

Antoine Parra

MAYOR OF ARGELÈS-SUR-MER

«Argelès-sur-Mer is the most popular seaside resort, with 90% of visitors returning»



IRINA
Rybalchenko

Argelès-sur-Mer is an extremely popular tourist destination. It is the most important seaside resort in the Pyrénées-Orientales department in the Occitanie region. Moreover, it's regarded as Europe's camping capital. We had the privilege of talking to the Mayor of Argelès-sur-Mer, Antoine Parra.

—Argelès-sur-Mer is a town surrounded by nature that attracts many tourists. So tourism is the most important sector of the economy, isn't it?

—In the beginning it was an agricultural city, and this can still be felt in its narrow streets. In the 1970s about 80% of the vineyards had disappeared and tourism began to develop, especially after France introduced paid holidays. At that time, French people



AJUNTAMENT D'ARGELERS DE LA MARENDA

who had worked all year-round flocked to the campsites to spend their holidays. That's why today the town has become Europe's camping capital, with no fewer than 48 campsites!

Argelès-sur-Mer is an exceptional town where the sea, marshes and mountains meet. It's at sea level, but if you are up for the hike, in less than two hours you'll reach an altitude of 1,255 metres.

The number of permanent residents is around 11,000, while the town has the capacity to accommodate 150,000 people.

—What are the most interesting places in your city?

—It's the nature. Everyone knows that the Pyrenees plunge into the Mediterranean, and that's what you can see in Argelès itself. The sandy coastline of the Mediterranean basin, from the Maritime Alps, meets its limit here. This is where sand transforms into rock (here there are 7 kilometres of sandy beaches and 2 kilometres of rocky beaches).

In France, there are 156 national nature reserves with two of them in Argelès-sur-Mer. The 160-hectare Mas Larrieu Nature Reserve to the north of the city is a showcase of fabulous biodiversity. The Massane National Nature Reserve, also known as the Couloumates forest, is located in the easternmost part of the Albères massif and covers 300 hectares at an altitude of between 600 and 1150 m. The Albères massif with a wooded landscape, notably a cork oak forest, is a perfect place to walk with shady landscapes.

Our town is the most popular seaside resort, with 90% of visitors returning. And the

tourist demand is strong year-round.

—Besides of nature, are there any unmissable cultural or historical sites?

—During the Spanish Civil War, when the so-called Retirada took place, Argelès-sur-Mer took in 200,000 refugees in just a few weeks, despite having no means to do so. Today, many of their grandchildren come here to try to relive and understand their grandparents' ordeal. A museum has been created for this purpose. And the Spanish cemetery pays tribute to all the children who were born and died in the camp... It was a terrible story that left a deep impression on the Argelès community.

—Do you currently have any joint events with your Spanish neighbours, in terms of culture, education or sport?



«Gastronomy tourism is very important for us. This is the centre of barbecue in French Catalonia»

—We're very keen to develop cross-border links, because Argelès is very popular with people from the Girona and Barcelona regions.

When we celebrate the anniversary of the Éric Cantona stadium (a football player whose parents fled the Franco regime and came through Argelès-sur-Mer), we organised a match between the Argelès

and Spanish teams.

We try to set up twinning arrangements and share the culture we have in common at patron saint and village festivals. These are customs that have endured in Spanish Catalonia and that we are in the process of reintroducing here, in French Catalonia. We dance the giant's dance, a typical Catalan tradition.

In terms of education, we have set up a bilingual school, where the children study in French and Catalan.

—One question I can't leave out is gastronomic tourism. What can you offer your tourists?

—Well, barbecue dishes. Here it's called grillade. This is the centre of barbecue in French Catalonia, whether it's sausage, brisket or even snail grill. That scares a people at the beginning, but is absolutely delicious and it's one of the hallmarks of our gastronomy.

There are two cooked dishes that are truly typical of our region. The first one is ouillade, it's stew made from cabbage, potatoes and sagi (the fat extracted from the abdominal wall of the pig and salted with dry salt). The second most popular dish is meatballs cooked in sauce.

I'm very good at making ouillade, meatballs, and snail grill!

—What do you like apart from cooking?

—Besides cooking, I love to cook. When I finish my meetings, sometimes they're a bit tense, I even arrive home at midnight, and I start cooking. That's what clears my head.

What I really like is going to Spanish Catalonia, where I find that the truly Catalan

traditions are much better preserved. And I love getting back to my Catalan roots. I like Olot, Garrotxa and trips to Andorra, especially when I travel with my wife.

Otherwise, whenever I can, I like to go in the middle of nowhere to spend time in peace and quiet.

