

Andorra

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Trekking** Tramp a sample of the walking trails that thread through the principality, especially above Ordino (p72) and Soldeu (p71)
- **Grandvalira** Slip-slide your way over the most extensive snowfields in the Pyrenees (p71)
- **Caldea** Steep yourself in the warm mineral waters of the space-age Caldea (p70)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 464 sq km (that's 2½ times smaller than Paris)
- **ATMs** Available everywhere
- **Budget** €40 to €60 per day
- **Capital** Andorra la Vella
- **Famous for** skiing, shopping, smuggling
- **Head of State** Albert Pintat Santolaria
- **Language** Catalan (but nearly everyone knows Spanish)
- **Money** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.59; CA\$1 = €0.69; ¥100 = €0.67; NZ\$1 = €0.49; UK£1 = €1.46; US\$1 = €0.78
- **Phrases** *hola* (hello), *adéu* (goodbye), *si us plau* (please), *gràcies* (thanks)
- **Population** 76,900

- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 376; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** None required

TRAVEL HINT

Skiing and summer walking packages (offered, for example, by all major UK tour operators and usually including flights) are much cheaper than going it alone. You could take advantage, then use Andorra as a springboard for Mediterranean travels.

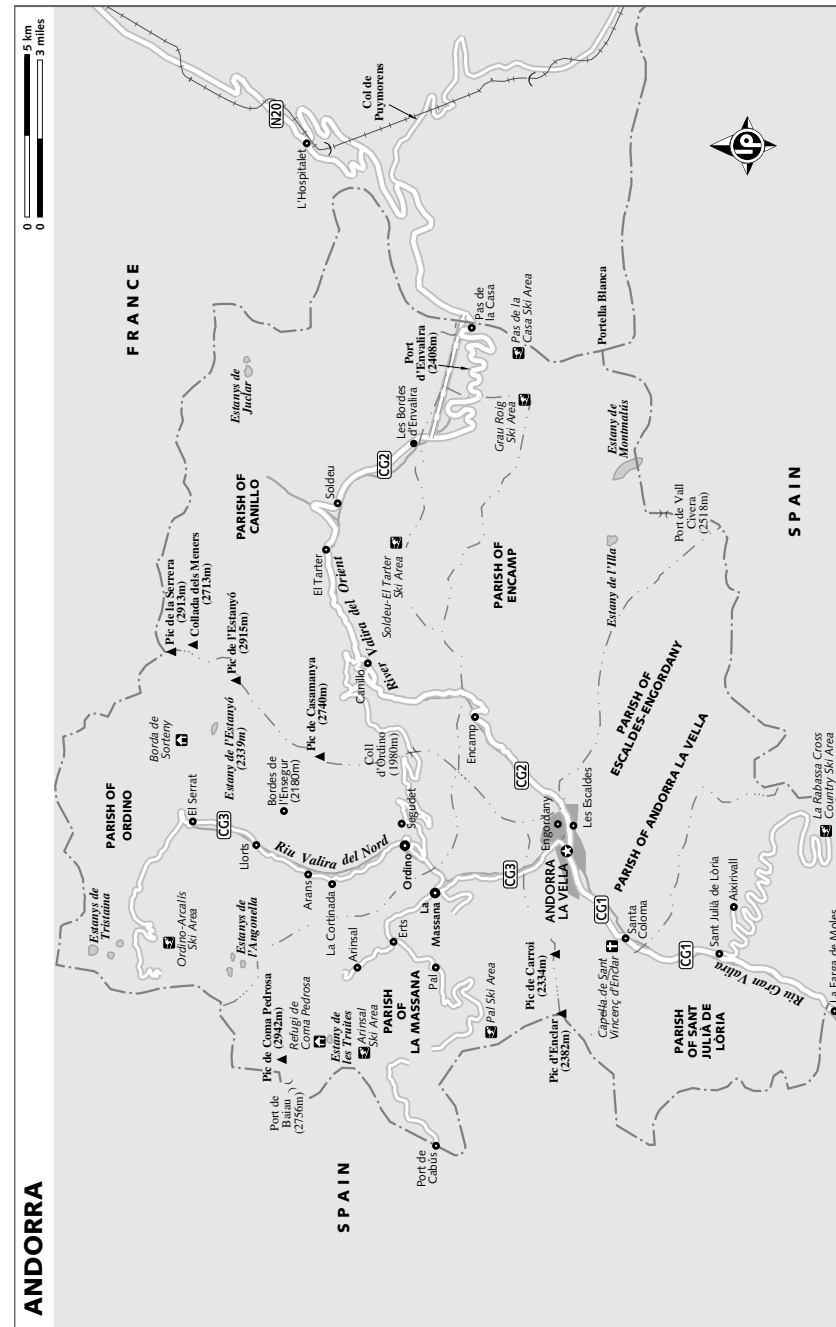
ROAMING ANDORRA

To savour this mountain principality, you've got to pull on your walking boots and get out of Andorra la Vella, hub for all bus routes. Then again, if you're really pushed for time, study the bus timetable well and you can cover what's significant in Andorra in a couple of days.

Mention Andorra and people may tell you it's all skiing and shopping. They might add for good measure that Andorra la Vella, its capital and only town, is a fuming traffic jam bordered by palaces of consumerism (fact: Andorra has over 2000 shops – more than one for every 40 inhabitants).

They're a bit right but also very wrong. Shake yourself from Andorra la Vella's tawdry embrace, take one of the state's only three secondary roads and discover some of the most dramatic scenery in all the Pyrenees.

Go soon, though: it may not be the same in a few years. Greed and uncontrolled development risk spoiling those side valleys. Already the pounding of jackhammers drowns out the winter thrum of ski lifts and threatens the silence of summer.



ANDORRA

