

THE SAINT-JEAN CELEBRATIONS

INFORMATIONS

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[canigou.com/agenda/les-grands-
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Sources et bibliography

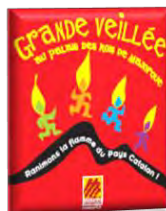
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The Saint-Jean celebrations are to acknowledge the summer solstice, just like in other regions, but in the Pyrénées-Orientales, these celebrations are also an opportunity to celebrate and strengthen the spirit of fraternity - at the peak of [Mount Canigou](#) - that has always existed between the Catalan communities on either side of the Pyrenees. On the 22nd June, a flame that has been burning all year in Castillet, in Perpignan, is carried to the peak of Mount Canigou, the sacred mountain for the Catalan community, known as "Muntanya Sagrada". At midnight it is used to set alight the bundles of sticks that had been taken there a week earlier, from each of the Catalan villages. The locals then begin the long walk back down the mountain to pass on the flame, and on the eve of the 23rd June, they light thousands of flames that have been prepared in each village. Every year in Perpignan, thousands of people wait eagerly for the arrival of the flame. This event is accompanied by some spectacular entertainment and events: knights, traditional and classical music, audiovisual shows on big screens, pyrotechnics shows, laser shows, and to really finish on a high note, the traditional Sardana dance is performed around log fires.

The flame that never goes out...

It all started with an ancient tradition that here was known as "Focs de Sant Joan" (The Flames of Saint-Jean in French), which was, just like everywhere else in France, a celebration of the summer solstice. At the end of the Second World War, this tradition began to slowly disappear. But one day in 1955, a local from Arles-sur-Tech, François Pujade, lit a fire at the top of Mount Canigou to celebrate the victory of his rugby team USAP (the Brennus Shield), and his birthday on the same occasion. The "Mountain" section of the Cercle des Jeunes association was taken by this symbolic act and the year after, they did the same thing, on the peaks across the whole of Catalonia. In 1963, the very same association decided to bring the flame of Canigou for the first time down into the villages where its arrival was celebrated in each one. In 1963, the [Castillet](#), the former door to the city of Perpignan was officially named as the location for the "Musée Catalan des Arts et Traditions Populaires". An exact replica of the kitchen from the "Mas del Gleix" in the high Aspres, was created in one of the exhibition rooms there. Marguerite Mestre Grandó was given the honour of lighting the fireplace in her childhood kitchen for the very first time with the flame that she would then hand over to those who carried it up to Mount Canigou. From that day on, the

"Llum d'Oli" flame would never be put out in Castillet... Marguerite Mestres carried out this new tradition 3 more times before her death in 1966. Every year now, on the day before the Saint-Jean celebrations, three young locals leave Castillet on the morning of the 22nd June and take the flame up to the peak of Mount Canigou. Once they arrive at the peak, the flame is once again "regenerated" on the bundles of sticks brought here the weekend before, known as "Trobada del Canigó", from all the villages where the Catalan language is spoken. In the morning on the 23rd June, the long walk begins and people from all over, carry this iconic flame to the various villages. But it is not until 10:30pm that the "Rei dels focs" (King of the Flames), also known as the "Pare" (father) is set alight, giving the signal to all his flaming descendants. There are so many flames today that the Canigou, the symbolic Catalan mountain, is also known as the mountain of 100,000 flames. The flame is fragile but is kept alight with determination, symbolising the Catalan culture.

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