

The El Saler Beach

WALK

ROUTE

The route follows the "Francisco Lozano" beach promenade which crosses the ecosystem of the foredunes of the El Saler beach longitudinally.

LENGTH OF THE WALK

Approximately 2,000 metres.

DURATION

Approximately 45 minutes.

WHAT TO DO

- _RESPECT THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS. Do not pick flowers or leaves.
- _RESPECT THE SOUNDS OF NATURE. Do not make noise.
- _DO NOT LEAVE YOUR LITTER BEHIND. Use the bins and containers provided.
- _DO NOT LIGHT FIRES.
- _KEEP TO THE MARKED PATHS AND TRACKS.
- _DO NOT GO BAREFOOT. Use appropriate footwear for walking.

USEFUL NUMBERS

DEVESA-ALBUFERA SERVICE	96 161 03 47
EL SALER FORESTRY PROTECTION CENTRE	96 183 00 12
FIRE AND EMERGENCY	112



THE EL SALER BEACH WALK



STOPS ALONG THE WAY

- 1** THE BEACH PROMENADE
- 2** THE DUNE PLANTS
- 3** THE DUNE ANIMALS
- 4** BATHING
- 5** THE BATHING SUIT
- 6** A WALK ON THE BEACH
- 7** EATING IN THE ALBUFERA

1st Stop

THE BEACH PROMENADE

The old ecosystem of the foredunes that characterized the El Saler beach was destroyed at the end of the 60s to construct a beach promenade which was raised above sea level, with restaurants and showers underneath. This promenade was eliminated at the start of the 90s and was replaced by a line of dunes and the current promenade along which this route runs. The new promenade, as it is at sea level and located behind the dunes, has a lesser impact.



Walk of El Saler, 1970



Recovered seaward dune system

Since before the middle of the last century the beach of the Devesa has suffered a process of heavy erosion caused by the lack of new sand reaching the beach, which was in turn caused by the regulation of river levels and the barrier effect of the port of Valencia. This situation was aggravated by the presence of the old promenade which also caused erosion (the El Saler beach is so narrow that the promenade worked as an obstacle, and during storms the energy of the waves would multiply when they crashed against it, and therefore carry more sand away as the water returned to the sea). There is now beach where the promenade used to be.

The artificial construction of a new line of dunes in front of the promenade was carried out because of the vital role that the dunes play in stabilizing the beach. On the one hand they act as a reserve of sand that preserves the beaches in front of them and maintains their equilibrium, and on the other, they protect the vegetation growing behind them from the sea winds. The particular characteristics of the plants and animals that live in these dunes, which are adapted to very harsh environmental conditions, give them a unique natural value which increases if we take into account that nowadays this is a very rare ecosystem due to the massive urban development along the coast.

2nd Stop

THE DUNE PLANTS



Morning Glory



Marram Grass

At this point the promenade moves away from the sea and runs behind an area of dunes that was not destroyed when the old raised promenade was built. The plants that can be seen are those that correspond to the characteristic scrubland of inland dunes. These plants are unable to bear the sea wind directly and they therefore grow as creepers, never growing higher than the dunes in front of them that protect them. We can see Mediterranean Fan Palms, Mastic, Sarsaparilla and even Pine. All adopt the form of small cushions, as if "combed" by the wind. If we look carefully at the pine we can see that it grows laterally rather than vertically.

As we move to look at the foredunes we can see that there the forms of the plants are different. They are all adapted to survive in this environment. They are able to resist the strong sunlight, the continual beating of the salt wind and the constant mobility of the sand which often covers them, and blocks their photosynthesis, or reveals them completely, leaving their roots in the air. We can observe that their leaves are small, and in this way they avoid dehydration as far as possible, or they are a whitish colour because they are covered with small hairs that protect them better from the environment, or they are fleshy which allows them to store water in their interior. Look at the leaves of the European Marram Grass, which are rolled around on themselves to avoid evaporation.

The stalks of all these plants grow along the ground to minimize the effects of the wind, or they grow vertically and are flexible and strong so that they can bend without breaking. All their roots are extremely long so that they are well anchored in the sand. It is important to bear in mind that not all plants can live in an environment with such harsh conditions.

3rd Stop

THE DUNE ANIMALS



Red-tailed Spiny-footed Lizard



Dung Beetle

Like the plants that live in the foredunes, the way of life and the mechanisms of adaptation of the animals that live here are conditioned by the environmental characteristics of the ecosystem. The lack of shade, and the excessive temperatures that the surface layer of sand reaches during the day, and the extreme temperature differences between the day and the night, mean that many of the animals in this environment, as in the case of some beetles, exhibit twilight and nocturnal rhythms of biological activity: they remain buried in the sand during the day and come out at dusk to find prey.

The species of snail that live in these dunes are also adapted to the environment, with thick shells and a high resistance to desiccation. To avoid contact with the ground at times of maximum solar radiation they climb up onto the branches of plants during the day and stay immobile there until the night comes, when they come down to feed (the high temperatures on the ground, in summer, could literally cook them).

The softness of the sand, which makes it easy for some species to bury themselves, also means that some of the animals that live in this environment have developed special appendicular structures that help them to walk over it better. The Red-tailed Spiny-footed Lizard has a kind of scales on both its front and back feet that allow it to run very fast over the sand without sinking.