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What's sure is that this minicountry wedged between France and Spain offers by far the best skiing in the Pyrenees. In the last five years its resorts have invested more than 50 million euros in mountain cafés and restaurants, lifts and snow-making machines. And once the snows have melted, there's great walking in abundance, from hands-in-pockets strolling to demanding day hikes in the principality's higher, more remote reaches.

HISTORY

Until as recently as 1993, Andorra was ruled, at least in name, by two 'princes': the Catholic bishop of La Seu d'Urgell, just over the Spanish border, and the French president himself (who inherited the job from France's pre-Revolutionary kings). Today democratic Andorra is a 'parliamentary co-principedom', with the bishop and president remaining nominal joint heads of state.

THE CULTURE

Only 36% of Andorra's inhabitants are Andorran nationals, a percentage equalled by the number of Spanish residents. It's the only country in the world that has Catalan, a relative of both Spanish and French, as the state language. Younger Andorrans, especially in the capital and ski resorts, manage more than a smattering of English as well.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can only reach Andorra by road, unless you trek across the mountains (and hey, we're not entirely kidding; it's a magnificent way to drop in or out).

To/From Spain

Alsina Graells (☎ 826 567; www.alsinagraells.com) Four buses daily to/from Barcelona's Estació del Nord (€20, 3½ hours).

Autocars Nadal (☎ 805 151; www.autocarsnadal.com, in Spanish & French) Six buses daily to/from Barcelona's airport (€26, 3¾ hours), calling by the city's Sants train station (€21, 3¼ hours).

Autocars Novatel (☎ 803 789; www.andorraybybus.com) Five minibuses daily to/from Barcelona's airport (€26, 3½ hours).

La Hispano Andorrana (☎ 821 372; www.hispanoandorrana.com) Hourly buses between Andorra la Vella and La Seu d'Urgell (€2.50, 40 minutes), just across the border. They call at the Plaça de Guillemó bus stop.

Viatges Montmantell (☎ 807 444) Four buses daily to/from Lleida in Spain (€17, 2½ hours) to connect with the Madrid-bound high speed AVE train (a great experience in itself). Services stop outside the Caldea.

MIND HOW YOU GO

Legally, Catalan is obligatory for all signage, publicity, restaurant menus, announcements and the like. However, since massive tourism is Andorra's lifeblood, most notices are also in Spanish, English and sometimes French.

But not always; even though Catalan is opaque to the vast majority of visitors, we came across the following monolingual signs, to which, for your safety, we append the English translation!

