local building traditions. The interior is divided into two floors connected by a spiral staircase in tuff stone attached to the wall. Tuff stone was also used to make door and window frames, as well as the vault that separates both levels. The conical roof, made of wood or natural fibres, has not survived. The millstones —along with the wooden machinery that moved them— were at the top. The mechanism was activated by the rotation that the wind transmitted to the blades, the most representative and popular element which could be seen from the town centre and the sea and dominated Xàbia Valley. Both the machinery and the blades were usually made of wood, which explains why they have not been preserved.</p>

Panorama	Cape San Antonio
	<p>We take the route back to CV-7362 road, where we turn right and continue straight on to Cape San Antonio lighthouse. Next road on the right, you can visit the Santuario de Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles (Sanctuari de Virgin Mary of Angels), where you can see tuff stone elements added in one of the last restorations of the 20th century. The extraction of tuff stone in Xàbia came to an end in 1970 for environmental reasons. Due to its scarcity, Xàbia Town Hall is currently working on the recovery of this type of stone when old buildings are demolished and stores it for restoration work in historic buildings. The cessation of quarrying has contributed to preserve Muntanyar, the coastal rock formation that supplies much of the tuff stone used in local architecture. From here we can observe Muntanyar in all its extension and likewise enjoy an unbeatable view of the magnificent Xàbia Bay —not only a highly-valued natural port but also an ancient refuge of pirates and Berbers, as well as of the numerous visitors and tourists who spend their holidays here every year. Cape San Antonio is the “Levantine Finisterre” that goes into the western Mediterranean basin. Its impressive cliffs, only cut by ravines and small coves, have witnessed shipwrecks and ancient fishing practices: “almadrabas [trap netting]” in Xàbia Bay; and “pesqueras colgadas” (fishing boats) on its</p>

vertical walls where local fishermen used to catch the best pieces. The micro-reserves of protected native flora coexist with the species of high environmental value that inhabit Cape San Antonio marine reserve. The great variety of ecosystems favours biodiversity and the appearance of marine communities of high ecological interest (protected by the European Council). These waters are a must for migratory species such as rorquals, whales, dolphins or turtles, which can be sighted to the delight of locals and visitors at different times of year.