4th Stop

BATHING



View of the beach at El Saler

If we walk this route in summer and we look towards the beach we will see families, couples and groups of friends bathing or sunbathing. Though this seems very normal now it has not always been like this.

The fashion for bathing in the sea began at the end of the 18th century and the pioneers were the aristocrats in the south of England. During the 19th century the practice of sea bathing became increasingly popular. The doctors of the period took up the idea, which the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had already advocated, of the curative effects of seawater, and recommended sea bathing as a way of preventing and curing numerous health problems and diseases. People began to go to the beach.

From the middle of the 19th century to the start of the 20th century the bathing areas were segregated by sex: one part of the beach was reserved for women and another for men. Men were prohibited from walking on the beaches reserved for women while they were bathing

At the start of the 20th century, bathing in the sea began to be appreciated not only for its curative qualities but also as a way of resting and relaxing. The "rope bathing system", a practice which consisted of bathing while holding on to a rope that was tied to posts set in the sand, testifies to the collective nature of the activity. This was a practice used especially by old people and those who felt uncertain about going into the sea. Halfway through the last century, and coinciding with longer holiday periods, the popularity of bathing led to a great number of people coming to the beaches. One went to the beach simply for pleasure, rather than to cure an ailment.

5th Stop

THE BATHING SUIT

The bathing suit has changed considerably over time. The first female bathing suits which appeared at the start of the 19th century were made of flannel, dark coloured, and composed of a close fitting body with a high neck, and sleeves to the elbow, a skirt to the knees with trousers underneath, black stockings and canvas shoes. At the end of the 19th century this bathing dress was simplified and replaced by a long shirt, trousers and socks. Dark colours were replaced by lighter ones.

25 years later socks were no longer used for bathing, and men were able to use shorts but women still used long shirts and skirts. It was in the 1930s that the female bathing suit appeared. It was made of wool and had a vest and short trouser that covered the thighs.

In 1946, a Frenchman called Louis Réard presented a two piece bathing suit. He called it the bikini, like the Pacific atoll where nuclear tests were being carried out that year. This suit was so daring that the person who modelled the suit at its presentation compared the effect it would have on society with the reactions to the nuclear tests on those islands in the newspapers of the time. The use of this kind of bathing suit did not become popular until the 60s. Its arrival in Spain coincided with the tourist boom of the end of that decade. The first elastic bathing suits, like those that are currently used, appeared in 1960, the year in which Lycra was invented.

The bathing huts in which people changed their clothes have also changed over the last two centuries. At first they were mobile with wheels: they were used to move the bather close to the sea, and even had a ramp which was used in order to slide into the water. The aim was to preserve the bather from the view of others and maintain decency. They were also used to facilitate access to the sea for sick people who needed treatment. Until the 70s of the last century it was normal to see the beaches covered with wooden bathing huts, usually striped, which could be hired and were used to change clothes. These huts are no longer part of the beach landscape.

6th Stop

A WALK ON THE BEACH



Red seaweed



Rubicardium shell



Mactra corallina clamshell



Shark's egg

Going down to the water's edge we will see that a simple walk along the beach can become an interesting adventure of observation. A walk after a storm is a perfect moment since the sea bed has been stirred up and the material dragged up by the waves is much more diverse and may come from further away. What we see can give us an idea of the life a few metres below the water, although we also find other objects that remind us that the sea returns to man whatever he throws into it.

On the sand we can find a wide variety of mollusc shells of different forms, sizes and colours, snail shells, the remains of skeletons, such as those of the cuttlefish, shark eggs such as those of the cat shark, seaweed, crabs, starfish, balls of Posidonia leaves, "bunches of black grapes" which are simply eggs

that have come loose from the rocks on the seabed, small pieces of coloured glass with different degrees of polish depending on the time they have been exposed to the erosion of the sea, remains of old pots and octopus hooks.

If we look closely we will also find different animal tracks in the sand and the muddy area closest to the sea, above all of birds. We can find the tracks of gulls, of the Kentish Plover, or of terns. In the dune area we can find the tracks of the Dung Beetle, the Red-tailed Spiny-footed Lizard or the Large Psammodromus and herons.

7th Stop

EATING IN THE ALBUFERA



All-i-Pebre

The Albufera Natural Park is and has been the natural habitat of two of the elements that have most characterized and influenced Valencian cooking: rice and eels. Together with these, the closeness to the sea and the variety of fresh vegetables from the numerous market gardens along the coastal strip, make up the classical ingredients of the cooking of the Albufera.

The most typical dishes of the area are *paella* and *all-i-pebre*. Paella and rice have many variants in the Albufera such as the cod and vegetable paella, duck paella, *arroz a banda* (rice with fish), *arroz negro* (rice cooked with squid ink), rice with cabbage and eels, rice with greens and snails, *arroz "amb fesols i naps"* (rice with turnips and peas).

All-i-pebre is the most native dish to this area, it is really the name that is given to the sauce that accompanies certain fish and meat dishes and which uses a base of fried garlic and paprika. The inhabitants of the area have usually used eel as the main ingredient and this fish has become a vital component that is usually associated with this dish.