

# Cabrerias tour

The viscounty of Cabrera was one of the most important feudal lordships in Catalonia. It functioned as such for over 900 years, from the 11th to 19th centuries. The viscounty was almost a state within the state, with its own administration, taxation, army and justice. The viscounts only owed allegiance to the king as his vassals. The viscounty extended over five districts: two thirds of la Selva, Alt Maresme, east of Vallès Oriental, Osona and La Garrotxa, that is, from Palautordera to Anglès and from Vall'd'en Bas to the marina between Arenys and Blanes. Its footprint in the territory is still visible today as the castles and villas which they inhabited or dominated: castle and villa of Hostalric, castle of Anglès, castle of Vidreres, castle and villa of Blanes, castle of Palafolls, castle of Montpalau, castle of Montclús, castle of Torelló and mayorships distributed through the five districts. Hostalric was always the administrative capital until the lordships were abolished. But from the 14th century on, the Court moved to Blanes, the maritime and commercial capital of the viscounty.



## Brief chronology of the Cabrerass:

The origin of the Cabrerass is to be found in the Osona district.

1002-1017  
Gausfred de Cabrera was the first lord of the Cabrera castle

His son Guerau I married Ermessenda de Montsoriu, daughter of the viscount of Girona, Amat de Montsoriu.

Since 1382 all these rights, which had previously been shared with the Blanes family or the king, had been concentrated in the house of the Cabrerass.

Later, in 1623, the Montcadas sold the direct lordship to the merchant Esteve Alemany i Florit, although they reserved some jurisdictional rights in addition to the fish tithe and the estuary right of "ribatge".

According to documents that have been found, by the year 952 a castle already existed.

1145  
When the viscounty of Girona had been abolished, Guerau III de Cabrera adopted the noble title of viscount of Cabrera, which his successors maintain to this day.

By purchasing the entire viscounty in 1574, this jurisdiction passed to the Montcada family, later marquises of Aitona.

The descendants of the Aitonas (later the house of Medinacelli), and of the Alemanys (later the Sala and Sans de Monrodon families) would own some of these rights until the 20th century.

### Other noble titles acquired by the Cabrerass:

- Viscounty of Ager in 1067 through marriage of Ponç I de Cabrera.
- Viscounty of the Baix Urgell 1094, obtained by Guerau II de Cabrera.
- County of Urgell with Ponç III.
- County of Empúries and viscounty of Bas through a connection of the Marquess of Cabrera with Ponç V d'Empúries in the year 1282.
- Viscounty of Bas by inheritance in 1335.
- County of Modica in Italy, awarded to Bernat IV as a reward for fighting with Pere el Cerimoniós in 1393.

In 1260 Viscount Guerau VI de Cabrera and his sub-feudal Guillem de Blanes granted the present and future inhabitants of the district of the castle and the town of Blanes a series of privileges that became an authentic letter of settlement. With this instrument the feudal lords aimed to attract settlers and consolidate an urban centre in the area of the viscounty marina. To stimulate this process, they granted the settlers a number of legal, political and economic privileges. This was the beginning of the town's urban growth, which would culminate in the 14th century, when Blanes became the main urban and commercial centre of the viscounty of Cabrera. In 1348 Blanes suffered a very serious epidemic of black plague.

