

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

The Once-In-A-Lifetime High Pyrenees Walk



If you want to experience one holiday in the High Pyrenees, then this is it! The spectacular glacial "amphitheatre" of Gavarnie (a UNESCO World Heritage site); the amazing Ordesa Canyon; lovely hotels - one made famous by Victor Hugo and Chateaubriand. Rewarding but comfortable walking.

7 nights, 6 walking days

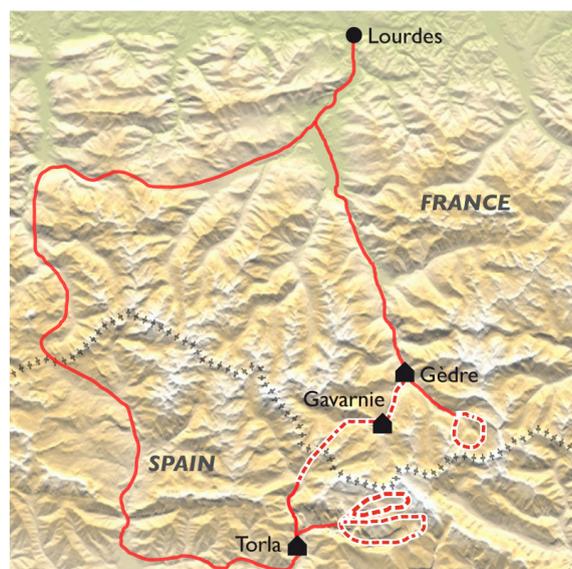
- Minimum required 2
- From point to point
- With luggage transportation
- Self-guided

Code :
FP2PUGO



The plus points

- **Gavarnie and Ordesa !**
- **Comfortable walking itineraries**
- **Authentic accommodation - at least two nights in three different hotels**
- **24/7 customer service**



Before departure, please check that you have an updated fact sheet.

http://www.purelypyrenees.com/once_lifetime_high_pyrenees_walk.html

This itinerary makes sure you experience the very best of the High Pyrenees, not least by staying in high quality hotels right in the heart of these magical mountains, both in France and Spain - this is truly a holiday without frontiers. We also include private transfers that ensure you only walk the best "bits", and there are always alternative itineraries for those who want more - or less - walking on any particular day.

The private transfers enabling you to only walk the "best bits" inevitably add to the holiday cost, so it cannot be directly compared with apparently similar holidays.

■ PROGRAMME

DAY 1

Arrival at Gèdre

We meet you at Lourdes (airport, train station or a hotel of your choice) and take you to Gèdre.

Gèdre is a typical and traditional Pyrenean village, wonderfully located where the Troumouse and Gavarnie valleys meet. En route and all around you in the village you will see the magnificent environment you will be exploring in the coming days.

You stay two nights at the recently refurbished, very comfortable and renowned three star Hôtel de la Brèche de Roland with its impressive and enjoyable restaurant serving local traditional dishes transformed into contemporary masterpieces by chef-owner Philippe Pujo. The Brèche de Roland - Roland's Breach - is a 40 metre wide, 100 metre high gap in the cliffs dividing the two sides of the High Pyrenees, and legend claims it was cut by Count Roland using his sword Durendal after losing the 8th Century Battle of Roncesvalles. The hotel is pretty much the only place in the valley where the Breach is visible without having to climb up a mountain.

Transfer time : 1h.

DAY 2

Troumouse

We transfer you to the fascinating Heas Chapel - a 16th century pilgrimage chapel built to house a wooden Black Madonna found by local shepherds, and which miraculously (say some) survived an avalanche. You then climb progressively up the side of a hidden valley to the dramatically located Cabane des Aires, a mountain refuge, and from this high altitude plateau you can see the whole of the phenomenal natural arena of the Cirque de Troumouse rising to over 9,000 feet. On the peaks, there is often snow even in July. After walking around the Lac des Aires, you descend to the Maillet mountain auberge for a well earned drink before heading back down to Héas. A more challenging option is to visit the Lac des Gloriettes, whose turquoise waters usually reflect the celebrated Mont Perdu (over 10,000 feet), and the Estaubé valley.

You stay again tonight at the Hôtel de la Brèche de Roland.

**Walking time : 4h30. Distance : 10km. Elevation : + 700m / - 700m.
Transfer time : 15 minutes.**

DAY 3

Gèdre - Saugué - Gavarnie

Today begins with a walk through a wood before you climb consistently up to the high pastures of the Granges (barns) de Saugué, used only in summer. You will already have seen magnificent views of the Cirque de Gavarnie, but now you walk through alpine meadows rich with flowers in season to gain a panoramic perspective on the majestic glacial "amphitheatre" with its dozens of waterfalls. The only thing that is not a wonder is that it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You then have an unforgettable descent down a natural balcony protected by stone walls until you arrive back at Gavarnie village.