I'm also a very happy dad, with four children and five grandchildren who I spend time with when I am free.

—What are the city's main investment projects?

—The main projects are all the refurbishment of the seafront over a distance of about 3 kilometres to create spaces for intergenerational sports. We are in the process of enlarging the port. This is an extremely important project to accommodate larger boats.

Argelès-sur-Mer is an old town that has been divided up. The port area, the green zone and the beach area feel detached. It's as if Argelès-sur-Mer were an archipelago with little 'islands' all around. I wanted to bring this archipelago together. To achieve this, we've redone the cycle paths to make them safe and very pleasant because they're planted with trees and landscaped with greenery.

We've set up a transport service with electric buses that are virtually free, so it's easy to get around.

We are also in the process of creating public services, such as mail service at the beach. ●

BIG BANG TRIAL

Justice sentences 'the cocaine waitress' to six years in prison

The main one involved in the 'Big Bang' plot will also have to face a fine of 40,000 euros

PARIS MAMEGHANI
ANDORRA LA VELLA

The sentence for the main defendant in the drug-trafficking plot in Pas de la Casa, known as 'Big Bang', is now final. Last Friday, the Court of Appeal handed down a single sentence of six years in prison - a reduction from the initial 10 years -, in addition to a fine of 40,000 euros and expulsion from the Principality for a period of 25 years. This sentence affects the one known as the 'cocaine waitress', who has had her sentence reduced thanks to the request made by her defense at the trial last July.

At the same time, the rest of the seven involved in the case were also judged last Friday. In this way, the seven years in prison imposed on his 'right-hand man', the individual who facilitated the supply of cocaine, stand out. In addition to the prison sentence, he will have to pay a fine of 50,000 euros and will be permanently expelled from the territory. Another of the accused was convicted of a minor crime of possession of cocaine and hashish and will have to serve another six years in prison, with a fine of 30,000 euros, the removal of his mobile phone and the expulsion from Andorra for 25 years. On the other hand, one of those involved who was free was tried for his drug trafficking and for the continued consumption of cocaine and hashish, seeing him-



The domains of the seat of Justice, in Andorra la Vella.

THE DATA OF THE SENTENCE

40,000 EUROS 25 YEARS

"The cocaine waitress" will have to pay the consequences to be tried for a major crime of drug trafficking.

selfaggravated by recidivism and thus being sentenced to a four-year prison sentence with not entering the Principality for another 25 years. Apart from that, he

The time that the main accused will have to respect without entering the country.

will have to serve a month of house arrest. Another of the defendants in the plot was sentenced for a major crime and continued in drug trafficking with a single

sentence of four years in prison and 20 years of non-return to the country.

Finally, it should be added that two others involved were also given a four-year prison sentence for trafficking in cocaine and marijuana and possession of hashish (one of them with a qualified sentence for having detoxified and with the option to reduce the sentence by four months) and one of the accused was acquitted. ●

MENTAL HEALTH

Projecte Vida celebrates the campaign, but claims the lack of suggestions

The association points out that it arrives two years late

ELENA HERNÁNDEZ MOLINA
ESCALDES - ENGORDANY

The association Projecte Vida, an Andorran entity specializing in addictive disorders, celebrated the launch of the new campaign to combat the stigmatization of mental illnesses, presented on Thursday by the Ministry of Health. Despite this satisfaction, the president of the entity, Eva Tenorio, emphasized that they had been waiting for this campaign since 2022. The main objective is to promote early detection, improve access to mental health services and guarantee respect for rights and the dignity of the people affected.

Faced with the campaign presented by the Ministry of Health, Tenorio expressed in statements to EL PERIÒDIC that during one of the corresponding meetings in which the project was presented to them, they suggested the replacement of some sentences in the campaign, believing that



The president of Projecte Vida, Eva Tenorio.



EVA TENORIO

PROJECTE VIDA PRESIDENT

«Projecte Vida suggested changes because there are sentences in the campaign that we find are not the most appropriate»

there were some sentences that could be replaced by others, a suggestion that was ultimately ignored. In this sense, Projecte Vida regrets that these types of modifications that they made at the time were not taken into account. On the other hand, she linked the controversy surrounding the Ròdol Building with the lack of information campaigns like this, pointing out that «this

campaign had been promised for 2022 and is being launched now». In addition, she wanted to add that «there is a lot of stigma with addictions because there is a lot of lack of information», while hoping that the presentation of the initiative will be the starting point for other actions aimed at ending the misinformation that it is at the forefront of mental illness. ●

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