- Perill: Zona Voladures = Beware: Falling stones
- Caiguda de Neu = Watch out for snow sliding from roofs
- Risc Allaus = Risk of avalanche (or, just jump when the locals jump)

To/From France

Autocars Nadal Twice each Friday and Sunday to/from Toulouse's bus station (€21, 3½ hours).

Autocars Novatel Two minibuses daily to/from Toulouse's airport and train station (€29, 3½ hours).

GETTING AROUND

Bus

Six bus routes, all radiating from the capital and run by **Cooperativa Interurbana** (☎ 806 555), follow Andorra's three main roads. Tourist offices carry a free leaflet giving current timetables.

Car & Motorcycle

The largely ignored speed limit is 40km/h in populated areas and 90km/h elsewhere. Two problems are the recklessness of local drivers and Andorra la Vella's horrendous traffic jams. Bypass the worst of the latter by taking the ring road around the south side of town.

TRANSPORT TIP

If you're motorised, top up your tank; fuel in Andorra is about 20% cheaper than in Spain and a good 30% less than France's.

ANDORRA LA VELLA

pop 22,900 / elev 1030m

Andorra la Vella (vey-yah, meaning 'old'), the capital and sole town of this tiny nation, is squeezed into the Riu Gran Valira Valley. Its main passion is flogging electronic items and luxury goods to binge-shopping tourists.

ORIENTATION

Andorra la Vella is strung along one main drag, whose name changes from Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch to Avinguda de Meritxell to Avinguda de Carlemany. The tiny historic quarter is split by this busy road.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

E-Café (Carrer l'Alziranet 5; per hr €2.40; ☎ 7.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun)

Future@point (Carrer de la Sardana 6; per hr €2.80; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)

Medical Services

Hospital Nostra Senyora de Meritxell (☎ 871 000; Avinguda Fiter i Rossell)

Post & Telephone

There are plenty of streetside telephones. You'll find a battery of them along Carrer de la Borda, just off Avinguda de Meritxell.

French post office (La Poste; Carrer de Pere d'Urg 1; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Spanish post office (Correus/Correos i Telègrafs; Carrer de Joan Maragall 10; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (☎ 827 117; turisme@comuandorra.ad; Plaça de la Rotonda; ☎ 9am-9pm Jul-Aug, 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Sep-Jun) Also carries pan-Andorra information.

National tourist office (☎ 820 214; sindicatd'iniciativa@andorra.ad; Edifici Davi, Local C, Carrer del Doctor Vilanova 13; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The tiny **historic quarter** (Barri Antic) was the heart of Andorra la Vella when the principality's capital was little more than a village. Within it is the **Casa de la Vall** (House of the Valley), built in 1580 as a private home and Andorra's parliament building since 1702.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 112
- Fire ☎ 112
- Police ☎ 112

The **Plaça del Poble** (People's Sq) is on the roof of a modern government office building. Giving great views, it's a popular local gathering place, especially in the evening.

If you've spare cash for **shopping**, you'll save on sports gear, photographic equipment, shoes and clothing, where prices are around 25% less than in Spain or France. Stock up on rock-bottom price booze and cigs, too.

SLEEPING

Camping Valira (☎ 722 384; campingvalira@andorra.ad; Avinguda de Salou; camp sites per person/tent/car €5.35/5.35/5.35; ☎ year-round; ☎) Just west of town, this camping ground has a small indoor swimming pool. You'll have to hunt to find a space between the resident caravans.

