

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

A World Class Journey To The Heart Of The Pyrenees



A wonderful walk through beautiful valleys and foothills before arriving at the amazing UNESCO Site of the Cirque de Gavarnie, the absolute must-see natural feature of the High Pyrenees. High quality accommodation, with one unforgettable night in the highest mountain refuge in the Pyrenees.

7 nights, 6 walking days

■ Minimum required 2

■ From point to point

■ With luggage transportation

■ Self-guided

Code :
FP2PUVG



The plus points

- **The sceneries**
- **Authentic accommodations and food**
- **24/7 customer service**



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

https://www.purelypyrenees.com/world_class_journey_heart_pyrenees.html

This sometimes challenging (but always rewarding) walk offers so many highlights and so much variety! It is a journey from the gentle pleasures of the renowned Azun valley up into the very heart of the Pyrenean mountains. Walk along ancient paths until reaching the most magnificent highlight of any Pyrenean journey, the UNESCO World Heritage Site that is the Cirque du Gavarnie. There are astounding cliffs rising to 10,000 feet, and numerous waterfalls - the Grand Cascade shoots out of the cliff face before falling over 1,400 feet to the ground below.. Then there are the herds of cattle, the marmots, the birds of prey, the villages, the hotels, the restaurants, the traditional and contemporary dishes - and a night 8,000 feet up where the light-pollution-free stars feel as close as the mountains do in daylight. Unforgettable? Most certainly!

This itinerary includes several private transfers to enable you to only walk the "best bits". Inevitably, this adds to the holiday cost (as well as the quality and enjoyment of the holiday), so the overall price cannot be directly compared with apparently similar holidays.

■ PROGRAMME

DAY 1

Arrival at Arrens-Marsous

Standard option: You make your own way to Arrens-Marsous, where it is easy to park your car. You can leave your car here for the week.

With extra airport pick-up: We meet you at Lourdes airport or railway station (or a hotel of your choice in Lourdes) and take you up to Arrens-Marsous.

Arrens-Marsous is in one of the most attractive Pyrenean valleys, the Val d'Azun. There will be a great sense of anticipation as all around you are the hills you'll begin walking through the next day.

You stay in one of our favourite places in the whole of the Pyrenees, although it is "only" a chambres d'hotes rather than a hotel. Maison Sempé is a beautiful 17th Century village house built of stone and wood in the local style with so much character and ambience that descriptions don't do justice to. The bedrooms (with en suite facilities, of course) are truly memorable with wooden balconies that give you wonderful views of the village's stone houses and the hills beyond. What makes it even more special are your hosts, Sylvie and Jean-Paul, who speak English, are most welcoming, and are full of fascinating information about the area. You'll also eat well!

Transfer time if you have booked the option : 30 minutes.

DAY 2

Arrens-Marsous - Estaing You begin your journey with gentle valley walking to the 12th century golden chapel, or chapel of stars, at Pouey Laun before taking an ancient lane up through woods. You are now on the famous GR10, which runs for 900 kilometres from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, yet, except from July to mid August, you can walk all day and barely see anybody other than shepherds. At the Col des Bordères, you can see the restored summer barns and shepherds' accommodation in use as they have been for centuries, and at the summit called Predousset you can enjoy magnificently panoramic views over the Azun valley. You now stroll through extensive alpine type pastures, rich with flowers in early summer, and begin your descent to the tiny valley of Estaing. Finally for today, you follow the stream to arrive at Estaing lake with its reflections of the peaks all around. Transfer.

We transfer you from the lake to Marsous for another night at the Maison Sempé. After your efforts you will enjoy Sylvie's homemade cooking even more this evening!

Walking time : upto 5h. Distance : 12 to 18km. Elevation : + 800m / - 500m. Transfer time : 15 minutes.

DAY 3

Estaing - Ilheou lake - Cauterets

We take you on a short transfer back to the Lac d'Estaing from where you continue up the GR10 through pine forest and on to the high pastures at Arriousec where you will see herds of the traditional horned cream cows of the Pyrenees, which are so tranquil that you can often walk among them without any of them moving an inch! From the Col d'Ilheóu, you walk to Ilheóu lake - a great place for a well earned rest - then can enjoy a gentle downhill walk to the lovely Cambasque valley where we meet you to save those just-a-little-too-far extra miles to Cauterets. A really rewarding day's walking.

Now for many of us, Cauterets is an enigma. On the one hand, it is a somewhat austere stone-built mountain town, but, on the other hand, since the 18th century it has been a spa town popular, even today, with those wanting or needing to benefit from its sulphurous waters. What is still called "taking the cure". The three star Hôtel le Lion d'Or is also an enigma. At first sight it is an unchanged traditional hotel with a wonderfully retro ambience, yet it has been very expensively and extensively refurbished right through to space age showers! The best of both worlds, especially as the menu remains true to its historic roots.