You stay two nights at the grand three star hotel Hôtel le Vignemale in Gavarnie, with its unique and privileged view of the Cirque de Gavarnie - facing south to the highest waterfall (well over 1,000 feet) to Mount Perdu (The Lost Mountain). No wonder it has hosted many famous people, including Victor Hugo (Les Misérables and The Hunchback Of Notre Dame) and the great Romantic writer and soldier in America who gave his name to *that* steak, Chateaubriand, and today it is a beautifully refurbished hotel with wood lined rooms.

Walking time : 5h. Distance : 16km. Elevation : + 850m / - 500m.

DAY 4

Cirque de Gavarnie

Today we visit what most people regard as the most exceptional and memorable site in the whole of the Pyrenees. You walk fairly gently up a wide path on a mountain "balcony" to the Bellevue plateau with privileged panoramas of the high mountain scenery all around you. From the top, you descend into the centre of the enormous natural "amphitheatre" that is the Cirque du Gavarnie with its myriad waterfalls - many impressively long and powerful - sheer bare rock cliffs, and contrasting peaceful valley bottom. The appropriately named Grande Cascade at about 1,300 feet is over 300 feet higher than the Eiffel Tower (300 feet!), and one of the highest in Europe. The bucolic final section is along the valley bottom, or, more challengingly, by the Espugues route, which follows an attractive rocky valley. Either way you arrive at Gerdre-Gavarnie village. Truly memorable, we are confident you will agree.

You stay again at the Hôtel le Vignemale from where you can now see where you have walked that day - and perhaps you can pat yourself on the back for your achievements!

Walking time : 5h or 6h. Distance : 9,5km. Elevation : + 500m or 750m / - 500m or 750m.

DAY 5

Gavarnie - Port de Boucharo - Torla

Today you wake in France and sleep in Spain. It is a fairly challenging walk - but hugely enjoyable and rewarding (and, anyway, the previous days will have got you walking fit). The highlights include: the walk up to the appropriately named Plateau de Bellevue; the walk under the Brèche de Roland, its cliffs towering above you; your views of the French and Spanish Pyrenees from the top of the Pouey-Aspé valley; the looping path to the frontier col at Port de Boucharo nearly 7,000 feet up and resonant with history; the descent into Spain; and finally the arrival at Torla, one of our favourite places, after a short transfer to save you those last excessive miles.

You stay three nights at the welcoming Hôtel Bujaruelo beautifully situated right in the centre of this charming mountain village with its cobbled streets, and facing the Ordesa Canyon itself. The hotel is traditional in style with wooden floors, some wooden ceilings and balconies presenting the most inspiring views, not least of Mount Perdido (as it is called here). You will also enjoy the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) changes from French to Spanish cuisine.

Walking time : 6h. Distance : 12,5km. Elevation : + 900m / - 900m. Transfer time : 30 minutes.

DAY 6

Faja Pelay (Ordesa valley)

This is a long, but hugely rewarding day's walking, which you start by taking the shuttle bus the short distance to Ordesa where you will enter the spectacular Canyon itself, and where the cliffs rise 3,000 feet above you while forest alternates with meadows around you. You zig-zag through forest up the stunning Chemin des Chasseurs (Hunter's Trail) until you join the wonderful panoramic footpath the follows the Ordesa valley, the Faja Pelay, where you can see Mount Perdido and enjoy the alpine type meadows all around you. Particularly near the magnificent (and magnificently named) Cascade de la Cola del Caballo you will find edelweiss everywhere. Reluctantly we are sure, you will descend to the bottom of the valley, but not without enjoying the succession of comparatively small waterfalls that is the Gradas de Soaso.

You stay a second night at the Hôtel Bujaruelo surrounded by the paths you have walked and mountain scenery you have almost obsessively photographed (we all do it!).

Walking time : 6h30. Distance : 18km. Elevation : + 600m / - 600m. Transfer time : 15 minutes.

DAY 7

The Cirque of Cotatuero (Ordesa valley)

Today you will be exploring the other side of the Canyon - the side with the high cliffs - but worry not! It is all well planned and safe as houses. You again take the shuttle to the Canyon, and take a pretty path through bushes and trees to the heart of the almost overwhelming Cirque de Cotatuero with its beautiful waterfall. Mountaineers may continue straight up to the Breche de Roland, but we prefer the less travelled balcony paths known as "fajas". You will experience the amazing Canarellos balcony path, but the fitter of you may like to tackle the Racun balcony path. In late spring and early summer, you may also experience the unforgettable pleasure of walking through flowering and fragrant broom and other mountain plants. At the end of this path, you arrive at the Cirque de Carriata, which presents a surprising vista of immense limestone cliffs - again, not a little overwhelming, even when you have experienced so many wonderful sights over the last few days.