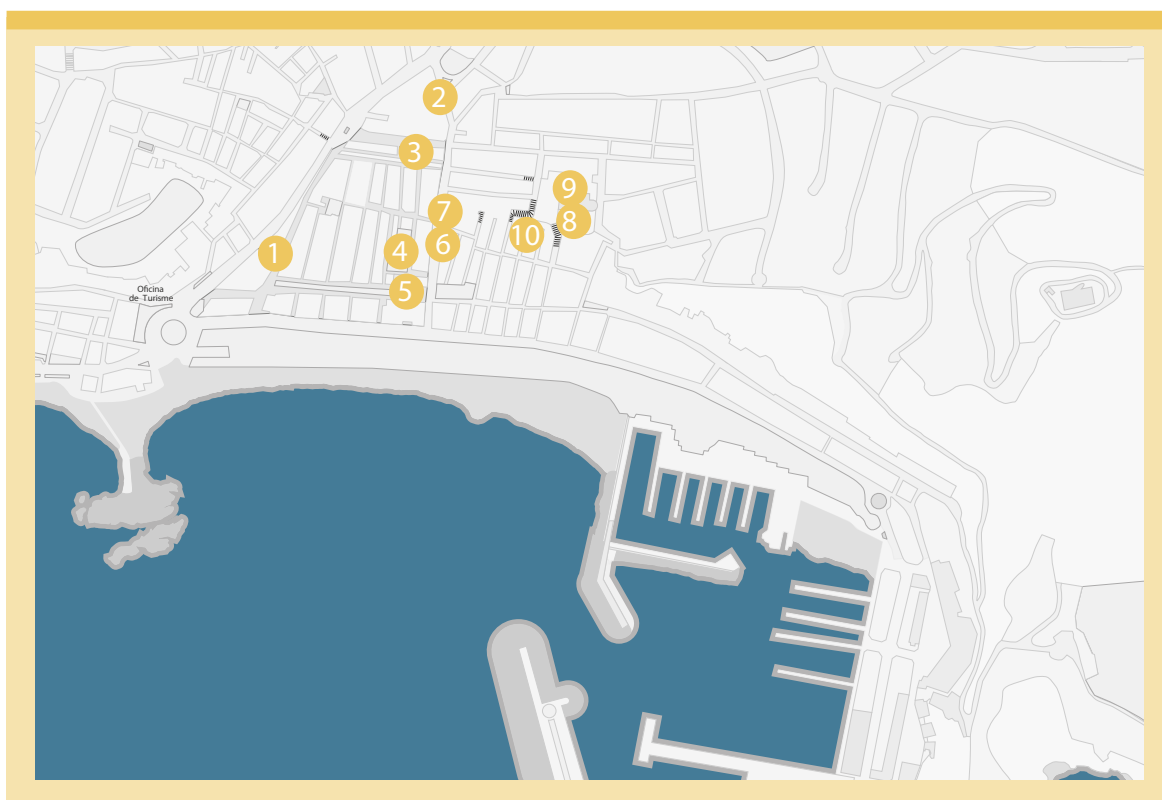
It should be made clear that during the middle ages a town was a small urban centre with a population dedicated to non-agricultural work. Its inhabitants could benefit from franchises or freedoms, with a status different from that of peasants or other citizens of other towns. The town was a focal point of artisan production, a centre of commercial activity, services and credit, and also had a notary. The peasants went to the city to trade, buy manufactured goods and obtain loans.

The towns interested the feudal lords as sources of taxes, in addition to those already obtained from the peasants. Some of these taxes were, for example: the "ribatge" (estuary navigation right through loading and unloading operations in the port were taxed) and the "mesuratge", which was a tax that was paid based on the quantity of merchandise entering the port.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, Blanes became a prosperous trading town and from then on it was the main port of the viscounty. The town was packed with merchants, textile craftsmen and people who earned their living in maritime commerce. This growth continued until the mid- 17th century. The beach was a hive of activity and all types of merchandise were loaded, from rags and manufactured articles to cereals or slaves.

It was used by the boats that traded with local markets, but also with distant ports of the Mediterranean. Patrons of ships, pilots, sailors, stevedores, slaves and the officers of the feudal lord who charged the fees, all mixed together. Master tilers, caulkers and other shipyard workers toiled at their side. In good weather the fishermen also went to sea with their boats and gear.

From 1382 on, the viscounts of Cabrera established their residence and court there. A magnificent Palace was built and they sponsored a number of developments that changed the face of the town: they provided it with institutions, walls (in 1356 they ordered the building of walls to defend them from corsairs), new streets, a market in the public square (in 1349 they granted the privilege of holding a weekly market every Friday and a 15-day fair in summer), a notary's office and other services, such as a public fountain (Font Gòtica), public baths from the late 18th century on, a bakery and a hospital for the poor.





Traces of the era of the viscounts of Cabrera can still be found today in the lands of the viscounty and also in Blanes. Some of the elements that bear witness to this legacy and that can be traced back to the city's urban fabric include the following:

## 01. Mediaeval layout of the streets of Dintre Vila (Beginning of carrer Muralla)

The structure of the streets of the old centre, also called Dintre Vila, has a notable mediaeval feel. They are narrow streets, running from the sea to the land, with small houses named after some of the distinguished people who lived there, such as Fornaca, Manresa and Tapioles, or descriptive names such as Mercaders, de l'Or, del Forn, del Lloro or de l'Hospital.