Walking time : Upto 6h. Distance : 12km. Elevation : + 1050m / - 850m. Transfer time : 30 minutes.

DAY 4

Cauterets - Gaube valley - (Petit Vignemale) - Bayscellance refuge

As you will by now have realised, mornings generally begin with an uphill climb, while afternoons are for descending - essentially because towns and villages are in valleys - and today is no different, except you have a lot of ascent and minimal descent - but then you have a privileged stay tonight still high up in the Pyrenees.

FP2PUVG Last update 29/12/2020 3 / 15 You begin by walking up to Gaube lake in which you will see mirrored the imposing grandeur of the north face of Vignemale and the crevasses of the Petit Vignemale glacier - one of the most beautiful and dramatic of panoramic views in the Pyrenees. You now walk alongside a glacial torrent, and among alpine meadows interspersed with numerous waterfalls before arriving at the Oule

ttés mountain refuge from which mountaineers climb Grand Vignemale (3298m). You, however, climb up gradually to the Col d'Ossoue, which gets you very close to Petit Vignemale. You can climb to the summit if you want to, or just go straight down to the wonderful Bayscellance refuge where you will spend a truly memorable night.

Built of stone with a copper vaulted roof in 1899, and refurbished in 2003, this unique refuge is the highest staffed refuge in the Pyrenees at 8,000 feet, and offers simple, shared accommodation with private, but shared bathrooms (no hot showers), unfussy but plentiful meals, a warm welcome from Peio and Morgane, a convivial atmosphere, and, above all, a magnificent location, both in daylight and at night when the light pollution-free stars seem almost as close as the mountains. It really does feel like a privilege staying here.

Walking time : Upto 5 à 6h. Distance : 12,5km. Elevation : + 1300m / - 100m. Transfer time : 20 minutes.

DAY 5

Baysseance refuge - Gavarnie

Get up early enough, and you will see the sun rise over Ossoue glacier - well worth it! You can take pleasure in the fact that where yesterday was all about ascending, today is all about descending. You walk down the lovely Ossoue valley with its streams, waterfalls - and marmottes. In meadow areas at certain altitudes, they are ubiquitous, and eminently photogenic. However, your eyes will increasingly be captivated by the sight of the Cirque de Gavarnie, which you may be surprised to find actually challenges some of yesterday's panoramic views as the best you've ever seen!

You stay for 2 nights at the positively traditional and very comfortable two star Hôtel du Marboré in the centre of Gavarnie village, but with exceptional views of the Cirque de Gavarnie and the 1,300 feet Grand Cascade waterfall, not least from its terrace. Bernard will prepare dishes for you which bring together the best of traditional Pyrenean cuisine (stews, meats, mushrooms, cheeses and more), while Roseline will ensure you have a warm welcome, and everything you need.

Walking time : Upto 6h. Distance : 15,5km. Elevation : + 100m / - 1400m.

DAY 6

Cirque de Gavarnie

This is 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 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 and one of the highest in Europe. The bucolic final section is along the valley bottom, or, more challengingly, by the Espugues route, which cuts across a rocky cliff face. Either way, you arrive back in the village of Gavarnie. Truly memorable, we are confident you will agree.

You stay a second night at the Hôtel du Marboré.

Walking time : 4 or 5h. Distance : 11km. Elevation : + 500m / - 500m.

DAY 7

Gavarnie - Troumouse Cirque

We transfer you to the Troumousse valley so you can begin your walk visiting the historic Heás 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 - before gradually walking up to the Aires cabin situated in the middle of the incredible "arena" that is the Cirque de Troumousse, rising to almost 10,000 feet. You then descend to the Auberge de Maillet before continuing to the much photographed turquoise waters of the Gloriettes lake, which often reflects the magnificence that is Mont Perdu.

There can be no doubts about why this whole area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You can now either get picked up here or descend on foot to Gedre village (adding an extra 2h30m) by crossing the Coumely plateau with its historic stone barns, and then taking the Lucien Briet footpath descending steeply (but safely) down to the village. And that, we're afraid to say, is it for this walking holiday.

For your last night, you stay at the recently refurbished, very comfortable and renowned three star Hotel de la Breche de Roland with its impressive and enjoyable restaurant serving local traditional dishes transformed into contemporary masterpieces by chef-owner Philippe Pujo. The Breche 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 the only place that you can see the breach from the bottom of the valley.

Walking time : 5h. Distance : 14,5km. Elevation : + 800m / - 600m. Transfer time : 30 minutes.