You may enjoy your last night at the Hôtel Bujaruelo, and the end of your holiday, by pushing the boat out with cocktails and/or champagne. It will be well earned, and a fitting end to what we are confident you will say has been one of the most memorable holidays of your life.

Walking time : 4h or 6h. Distance : 12 or 15km. Elevation : + 500 or 750m / - 500 or 750m. Transfer time : 15 minutes.

DAY 8

End of stay

We transfer you back to Lourdes after breakfast (airport or railway station). You can, however, extend your stay by spending a night or two in Lourdes (see below).

Transfer time : 3 hours.

Elements beyond our control (the weather, level of the group, logistical risks, other miscellaneous reasons...) may lead our team to modify the programme. We aim to please, but your safety will systematically be our priority.

You can choose to stay an extra night at the three star Hôtel Beauséjour in Lourdes to visit the religious sites, and take the funicular up to the Pic du Jer, which has panoramic views.

PROGRAMME OF DEPARTURES

15 June to 15 October

MEETING POINT

We meet you at Lourdes (airport, train station or a hotel of your choice) and take you to Gèdre.

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TO GET TO THE MEETING POINT

SNCF runs overnight sleeper and daytime trains from Paris to Lourdes, which is also easily accessible by road (all motorway except the last 10 or so miles).

You can fly to Tarbes-Lourdes-Pyrénées airport direct from Paris everyday, and on several days a week in peak holiday months from London and several other cities in Britain, Germany, Spain and Eire. Or you can drive to Lourdes.

CAR SHARING

To reduce your travel costs as well as carbon emissions, think about car sharing, whether you are a driver or passenger. Connect to [Blablacar](#) it's simple and practical.

We recommend that you compare the cost of various different means of accessing your circuit start point by using the website [Rome2rio](#) or [Comparabus](#). Contrary to what the names suggest, these sites propose several different means of completing a journey, including, flights, trains, buses and even car sharing.

PARKING

Some parkings in Lourdes a free of charge.

GUARANTEED DEPARTURE FROM (PERS)

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LEVEL

This holiday features somewhat challenging walking on some days, so is most suitable for those who are reasonably fit, and/or do quite a lot of walking. It can get quite hot in July and August, as well as more crowded, and we would recommend June and from late August to the end of September as the best periods.

LUGGAGE TRANSPORTATION

We will transfer your luggage between each hotel, so all you need to carry when walking is a daysack with all you regard as essential.

SUPERVISION

This is an independent, self-guided holiday.

ACCOMMODATION

You stay in double or twin rooms for 4 nights in three star hotels, and 3 nights in a particularly good two star hotel.

MEALS

You will eat very well. Dinners are based on set menus featuring regional specialities usually with 3 or 4 choices for each of three courses, but you can pay locally for upgraded choices. Breakfast is included every morning, but lunches and picnics are not because there are plenty of places to make your own choices, although the night before you can ask the hotel for a picnic, which you can pay for locally.

TRANSFERS

Usually transfers are in people carriers, mini-buses, cars or taxis. Often they will be exclusively for you.

THE PRICE INCLUDES

7 nights dinner, bed and breakfast; people transfers from and to Lourdes; luggage transfers; detailed walking instructions; 1:25,000 IGN map; 24/7 customer phone service.

THE PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE

The journey to the start point, and from the finish point, except as specified; lunches; drinks with meals; non-standard menu items; shuttle bus charges (about £4 per person per journey).

FORMALITIES

You need to keep your passport with you at all times, and ideally insurance information. You need to make your own arrangements to claim local healthcare. There are requirements in France and Spain for all vehicles to carry safety equipment.

■ EQUIPMENT

Do pack everything into one suitcase (preferably soft form) and bring a weatherproof daysack (small rucksack) each. We transport your luggage, and large rucksacks are difficult for flights and cars.

Do invest in "tech" clothing - light, waterproof, breathable, quick drying etc - and good walking boots with ankle protection (trainers will not be good enough).

Do simplify your "tech" equipment if you can: for example, can you get communications, internet access, entertainment, music and books all on your smartphone ? There's plenty of space in your luggage for a Kindle, so do you need to take books as well ?

Do choose comfortable clothing for evenings too - usually people dress casual, or at most smart casual, but remember you are usually staying and dining in quality hotels.

Do remember that while you are enjoying some of the most unspoilt and magnificent scenery and landscapes in the world, and walking for hours without seeing another soul, you will be staying in villages and towns with shops that have most of the things you might need as replacements, or if you've forgotten stuff. After all, you are in France and Spain, not the middle of nowhere !