## 02. Street of Jaume Ferrer de Blanes

Jaume Ferrer de Blanes was a prestigious cosmographer who advised the monarchy and the most influential people, on geopolitical issues related to the conquest of America. Between 1445 and 1449, he prematurely travelled to the court of the Kingdom of Naples, where his Ferrer family relatives worked, as confirmed by many preserved documents, such as the letters which the King of Cyprus, son of that of Naples, and the Queen of Naples, Joanna of Aragon, wrote in his favour. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, he corresponded with the Catholic Monarchs, with Cardinal Mendoza, councillor of their Majesties, and with Christopher Columbus, as a result of the difficulties derived from the division of the Atlantic and the far-off lands between the Castilians and the Portuguese.

About thirty years before his death (1529), he returned to Blanes, the town where the Ferrer family all enjoyed positions and professions of recognised prestige, to enter the service of the Viscount of Cabrera and Bas, as keeper of keys and collector of the revenues from the territory. He also wrote a text entitled *Sentències catòliques* (Catholic Sentences), where he stated the three things necessary for good men to reach Heaven: "To know God, to know oneself and to have a good death, a death as is due, far removed from the vices of intemperate youth". In his testament he asked to be buried in the church of Blanes, where, as he writes, "són stats los cossos soterrats de mon pare y mare y altrass predecessors meus" – "here lie the buried bodies of my father and mother and other ancestors of mine".

## 03. El Portal de la Verge Maria (Virgin Mary's Gate)

We have evidence that by the mid- 14th century, they had already begun to build walls to protect the village. An effective defence system against attacks from the sea was needed. Of this defensive system, which was progressively dismantled from the 17th century on, the mountain gate today named Portal de la Verge Maria still survives today. Records already exist of this portal from the 14th century, but the preserved arcade probably dates from the 16th century. It is an arched door with a niche dedicated to the Virgin located in the square of the same name and that leads to the Raval, from where the town spread out from 17th century on.

When we say in Blanes that we are going to the Portal, we mean that we are going to buy fish. This originates from the era when fishmongers had their stalls in the square in front of the Portal. The 1901 arcade booths are preserved to this day. They are registered as an Asset of National Cultural Interest (BCIN). In 1969, this activity was transferred to the same municipal premises, which have now been renovated.



## 04. The Square

During the Middle Ages, the old Plaça dels Dies Feiners square, also known as Plaça Vella, was the location of the daily market where fresh produce from the Blanes orchards was sold. It was a much narrower square than the current one and much longer, as it crossed carrer Ample and extended as far as carrer de Lloro.

Blanes market remained in the Plaça dels Dies Feiners until 1599, when it moved to Carrer Ample, which was its location until 1914. When this street was opened to vehicular traffic with the works known as La Reforma and La Plaça and the market moved to the Passeig de Dintre, the Casa del Comú or Town Hall was built in the late 16th century in the Plaça de la Vila, very close to the defensive bastion of the sea. The doorway in the facade of the building that faces the Plaça dels Dies Feiners bears witness to that time. It is a large doorway with a semi-circular arch with keystones crowned by an ancient shield with the cross of the Blanes family, sub-feudatories of the Cabrerass until the 14th century. Today we know that this ancient portal was installed centuries later, probably during the 19th century.

## 05. The Town Council

During the 15th century, the municipal system was consolidated and regulations were drawn up to properly govern the University or Comú de Veïns, a forerunner of today's town councils. Llibre de la Universitat de la Vila de Blanes is the name given in 1969 to the edition of the codex that included the most important rules and privileges of the old university of Blanes. However, the creation of the book dates back to the early 16th century, when the leaders of the university of the town decided to collect the documents they considered essential for the good management of public affairs in Blanes into a single volume.



The work was entrusted to Fray Vicenç Sala from Sant Pere de Galligants, who devoted himself to it until January 1518. After this date, the municipal clerks continued transcribing documents until well into the next century. Broadly speaking, the book brings together a rich documentary sequence of more than 350 years, which is essential to understanding how a community on the Catalan coast functioned from the Late Middle Ages until the first third of the 17th century. Therefore it is an important piece of common historical heritage. A collection that Josep Maria Pons Guri has described as "the Bible of the people of Blanes".

