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Dossier: Pyrenees/Guided/Hotels/11 days/2020

Pyrenees Traverse GR10 & GR11 / Guided: 11 days

Trip starts: Day 1 at Toulouse Airport
Trip ends: Day 11 at Toulouse Airport

The Pyrenees stretches from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean and forms a natural border between France and Spain. The famous GR10, GR11 and Pyrenean Haute Route follow separate paths along the spine of this range, and our trip takes in the central and most spectacular section.

The route begins in the spa town of Bagnères-de-Luchon and heads west to Gavarnie along the French GR10. We then head south into Spain and do a fabulous loop into the Ordesa Canyon and along the GR11. The scenery constantly changes from wonderful green meadows and thick deciduous forests to high pastures and arid mountain peaks. The contrast between France and Spain is very marked as is the food and culture.

The trails are quiet compared to the Alps and Dolomites and the villages maintain much of their traditional feel.

We stay for six nights at 2-3-star hotels, one night at an auberge and three nights at mountain refuges. Most of your meals are included when on the trek. There is a rest day in Gavarnie on day seven. Your main luggage is transferred from hotel to hotel.

This trek will suit people who have comfortably completed the TMB or equivalent and who enjoy trekking in quiet surroundings. The Pyrenees Traverse is a bit tougher than the TMB with some longer days. You should be happy covering 15-18km (10-12 miles) each day, with a number of ascents and descents between 1000 and 1200m. This is a challenging trek and you should be confident of your fitness.

The walking is on a mixture of well-maintained trails and feint paths. There are some sections where it is rocky underfoot, but it is a hiking trip – there is no scrambling. There is one small section on day 8 when we have to climb up a short waterfall on our way up (not difficult, but you might get slightly wet feet).

The trip will be led by an experienced and fully qualified International Mountain Leader (IML).



ITINERARY: PYRENEES TRAVERSE: GR10 & GR11

Day 1 Meet at Toulouse Blagnac Airport: transfer to Luchon (625m)

Meet at Toulouse Blagnac Airport at 13:00hrs (1pm). We will then transfer you by road to our hotel in Bagnères-de-Luchon: the trip takes just under 2 hours. Luchon is a spa town and the healing powers of the thermal waters were known to the Romans. The town is pretty and there is a lovely main street with shops, cafés and restaurants. We stay in a hotel located in the centre the town.

Hotel. Meals included: dinner

Day 2 Trek from Superbagnères to Lac d'Espingo

After breakfast we transfer for 30 minutes to Superbagnères at 1780m. Here we join the GR10 and walk beside a ridge to a col at 2272m. We traverse through rocky surroundings to another col and then head down to Lac d'Espingo (1880m). A beautiful spot with options to climb higher above the lake. Today is relatively short.

We spend the night in a mountain refuge. It is simple with hot showers. We sleep in a small dorm with blankets and pillows. Dinner is taken in the main dining room.

You will not have access to your luggage tonight so you need to pack appropriately.

Hiking time is approximately 5.5 hours. 10km.

Ascent 800m, Descent 600m.

Refuge. Meals included: breakfast, lunch & dinner

Day 3 Trek Lac d'Espingo to Germ

From the refuge we continue on the GR10 and quickly lose height, passing Lac d'Oô and on to les Granges d'Astau (1140m) in 90 minutes. We then make a tough, steep climb through thick forest and then on to open country in rocky surroundings. We reach a col at 2100m with views from where we have trekked from and where we are heading to. The first section of the descent is steep on a feint trail through thick grasses. Eventually the angle eases and we pass into meadows surrounded by big peaks. The trail contours along a remote valley and we arrive in the pretty village of Germ (1330m) in the late afternoon. Today is a long day.

You will have your main luggage tonight.

Hiking time is approximately 8 hours. 17km.

Ascent 1200m, Descent 1650m.

Auberge. Meals included: breakfast, lunch & dinner

Day 4 Along the GR10 to Saint-Lary Soulan

We descend to the town of Loudenvielle by Lac Génos (950m) and then make a climb up to 1586m amongst fields and forests. The route closely follows one of the smaller sections of the Tour de France cycle race. The descent is in similar surroundings and passes through the village of Azet with an imposing eleventh century church. Our hotel is in St Lary (800m) which has a few bars and restaurants.