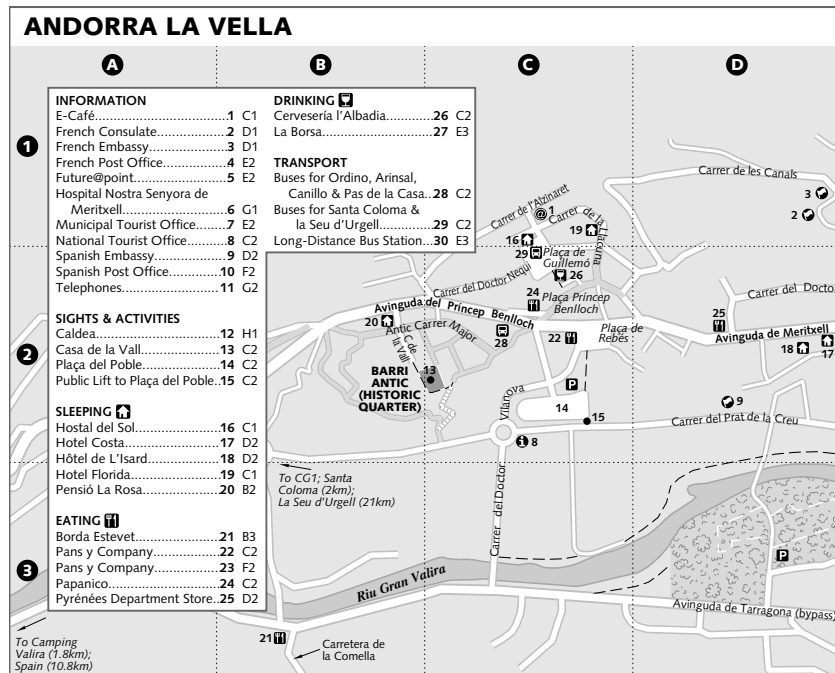
Pensió La Rosa (☎ /fax 821 810; Antic Carrer Major 18; s/d with shared bathroom €13/24) At the heart of the Barri Antic, La Rosa offers clean, simple accommodation, including a couple of dorms (€72) that sleep six people.

Hostal del Sol (☎ 823 701; fax 822 363; Plaça de Guillemó 3; s/d with shared bathroom €14/28) This friendly, family-run place has 12 spruce, excellent-value rooms, and there are several cheap eateries just below. Sadly, it may be closing down at the end of its lease unless a grasping landlord relents.

Hotel Costa (☎ 821 439; fax 824 867; 3rd fl, Avinguda de Meritxell 44; s/d with shared bathroom €17/32) Hotel Costa has 26 clean, no-frills rooms. Badly indicated at street level – you need to crane your neck to see the sign way up high – its entrance is in the shopping arcade.

Hotel Florida (☎ 820 105; www.hotelflorida.ad; Carrer de la Llacuna 15; s/d incl breakfast from €37/45) At this welcoming modern hotel, you can relax in the sauna and *hammam* (Turkish bath; free to guests), or tone yourself up in the gym. Rooms vary in size; ask for one of the larger ones.

Hôtel de L'Isard (☎ 876 800; www.hotelisard.com, in French & Spanish; Avinguda Meritxell 36; s €56-80, d €71-110, all incl breakfast) Behind its attractive stone façade, you'll find a comfortable, family-run hotel. Rear rooms overlook the valley and mountain beyond. It runs a good restaurant (menu €15, mains €10 to €14.50).



EATING & DRINKING

Pans y Company Barri Antic (Plaça de Rebès 2); Escaldes (Avinguda de Meritxell 91) This Spanish chain, with a couple of branches, does crunchy baguettes (€3 to €4.20) and salads.

Pyrénées department store (Avinguda de Meritxell 21) At the top-floor café, pile your salad plate (€4.95) high at the buffet, then tuck into the dish of the day (€4.65) or pick from one of the *plato combinado* (mixed plate; €7.25). Below, the supermarket is great for picnic fare.

Papanico (☎ 867 333; Avinguda del Príncep Benlloch 4; mains €9.50-13) This cheery place does tasty tapas from €2.95 and a range of sandwiches and mains.

Borda Estevet (☎ 864 026; Carretera de la Comella 2; mains €14.60-18.50) Here's a place for meaty mountain fare with a pronounced Catalan twist. Try its *gruellada de muntanya*, a selection of meats and sausages sizzled on hot slates. Among the chef's many accolades and commendations is the intriguing Golden Cock Award.

La Borsa (The Stock Exchange; ☎ 827 657; Avinguda de Tarragona 36; ☎ 11pm-3am Tue-Sun) Like a little flutter while you drink and dance? The price of each drink varies according to the night's

consumption so far, so keep an eye on the electronic, computer-controlled screen.