## 06. Les Voltes

The nerve centre of the urban improvements promoted by the Cabrerass was Carrer Ample. A magnificent public fountain was erected in this street, the home of the local elite and where many of the houses have porches. What remains of this network is the area called Les Voltes. These are a set of four arcades of the old porches and the vault that connects with sa Carbonera from Carrer Unió.



Above the main vault of Carrer Gibert there is a niche with the city's two patron saints, Saint Bonosus and Saint Maximilian, legendary Christian martyrs of Roman times. The celebration of the two patron saints' festival began with the construction of its altar in the parish in 1663 and also as a result of the initiative of the religious scholar of the Order of Minims and author of the Llibre dels Fets d'armes de Catalunya, Joan Gaspar Roig i Jalpí (1624-1691), when the legend of the two Blanes brothers martyred by Roman soldiers of the ancient Blanda began to be spread.

## 07. The Ghotic Fountain (la Font Gòtica)

This is the best-preserved fountain of civil Gothic architecture in Catalonia and one of the most important in Europe. Its construction was commissioned by the Viscount Bernat Joan de Cabrera to the Barcelona stonemason Pere Torrent, who had completed it by 1443. The octagonal fountain consists of three levels. At the bottom is the trough. The central part contains the tank with springs and corbels decorated with human and animal characters, along with the heraldic shield of the Cabrerass and that of the town's wool-workers' guild. Finally, at the top, above the cornice, there is a set of crests topped with the figure of a little angel. Many of these noble elements were constructed using a Santanyí stone from Mallorca, and some of them are the work of the sculptor Pere Oller. It was restored in 2007.

The rocks used in the construction of the fountain include the local microgranite. The entire base and cistern are made from worked ashlars of this stone, which is very resilient, dense and not very porous. This makes it very good for constructing a water tank.



The calcareous Santanyí stone comes from the quarries in the south of the island of Mallorca. A figurehead, the dust cover, the shields, the corbels, the vents and all the elements that make up the roof except for the horizontal floor of the tile are carved from this stone. And finally, very compact Girona stone was used to carve the rest of the figureheads.



For the Annual Festival of Santa Anna of 1968, with Mr. Domènec Valls as mayor of Blanes, the custom began of delivering a reproduction in miniature of the Gothic Fountain of Carrer Ample to the town crier. The fountain has become the highest award in the town of Blanes and has served to recognise the work within the Blanes and/or Catalan scope of the various characters or organisations that have had the honour of opening the great festival of the Blanes people over all these years. In addition to the town criers, this cherished distinction is also given to all leading town councillors when they leave office. Recently, other miniature replicas of some parts of the fountain have been made, such as the central medallion with the coat of arms of the viscounty house of the Cabrerass or the figure of the angel, which are given to persons, organisations or establishments of Blanes with a distinguished track record. It is registered as an Asset of National Cultural Interest (BCIN).



## 08. The viscount's palace

The beginning of its construction in the 14th century was commissioned to the renowned architect Arnau Bargués. Bargués was one of the most important master builders of his time. He served as the Senior Master of the Barcelona Cathedral and also of the city. Among other things he directed a part of the works of the Barcelona Cathedral, the construction of the royal quarters of Poblet, the old Gothic-style facade of Barcelona Town Hall and the extension of the city walls.



The Palace, with a rectangular floor plan, was initially structured in ground and first floors around a courtyard. It also had four defence towers, two round towers on the part facing the sea and two square towers on the mountain side. One of these survives to this day as a bell tower. It was the residence and court of the viscounts and was destroyed in the late 17th century by the French. Today we can trace almost all its perimeter, and the entrance door provides access to a part of the courtyard where the start of the vault can be seen with decorative sculptures.

The splendour of this palace lasted until the 17th century. The first third of that century saw the growth of the side chapels of the church, to the detriment of the Palace. Later, the upheavals of the Reaper's War (1640-1659) and the blowing-up of the towers by the French troops in the year 1694 led to its final demolition. Even so, shortly before that date, in 1691, works to improve the palace were still detected.