You will have your main luggage tonight.

Hiking time is approximately 6 hours. 12km.

Ascent 750m, Descent 1200m

Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & lunch



Day 5 Col de Portet and the Néouvielle National Reserve

We make a long climb up to the Col de Portet at 2214m in wide open countryside. There are superb views and we enter a different kind of scenery in the Néouvielle National Reserve. There are pine forests and beautiful azure lakes dotted all over the reserve. We lose some height and then make a further climb until we reach our mountain refuge located by a lake (1850m). Today is a long day.

Our second mountain refuge is small house with a cosy restaurant and a seating area facing the sun. There are hot showers and we stay in a small dorm with blankets and pillows.

You will not have access to your luggage tonight so you need to pack appropriately.

Hiking time is approximately 8 hours. 18km.

Ascent 1800m, Descent 800m

Refuge. Meals included: breakfast, lunch & dinner

Day 6 Beautiful lakes and arid scenery

We make a short, steep ascent to beautiful Lac d'Aumar (2190m) and then continue over a mountain col at 2500m. The mountains are jagged and arid and provide a perfect example of topography created by glaciers. We descend past smaller lakes in a quiet valley. Eventually we reach the road and follow a path to the small ski town of Barèges. We then transfer in under an hour to Gavarnie (1400m).

You will have your main luggage tonight.

Hiking time is approximately 7-8 hours. 17km.

Ascent 800m, Descent 1300m.

Hotel. Meals included: breakfast, lunch

Day 7 Rest day or hike above the spectacular Cirque de Gavarnie.

Famed for its incredible steep rocky cirque, Gavarnie is great place to spend the day, though it can get busy in the village during the daytime. You can use your time to relax in the hotel garden, take a leisurely lunch or hike with the Guide into the mountains.

Hotel. Meals included: breakfast

Day 8 Cross Brèche de Roland into Spain

We take a 30-minute drive to the Col de Tentes at 2200m and start hiking amongst huge rocky peaks. The path is rocky underfoot and we have to climb up a short waterfall on our way up (not difficult, but you might get slightly wet feet). Soon we reach a mountain hut and make our final climb to the Brèche de Roland at 2800m - an incredible gap in a vast rock wall. Here we cross into Spain and the scenery is very different. It is dryer, more jagged and more moon-like. We take a short, steep descent and then continue south east to the spectacularly located Refugio de Góriz (2,200m).

Our third mountain refuge is much bigger and busier with hikers and mountaineers and there is a great atmosphere. There are hot showers and you will stay in a bigger dorm with blankets and pillows.

You will not have access to your luggage tonight so you need to pack appropriately.

Hiking time is approximately 7 hours. 14km.

Ascent 800m, Descent 800m (Total ascent 1600m, including transfer in bus).

Refuge. Meals included: breakfast, lunch & dinner



Day 9 On the GR11 and the Ordesa Canyon

The Ordesa Canyon has huge, steep rock walls and a river flowing at the bottom of it. We make our way down for about four hours along the GR11 to reach the valley floor at 1300m. The scenery is outstanding and we take our time as this is a very special place and a highlight on our journey. We continue down, close to the river, and finally arrive in Torla (900m), a pretty Pyrenean town with a sixteenth century church and a smattering of restaurants and hotels.

You will not have access to your luggage tonight so you need to pack appropriately.

Hiking time is approximately 6-7 hours. 20km.

Ascent 200m, Descent 1400m.

Refuge. Meals included: breakfast & lunch

Day 10 Puerto de Bujaruelo and on to Gavarnie

Our final day's trek allows us to savour the magnificent surroundings of this unique mountain range. We make a 20-minute drive to Bujaruelo (1340m) and then make a three hour climb to the mountain pass at 2272m and back into France. The hike takes us down through a beautiful green valley and we arrive in Gavarnie in the late afternoon. Today's walk is a fitting end to our journey.

You will have your main luggage tonight.

Hiking time is approximately 5-6 hours. 12km.