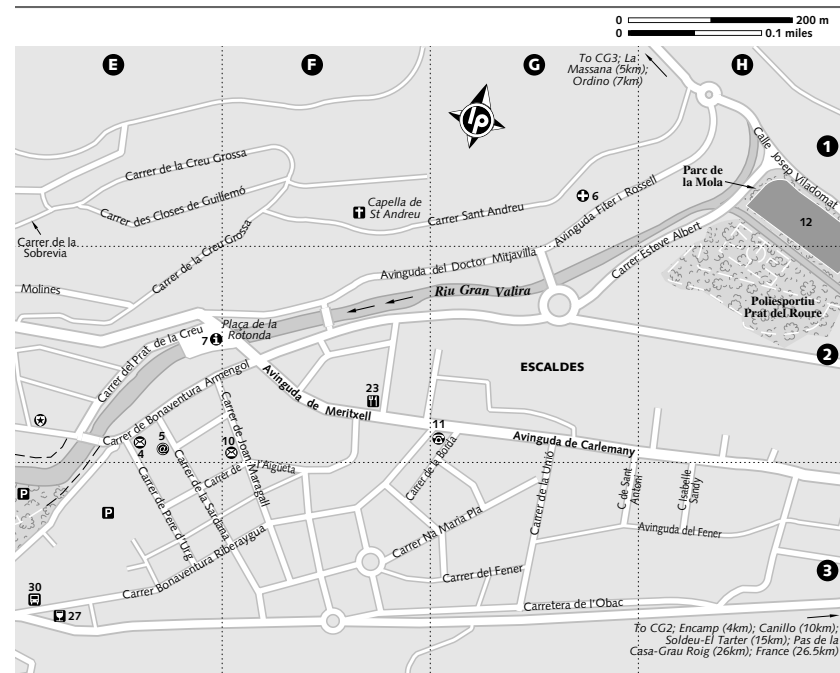
Cerveseria l'Albadia (☎ 820 825; Cap del Carrer 2) A place for beerophiles, with over eight classics on draught and many more in the bottle.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Long-distance buses pull in at the bus station on Avinguda de Tarragona, in the heart of town. Short-haul services for La Seu d'Urgell, just over the Spanish border, call by the stop on Plaça de Guillemó.

SPLURGE

Caldea (☎ 800 999; www.caldea.ad; Parc de la Mola 10; adult/child €29.50/22; ☎ 10am-11pm, last entry 9pm) is a great place for a splurge. One of Europe's largest spa complexes, its lagoons, hot tubs and saunas are all fed by thermal springs. Dunk yourself long enough and you can forgo showers for a week! If you're game for more, sign on for a whole range of extras, including 'Turkish exfoliation', 'body scrub' and the enticing 'full hand care'.



AROUND ANDORRA

CANILLO & SOLDEU

Canillo, 11km northeast of Andorra la Vella, and Soldeu, a further 7km up the valley along the CG2, share a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 751 090; www.vdc.ad; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun) at the eastern end of the main road.

The two villages are at the heart of the combined snowfields of **Grandvalira** (☎ 801 060; www.grandvalira.com), the vastest ski playground in the Pyrenees with 193km of runs and a combined lift system that can shift 96,000 skiers every hour. Lift passes for one/three days cost €37/97.50.

In summer **Canillo** (1500m) offers canyon clambering, a *via ferrata* (iron way) climbing gully and a climbing wall. There is also the year-round **Palau de Gel**, with an ice rink and pool (plus restaurant and a bar with free wi-fi), guided walks and endless hiking options.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Santa Creu (☎ 851 462; camping_antacreu@yahoo.com; camp sites per person/tent/car €3.50/3.50/3.50;

☎ mid-Jun-Sep) The greenest and quietest of Canillo's five camping grounds.

Aina (☎ 851 434; colonies.aina@andorra.ad; dm €13, half-board €19; ☎ Sep-mid-Jun) Just east of Canillo, Aina functions as a youth hostel outside high summer. Dormitories sleep six people, and you need your own sleeping bag.

Hotel Roc de Sant Miquel (☎ 851 079; www.hotel-roc.com; half-board per person winter €30-68, summer €27-45; ☎ closed May & Oct) This relaxed Soldeu hotel – the owner plays lead guitar in a local band – hires mountain bikes to guests for a small fee. It's less than 1km from the village en route to Canillo.