DAY 8

End of stay

Standard option: After breakfast, we will take you back to Arrens-Marsous to collect your car.

With extra airport pick-up: After breakfast, we will take you back to Lourdes airport or railway station (or a hotel of your choice - see our recommendation below).

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 30 September

MEETING POINT

Standard option: You make your own way to Arrens-Marsous, where it is easy to park your car. You can leave your car here for the week.

With extra airport pick-up: We meet you at Lourdes airport or railway station (or a hotel of your choice in Lourdes) and take you up to Arrens-Marsous.

END OF STAY

Standard option: After breakfast, we will take you back to Arrens-Marsous to collect your car.

With extra airport pick-up: After breakfast, we will take you back to Lourdes airport or railway station (or a hotel of your choice - see our recommendation below).

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.

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.

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

You can park your car for free in Marsous (or in Lourdes).

IF YOU WANT TO ARRIVE THE NIGHT BEFORE OR STAY AFTER THE TRIP

We can arrange extra nights before, during and after the itinerary. Just contact us.

GUARANTEED DEPARTURE FROM (PERS)

2

LEVEL

This holiday includes sometimes challenging, but always rewarding walking, and is suitable for people who are reasonably fit, and used to walking for much of a day. It can get hot in July and August, as well as much more crowded. We would recommend June and from mid August to the end of September as the best months.

LUGGAGE TRANSPORTATION

We will transfer your main luggage between each hotel, so all you need to carry when walking is a daysack with whatever you regard as essentials, except for the night in the mountain refuge where you will need to carry clothes and washing essentials.

SUPERVISION

This is an independent, self-guided holiday.

ACCOMMODATION

You stay in double or twin rooms for 2 nights in three star hotels, 2 nights in two star hotels, 2 nights in an excellent chambres d'hotels and one night in a mountain refuge.

MEALS

You will eat very well. Dinners are based on set menus featuring regional specialities etc usually with 3 or 4 choices for each of three courses, but not at the chambres d'hotels or the refuge. Breakfast is included every morning as are picnics on those days when there are no immediate shops or en route places to eat, although the night before you can always ask 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 plus one picnic; 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 except one picnic; drinks with meals; non- standard menu items.

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 for all vehicles to carry safety equipment.

CONTENTS OF YOUR TRAVEL FOLDER

■ EQUIPMENT

Do pack everything into one suitcase (preferably soft form) and 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 boots.

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, but do you need to take 3 or 4 books?

Do choose comfortable clothing for evenings too - usually people dress casual, or at most smart casual, but you are 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!

LUGGAGE

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

CLOTHES

- A waterproof and breathable jacket (Gore-Tex type)
- A fleece or a sweater
- A raincoat (poncho)
- Walking trousers
- 1 pair of gloves
- 1 hat
- Shorts
- A bathing suit + towel
- Several pairs of socks (not too large)
- Underwear
- 1 pair of trainers
- Loose clothing for the evening

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- 1 pair of walking shoes that have been used before
- Sunglasses, sunscreen and lip protection
- 1 bottle (allow 2 to 3 litres per person per day in summer)
- A Tupperware type plastic bowl for the picnic + cutlery
- 1 compass
- Waterproof map cover (advised)
- 1 head torch in your rucksack (for safety)
- 1 survival cover (from a chemist)
- 1 mobile phone (advised)
- Camera and why not a novel, your watercolours or other desires...
- Your identification documents
- **Sleeping bag liner** : your itinerary includes a night in a mountain refuge, then you will need a sleeping bag liner as the refuge will supply sleeping bags and/or blankets. Sleeping bag liners range greatly in size (avoid a "mummy" shape if you are a larger person) and material (from nylon through cotton to silk), so we think it is better for you to buy and bring one that suits you.

FIRST AID KIT

- A small personal kit (gauze, Elastoplast, analgesic, double skin for blisters, earplugs...)

LUGGAGE

Please use soft travel bags, and restrict each bag to 10 kilos. You will also need a daysack of about 30 litres.

CLOTHES

You will know what to bring, but casual as much as smart casual clothing works for most evenings, and your priority should be comfort, especially for your feet!

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

For walking, you will know what to bring, but we would recommend ankle protecting walking boots, a complete waterproof and breathable outfit, sunhat, plenty of sun protection, a 2 litre water container per person, waterproof map case, compass, head torch, mobile phone, small first aid kit, and a Tupperware container and utensils for lunches.

■ 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.

There are large concentrations of spa towns (Barèges, Luz-Saint-Sauveur, Argelès-Gazost, Bagnères de Bigorre...), some of the worlds most renowned cycling cols (such as the Tourmalet, for example), the highest peaks in the Pyrenees (such as Aneto, Vignemale, Mont Perdu or Balaitus), superb walking trails, and the four top tourist sites in the Pyrenees: the town of Lourdes with its Catholic sanctuaries and curative waters, the world class observatory at the Pic du Midi, the Victorian-style spa town of Cauterets and its famous bridge at Pont d'Espagne, and the village and cirque at Gavarnie (of course!).

