

# CATALONIA, A COUNTRY TO PRACTISE SPORT IN

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, A GROWING NUMBER OF CATALANS HAVE SHOWN AN INTEREST IN TAKING PART IN SPORT. IN SUMMER, THIS INTEREST INCREASES CONSIDERABLY. IF YOU SPEND YOUR SUMMER HOLIDAYS IN CATALONIA, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE THAT A LARGE PART OF THE POPULATION PRACTISE SOME KIND OF SPORT IN THEIR FREE TIME.

EDUARD BOET JOURNALIST



**W**hen referring to Catalonia, travel agents' advertising campaigns have traditionally tended to concentrate on the famous sun, the beaches, the culture, the artistic heritage and, recently, the mountains. Not much has been said until now of another possibility which, it has lately become clear, is one of the things holiday-makers in our country are most anxious to find, the chance to practise their favourite sport.

In the last few years, a growing number of Catalans have shown an interest in taking part in sports. In summer, this interest increases considerably. If you spend your summer holidays in Catalonia, you will be able to see that a large part of the population take part in sports in their free time. In recent times, this has led to the proliferation of sports installations in the most im-

portant tourist areas. There are also many installations that have been built thanks to the initiative of foreigners who have been holidaying in Catalonia for some years. Without doubt, the great advantage that Catalonia has to offer when it comes to sport in summer is the climate. Naturally the weather is warm and sunny, though without extremes that would be difficult for the human body to resist. According to many top sportsmen and women, the long summer afternoons in this country offer

possibly the best conditions for the practice of the various open air activities. At present, many Spanish sports clubs choose Catalonia for their summer training, in preparation for the Spanish competition season, which starts in September.

At the moment, there are 52 sports with their own federations, that is to say, that are organized and that have installations spread over the country and open both to federated members and those who wish to take part sporadically. The latter is more frequently the case. Though at present more than 400,000 people take part in federated sports, the latest estimates made by the organisms responsible for administering sport in Catalonia suggest that one in five Catalans regularly practise some form of sport. To sum up,



Catalonia has an answer available for all the sporting needs of those who visit; even in the case of those specialities which have no federation here. One example is the typically British sport, cricket. At the Barcelona Polo Club, a few British residents, along with fellow-countrymen here on holiday, occasionally organize cricket matches, an otherwise totally unknown event in Catalonia.

A run through the different activities which are most ideally suited to summer has to start with sailing, the most important. Almost all the Catalan coast offers opportunities for sailing in light yachts. Most beaches are easy to get to by car and trailer and have areas reserved for yacht handling. As well as this, there are 89 sailing clubs distributed amongst the coastal towns and there are numerous marinas with all the necessary facilities for cruise sailing. This last point is also particularly true of the Balearics, a must for anyone who chooses to sail the Mediterranean. Returning to light yachting, there are three places in Catalonia where regattas are held and which earned the praise of the international organisms when they were presented as possible settings for the sailing events of the '92 Olympic Games. The three places are the bay of Roses, on the Costa Brava, the Barcelona coast and the gulf of Sant Jordi, on the Costa Dorada. Indisputably,

one of the most popular activities on the beaches recently is wind-surfing. The different winds that blow on the coasts of Catalonia make this sport very attractive and the boards can be hired at almost all the larger towns.

If you are a habitual tennis player, be sure to bring your racket, as you can find courts all over the country. There are 289 tennis clubs in Catalonia at present and an incalculable number of facilities for hire. One of the areas where there is the highest concentration of courts is Castelldefels and Gavà, very close to Barcelona. The courts to be found here are generally of beaten earth or "tennis-quick". If you prefer the latter, you are advised not to play before five in the afternoon as the heat can be a problem. If you are a great enthusiast, you would be wise to extend your holiday, because the Count of Godó tournament, which counts towards the Grand Prix and attracts the best players in the world, takes place in Barcelona in the second week of September.

If you play golf, Catalonia now has eleven clubs, most of them close to the important tourist areas. For example, on the Costa Brava, there is the golf course at Pals. Near Barcelona, there are those of Vallromanes, Sant Cugat and El Prat. Halfway between Barcelona and Tarragona is the Sitges course and on the Costa Daurada we find the Tarragona golf club. All these facilities, and those of the rest of the country, have been much praised by the majority of Spanish golfers, who have been so successful on the international scene in recent years.

The roads of Catalonia are also a good place for those who want to go footing or cycling. There are all sorts of routes to choose from, from very level to the most daring, and always on secondary roads with little traffic and with the surface in good condition. For the cycle tourers, there are more than 100 clubs in Catalonia that organize excursions all the year round, though especially in summer. If you consider yourself a good climber, you must try scaling the mountain of Montserrat. This is a traditional challenge for all Catalan athletes in general. You can rest assured that, once at the top, you will find everything you need to recover your energies. This very mountain of Montserrat, some 50 kilometres from Barcelona, is close to the hearts of all Catalan climbers. If you enjoy mountain sports, you will find its rock-faces a great attraction. Obviously, you should first get advice from one of the 250 ramblers' clubs in the country.



© LLUIS TREPAT

The summer months are not the most satisfactory for the football fans. The league starts in the first week of September, but there is the Joan Gamper trophy, which is played in the Camp Nou, in Barcelona, on 23rd and 24th August, and in which some of the most important European clubs take part. However, anyone who wants to spend the holidays playing will have plenty of opportunities. There is a continuing tradition of holding a football match at the local festivities organized by different towns during the summer. Also, as you will see, any excuse will do to organize a match: married versus single, tourists versus locals, etc. You can be sure that wherever you spend your holidays there will be no lack of opportunity to play. Don't leave your boots at home, then. Bear in mind, though, that the majority of football grounds in Catalonia are of earth or grass in not very good condition and that, subsequently, the most suitable boots are those with rubber studs. Obviously, you can also play in gym shoes, especially one of the forms that has become so fashionable over the last few years, indoor football. If you enjoy playing football, you can be sure that you will have difficulty getting out of playing, even if only a short match.

In football, just as in all other sports, you will be able to feel at home in Catalonia. May the best man win! ●