## 09. Church of Santa Maria

Initially Santa María was a small suffragan church of Sant Pere de Rodes (from the 10th century until 1246), which passed into the hands of the Sant Esteve de la Tordera parish. If it became independent in 1319 and the Gothic construction began, with a central nave and two lateral ones that would be filled with chapels. It had choir-stalls with an organ, a Baroque altarpiece and modernist pulpits by Gaudí.



This heritage was destroyed during the Civil War and it currently conserves the Gothic floor, sacristy and façade. Its interior features the presbytery with a canopy and the contributions of contemporary artists, such as the wall paintings by Jaume Busquets, frescos by Ricard Ferre or designs by Domènec Fita.

The ogival portal is composed of four pointed arches, geometrically patterned and supported by columns. The main facade features a rosette dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, holder of the parish. With the fire of 1936, the vaults and much of the walls were demolished. The rebuilding of the church took ten years (1939-1949) and was directed by the architects Francesc Folguera and Lluís Bonet. The sacristy, together with the belfry, the façade of the church and the remnants of the walls, are all that remains of the site of the Gothic work that formed the church and palace of the Viscounts of Cabrera. It is a noble hall, rectangular, divided into two sections with a ribbed vault. The sacristy also contains carvings of the Nazarene and the Virgin of Sorrows that are used in the Good Friday procession, a reproduction in the form of stained glass of some of the designs that Gaudí produced for the pulpits, and also the old mechanical clock of the church bell tower. It is registered as an Asset of National Cultural Interest (BCIN).

## 10. The pirates and the Cross of the Skulls

Piracy was a scourge that devastated the Catalan coast for centuries. To protect itself against piracy and other attacks from the sea, the community enclosed the town with walls that would later house a bastion. On a wall facing the sea below Plaça de l'Església square and the Palace you can still see a cross called Creu dels Pirates (Pirates' Cross). Legend has it that a pirate ship was captured, its crew were decapitated and their skulls embedded in the cross-shaped wall to dissuade other pirates from any attack on the town. Candles were set in its orbital cavities so that the cross could be seen at night and from the sea. There is another less literary version that relates the Cross of the Skulls with its proximity to the cemetery. At some point during works in the cemetery, it seems that after heavy rains, the skulls were placed in the form of a cross. Today you can see the outline of the cross with the cavities left by the skulls.



## 11. The Port

The town of Blanes was growing into the main port of the viscounty of Cabrera, turning it into a commercial financial capital and boosting other economic activities. Blanes beach was to become the great centre of operations for these activities. Many events that took place during the mediaeval period were connected with the port. Thus, in 1113, there are records of the occasion of welcoming the Christian fleet when the first Pisan-Catalan expedition went to conquer the Balearic Islands



Also, in 1285, the army of Philip III of France, who burned Blanes in the war with the Crown of Aragon, found refuge. The following century, in 1355, the Genoese attacked the town and in 1415, it seems that it was visited by the papal galleys of Benedict XIII, when he was fleeing into exile from Peñíscola. In the pastoral visits throughout the 15th century, the chalice that the Pope gave to the village during his stay was repeatedly mentioned. The port was visited by his Vizcaya, Castilian and Majorcan ships, and Blanes enjoyed increasing maritime activity, which favoured the creation of the guild of fishermen and sailors, and it became necessary to build shipyards on the beach.

Work on the first harbour began in 1914 and was not completed until the 1940s.



## 12. The castle of Sant Joan

The castle of Blanes or Forcadell is located on a 170-metre high hill that bears the same name and dominates the town. It already appears mentioned in the year 1002 in a document of the Viscount Sunifredde Girona, and in about 1050, the Cabrerass were to succeed him and took ownership of the castle as a fiefdom of the counts of Barcelona. Under the Cabrerass, dominion over the inhabitants of the village from the 12th century to the 14th century was exercised by the family of knights with the surname of Blanes.

The structure of the castle consists of a cylindrical tower 15m in height, surrounded by a moat and a rectangular walled enclosure with door that faces the sun at mid-day. It was part of the defensive line of the Tordera castles that defended the city to the north. As for the hermitage of Sant Joan, it must be said that it was a fortified as the castle's chapel and that due to the lack of space it was located outside the enclosure. It already appears documented during the thirteenth century and in 1377 it is known that there was a priest in the castle who looked after it. During the 17th century it was a pilgrimage centre on the day of Saint John the Baptist It is registered as an Asset of National Cultural Interest (BCIN).