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!

In the central Pyrenees there are several granite massifs filled with pristine mountain lakes. The Lac de Gaube near Cauterets is considered to be one of the most beautiful lakes in the Pyrenees, with stunning views out to the north face of Vignemale (the highest peak in the French Pyrenees at 3298m). It is a real pleasure to snowshoe over the top of it in good winter conditions. Slightly more difficult hikes will also take you to many other lakes that are arguably just as beautiful but without the crowds of tourists.

The massif of Néouvielle was one of the first nature reserves to be created in France in the 1930s. There are almost 600 types of algae in the lakes, of which there are over 70 (not including the other lakes just outside the protected area!). The fact that this massif is entirely within France and protected on all sides by other large massifs means that it has a special micro-climate, leading to an abundance of different animal and plant species. The temperatures are higher than expected for a given altitude, meaning that European altitude records for many different species have been registered here: mountain pines growing at over 2600m and fox-gloves at over 1800m!

The French electricity company EDF have made the most of the park's water reserves by building dams and creating huge storage reservoirs at high altitudes (the valley of Cauterets refused to be a part of this development - see below). The water can be sent at great speeds down penstocks buried inside the hillside (there are still a few impressive penstocks built onto the outside of cliff faces too), down into the power stations in the valleys where the kinetic energy will be transformed into electricity.

The natural environment around Cauterets: The massif of Cauterets is essentially composed of crystalline granite formations from the end of the Primary Era (between 350 and 400 million years ago). This granite is what gives the landscape its character. The freeze-thaw action of the ice shreds away the ridges and screes accumulate at the foot of the cliffs. In the bottom of the valley, glacial erosion has rounded off the boulders, some of which have been scratched by stones in the glacier's moraine. Areas of different types of limestone can be found : on the North Face of Vignemale, on Pic du Cabaliros (Devonian) or on the summit of Pic du Viscos (Ordovician). Zones of schist are also visible at Lisey and the Ferme Basque. The granite has been used by man for the building of houses and retaining walls, while slate from Cambasque and Tournaro has been used for roofing.

Hydraulic energy systems were mastered in the 18th Century to drive saw mills (at least four, one of which is on the Plateau de Cayan) and three flour mills. In 1888 one of these mills was equipped with a dynamo and became the first hydro-electric power station. In 1897, Calypso's mini power station (with a 67m penstock) was built to feed the new tramway. Nevertheless, the people of Cauterets have always vehemently defended their rivers, lakes and waterfalls against pre- and post-war dam projects. From an altitude of 1800m, the plan would have been to channel the water into the neighbouring valley (at Pragnères) to drive the power station's turbines, leaving the giant rivers of Cauterets reduced to trickling streams. In the end, nuclear development in other parts of France put a stop to all speculation.

The impact of the mountains on the population can also sometimes be negative. In the 19th Century, the land had suffered from mass deforestation due to overgrazing, which in turn gave rise to huge quantities of stone fall on the flanks of Le Peguère. These rock slides were so large that they even considered moving the spas down the valley to Pierrefite. From 1886 to 1892, the Water and Forestry Commissions built enormous retaining walls and reforested the hillside (which is why they are now covered with non-Pyrenean larch trees). A few years later, in 1895, a landslide came down from Lisey and trundled right down to the bottom of the valley, destroying houses and blocking both the road and the river. The army had to be called in to re-establish access between Cauterets and the rest of the world. The Water and Forestry Commissions were again involved in retention works and reforesting.

MAPS

- Carte au 1/25000ème. 16470T Vignemale. I.G.N.
- Carte au 1/25000ème. 17480T Gavarnie. I.G.N.

■ 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, bys 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](http://www.tourisme-responsable.org)

■ CONTACT US

Purely Pyrenees
48 Route d'Azun
F-65400 ARRENS-MARSOUS
FRANCE

Tel: 00 33 (0)5 62 97 72 03
Mobile phone: 00 33 (0)6 73 19 87 60
24/7 Emergency hotline : 00 33 (0)6 76 02 91 15

contact@purelypyrenees.com

Purely Pyrenees is a brand created by La Balaguere SAS.

La Balaguere SAS with a capital of 179 775 euros - Registration number: IM065100002 - Siret: 389 350 745 0001 1 - RCP. Allianz contrat n°53.231.046 - No. 7911 NAF Z - Financial Guarantee: Groupama - Head Office at the address listed above.

■ NOTES