LUGGAGE

- A soft travel bag, avoid suitcases, which are more cumbersome and limit the weight of your belongings to 10 kg if possible.
- A small backpack of 30 litres minimum for your daytime requirements.

CLOTHES

- Waterproof and breathable anorak (Gore-Tex type)
- Fleece or a sweater (depending on the location and season)
- Waterproof over-trousers
- Pair of gloves (depending on the location and season)
- Sun hat (with all round brim)
- Shorts
- Swimming costume + packaway towel
- Several pairs of proper walking socks
- Underwear
- Pair of trainers or light evening shoes
- Comfortable clothing for the evening

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- Walking boots (with ankle protection)
- Sunglasses, sunscreen and lip protection
- Water bottle or backpack container (allow 2 litres per person per day)
- Tupperware type container for the picnic + cutlery
- Compass
- Waterproof cover for walking instructions and map
- Head torch
- Survival blanket
- Mobile phone (signal strength is often surprisingly good, but cannot be relied on)
- Your identity documents (including driving licence - you never know when...)

FIRST AID KIT

- Small shared kit (gauze, plasters, analgesic, blister plasters, earplugs, pain killers, indigestion tablets)

■ MORE INFORMATION

THE AREA

This region is the heart of the Pyrenees and what most people imagine the Pyrenees is like before they come here.

On the French side the landscape is made up of long deep valleys running approximately north-south, with a few perpendicular valleys running east-west. There are several interesting areas in the foothills (such as the Nature Reserve of Pibeste and its mouflons) or the wonderful ridges in the Val d'Azun or up on the Hautacam, but these lower areas soon give way to the immense north faces and cirques in the National Park of the Pyrenees, a protected area teeming with wild animals and endemic flowers.

The biggest gem of all is the double-rated (for both nature and culture) UNESCO site of Gavarnie. Its cirque (along with the Breach of Roland and the cirques of Estaubé, Troumouse and Barroude) forms a focal point for Pyrenean exploration and romanticism.

On the other side of the cirques lies Spain and the National Park of Ordesa, lined with jaw-dropping canyons such as Añisclo, Escuin, Pineta and Ordesa itself. The whole area is a mountain paradise.

Victor Hugo once wrote of Gavarnie "it is both a wall and a mountain at the same time, it is the most mysterious of edifices built by the most mysterious of architects; it is nature's coliseum; it is Gavarnie".

In the early 19th Century, other Romance writers and poets flocked to this area of the Pyrenees searching for inspiration.

I have personally visited the cirque maybe hundreds of times and it literally never ceases to amaze me. The sheer beauty and immensity of its 1700m vertical cliffs and Europe's highest waterfall pouring out from its centre are enough to make a grown man cry. The impossible scale of everything leads me to reflect on just how small we are in comparison to the incredible forces of nature.

The place is obviously crawling with tourists, which is why you should go for a hike off the main trail and up onto the surrounding hillsides where you will get some of the best views of both the Cirque and the Breach of Roland (a 50x100m gap in the cliffs that a giant 8th-Century soldier named Roland allegedly made with his sword when fleeing back to France from Spain after fighting with Arabs and Basques).

On the other side of the Breach there is a whole new world waiting for you in the colourful canyons of the National Park of Ordesa, in Spain. Here you will find the Faja de las Flores, one of the most famous walking paths in the Pyrenees, carved into the top part of a cliff at an altitude of 2600m!

The few people you will meet in this sparsely populated area will almost certainly be very friendly and hospitable, and if you are lucky they may offer you some homemade patxarán, a purple-coloured alcoholic beverage based on local blackthorn berries and some aniseed.

Politically, Aragon is an autonomous region of Spain, with Catalonia to the East and Navarra to the West. Along with neighbouring Navarra, it is an ancient Christian kingdom with long and important history.

The regional language is Aragonese (though it is not an official language of the Spanish state and very few people speak more than just a few words).

■ INSURANCE

Insurances are contracted between the client and the sales agent.

■ ACTING FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Purely Pyrenees who's organising this tour is a founding member of Action for Responsible Tourism.

The label "Action for Responsible Tourism" was awarded Purely Pyrenees in 2009. It is controled, every year, by ECOCERT.

Based on common values of respect, solidarity and quality, ATR aims to harmonize professional practices of its members.

To win the confidence of customers, it focuses on four key commitments, which arise from many activities in the field and at home.

- Clear information and awareness of responsible tourism given to the traveller.
- Selection of providers in the spirit of responsible tourism.
- Setting up of a transfer of competencies to the providers.
- Commitment in relation to the tour operator's own structure.

More information on the label ATR on /www.tourisme-responsable.org

■ CONTACT US

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■ NOTES