Cal Lulu (☎ 851 427; pizza €7.50-10.35, menu €13.60, mains €16-18; ☎ closed Mon & Tue except high season) Intimate and often packed to the gills, Cal Lulu in Canillo serves large portions of excellent Catalan and French dishes.

Hotel Bruxelles (☎ 851 010; sandwiches €3.25-4, menu €11.10-20.30) On Soldeu's main drag, this hotel restaurant with a small terrace serves good lunch menus, yummy sandwiches and whopping burgers.

Slim Jim's (☎ 852 567; ☎ 9am-10pm mid-Nov-Apr, 9am-5pm Jun-mid-Sep) This British-run place, one block from Soldeu's main street, does

sandwiches, snacks and sizzling kebabs. It has four internet terminals (per hour €5).

Entertainment

The music pounds on winter nights in Soldeu. Pussy Cat and its neighbour Fat Albert rock until far too late for impressive skiing the next day, while **Avalanche** (☎ 852 282) and, three doors away, **Aspen** (☎ 851 974), have regular live bands. Also on the main drag, Stone Bar has broadband internet access, table football and occasional live music.

Getting There & Around

Hourly buses run from Andorra la Vella to Soldeu (€2.50) via Canillo till 8pm. In winter hourly ski buses (free if you flash your ski pass) also cover the same route.

ORDINO & AROUND

Despite ongoing development, Ordino, on highway CG3 8km north of Andorra la Vella, is a great little village, built of local stone. At 1300m, it's a good starting point for summer activity holidays. The **tourist office** (☎ 737 080; www.ordino.ad; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, 8.30am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Oct-Jun) is beside the CG3.

Sights & Activities

Museu d'Areny i Plandolit (☎ 836 908; adult/child €2.40/1.20; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) is a 17th-century manor house with a richly furnished interior. In the same grounds, the **Museu Postal de Andorra** (Postal Museum; adult/child €2.40/1.20; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Sep-Jun) is fun, even for the philatelically challenged. It has a 15-minute audiovisual presentation (with English option) and stamps by the thousand, issued by France and Spain for Andorra.

There are excellent **walking trails** around Ordino. Grab *Thirty-six Interesting Itineraries on the Paths of the Vall d'Ordino & the Parish of La Massana* (€2) from the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Borda d'Ansalonga (☎ 850 374; www.campingansalonga.com; camp sites per person/tent/car €4.80/4/4; ☎ mid-Jun-Sep & Nov-Apr; ☎) A pretty, grassy camping ground just outside the village.

Casa León (☎ 835 977; menu €12.50-18.50; ☎ Tue-Sun) This eatery serves lots of tapas and filling à la carte dishes (€9.50 to €15).

Next door to Casa León, **Bar Restaurant Quim** is more snacky and also does tasty tapas and a filling lunchtime menu (€10).

Getting There & Away

Buses to/from Andorra la Vella run every half-hour from 7am to 9pm.

ARINSAL & PAL

In winter Arinsal, 10km northwest of Andorra la Vella, has good skiing and snowboarding. It's linked with the smaller ski station of Pal, and both are part of the **Vallnord** (www.vallnord.com) complex. They share 63km of pistes with a vertical drop of 1010m. A one-day lift pass costs €27 (€32 in the high season).

In summer Arinsal is a good departure point for medium-grade mountain walks. From Aparthotel Crest on Arinsal's northern fringe, a trail leads northwest then west to **Estany de les Truites** (2260m). The steepish ascent to this lake takes around 1½ hours. It's another 1½ to two hours to bag **Pic de Coma Pedrosa** (2942m), Andorra's highest point.

Pal has plenty of summertime activities, including mountain biking, horse riding, go-karting and archery.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Xixerella (☎ 836 613; www.campingxixerella.com; camp sites per person/tent/car €4.95/4.95/4.95; ☎ Nov-Sep; ☎) Between Pal and Arinsal, this large, well-equipped camping ground has plenty of shade.

our pick **Hostal Poblado** (☎ 835 122; sti@andorra.ad; B&B per person €30, with shared bathroom €22.50; ☎ Dec-Oct; ☎) Hostal Poblado sits right beside the cabin lift. With its lively bar and internet point (per hour €3), it's friendliness itself and a great place to make contact with other skiers or walkers.

Refugi de la Fondue (☎ 839 599) As a change from the plentiful snack and sandwich joints, dip a fork into its cheese or meat fondue dishes (€14). In summer it puts on outdoor barbeques.

Entertainment

In winter Arinsal virtually throbs after sunset. In summer it can be almost mournful.

Surf (☎ 838 069) When the snow's around, call by Surf, near the base of the cabin lift. It's a pub, dance venue and restaurant (sink your teeth into its juicy Argentine grilled meat dishes) all in one.

Getting There & Away

Nine daily buses (€1.50) leave Andorra la Vella for Arinsal via La Massana. There are also at least nine local buses daily (€0.90) between La Massana and Arinsal, and four (€0.90) between La Massana and Pal.

SANT JULIÀ DE LÒRIA

At Sant Julià de Lòria, 6km south of the city, is the splendid **Museu del Tabac** (☎ 741 545; Carrer Doctor Palau 17; admission €5; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun). In a one-time tobacco factory, it recalls the pleasurable sins of tobacco and smuggling. Allow at least an hour for a visit.

ANDORRA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Tourist offices stock a free booklet *Guia d'Alotjaments Turístics*. It's reliable, although the prices indicated are only a guide. No bed comes cheap in Andorra. For the most modest accommodation, expect to pay about €20 for a shared double. There are no youth hostels, but there are plenty of camping grounds, many in beautiful surroundings. A free booklet, *Guia de Càmpings i Refugis* (Camping and Mountain Hut Guide), found at tourist offices, is a comprehensive listing of all of Andorra's camp sites. In the high season some hotels raise prices hugely, while others don't accept independent travellers and may insist upon half-board.

If you're trekking, ask at tourist offices for the free *Mapa de Refugis i Grans Recorreguts*, which marks and describes Andorra's 26 remote *refugis* (mountain refuges).

ACTIVITIES

Above the main valleys, you'll find lake-dotted mountain country, good for skiing in winter and walking in summer. The largest and best ski stations are those of the Grandvalira complex (p71). Those of Vallnord (opposite) are cheaper, but can be colder and windier.

Downhill ski-gear hire costs around €10 per day, while snowboards go for €17.50 to €20 per day.

La Rabassa, nudged up against the frontier with Spain, is a great little cross-country skiing centre with 15km of marked forest trails.

In summer you can hire mountain bikes in some resorts for €15 to €18 per day.

But Andorra is, above all, for walkers. Ordino (opposite), Canillo (p71) and Soldeu (p71)

make great bases, and the trails, once you head out of the valley, will be all for you.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat

Restaurants ☎ 1-3.30pm & 8-10.30pm

Shops ☎ generally 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in Andorra

France (☎ 736 730) Embassy (Carrer de les Canals 38, Andorra la Vella); Consulate (Carrer de la Sobrevia 7, Andorra la Vella)

Spain (☎ 820 013; Carrer del Prat de la Creu 34, Andorra la Vella)

Andorran Embassies Abroad

France (☎ 01 40 06 03 30; place d'Andorre 1, 75016 Paris)

Spain (☎ 91 431 74 53; Calle Alcalá 73, 28009 Madrid)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On 8 September the **Día de Meritxell**, in honour of the patron saint of Andorra, is celebrated throughout the country.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.andorra.ad Website of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

www.skiandorra.ad For skiing and practical winter information.

www.turismeandorra.com Maintained by the local hotel association.

POST

France and Spain operate separate systems with their own Andorran stamps.

TELEPHONE

Buy a *teletarja* (phonecard; €3 and €6 from tourist offices and kiosks). Off-peak times are 9pm to 8am, plus all day Sunday.

VISAS

Visas aren't necessary; the authorities figure that if Spain or France lets you in, that's good enough for them. But bring your passport or national ID card.

WORKING

You'll be up against strong competition from Chileans and Argentines working the northern winter in Andorra, but you might pick up a ski-season bar or table-waiting job.

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