Ascent 1000m, Descent 900m.

Hotel. Meals included: breakfast & lunch

Day 11 Transfer to Toulouse Blagnac Airport

After breakfast we transfer in 3 hours to Toulouse Blagnac Airport by private bus. We aim to arrive before 1pm (13:00hrs). Trip ends.

Meals included: breakfast

Extending your stay in France or Spain

You may like to explore Toulouse which can be easily reached by taxi or bus from the airport. We recommend you book a hotel via a hotel booking website, such as booking.com where you will find competitive rates. Toulouse is a good place to reach other places such as Carcassonne, Lourdes and Barcelona.

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day route as printed above, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested. Occasionally, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons – climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best alternative arrangements possible that maintains the integrity of the original itinerary.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Is it for me?

The route is approximately 120km/75 miles and is quite tough as there are some big ascents and descents. This trip should appeal to you if you regularly take walking weekends and are happy covering 15-21km (10-14 miles) each day, with a number of ascents and descents over varying terrain. On this trek in the Pyrenees we normally walk for between 6 and 8 hours each day and be outdoors for 8 or 9 hours.

Some of the trails are on good, well-maintained paths though there are sections when it is rocky and loose underfoot. In other places there are only faint paths. There is a short climb up a mountain stream and you might get slightly wet feet.

The highest altitude we walk to is 2800 metres, so you should not feel the altitude apart from a little shortness of breath.

Group size

- Minimum 6, maximum 14.

Price and what it includes

- Accommodation on a twin-share basis at all hotels.
- Three nights at comfortable refuges in dormitories.
- Transfers to and from Toulouse Blagnac airport.
- All transfers when part of the organised trek.
- 10 breakfasts, 8 picnic lunches and 5 dinners.
- Luggage transfers so that you have your main luggage for 6 of the 10 nights.
- The trek is led by a qualified International Mountain Leader (IML).

What is not included

- Dinner in St Lary, Gavarnie, Torla (days 4,6,7,9,10).
- Lunch on day 7 and the first and last day when we transfer to the airport.

Accommodation and meals

We stay in 3-star hotels for five nights, a 2-star hotel for one night, an auberge for one night and refuges for three nights.

Rooms at the hotels are on a twin-share basis: all have attached private bathrooms.

For the nights at the mountain refuges, we reserve places in dormitories. The refuges have fewer comforts and are run more like a traditional refuge. In France, both refuges have 8-10 people in a dorm; in the Góriz refuge in Spain there are more people and there is a mix of hikers and mountaineers. At all three refuges you are required to bring a light-weight sheet sleeping bag or silk liner and a towel. All have hot showers. Their locations allow us to get deep amongst the mountains and take the best route.

Included dinners are normally a set 3-course meal and are eaten in the hotel and refuges' restaurant area. There are nights when we eat at locally recommended restaurants. Tea and coffee at dinner and all other drinks are not included.

Typical meals at the hotels

Breakfast: please note that some places serve a classic French breakfast whilst others offer more. Normally there will be tea, coffee, juice, bread, butter, jam, cheese and, in some hotels, you will also get cereals, ham, salami, yoghurt.



Dinner: starter, main course, dessert.

Vegetarian diets are catered to. Vegan and gluten-free diets are less well catered to and so we cannot guarantee this. If your diet is restricted we suggest you bring supplementary foods with you.

You must advise us at the time of booking of any dietary requirements.

Typical meals at the refuges

There will be a 3-course set menu with vegetarian options. The food is often good.

The refuges sell soft drinks, beer, wine, mineral water, cakes and a variety of chocolate bars.

Lunches

We will provide a picnic lunch for 8 days. This will either be bought when the Guide is able to shop at a supermarket or will be supplied by the refuges. There are not many mountain cafés along the route – it is not like the Alps.

If you chose not to take or eat any of the meals provided throughout this trip, there is no refund.

Luggage transfers

You will have access to your main luggage for 6 of the 10 nights. This will be at the towns when we stay at hotels.

On the days you do not have access to your luggage (four nights in total) you will need to carry your over-night gear, which will most likely include spare socks, underwear, T-shirt and basic toiletries. This is light backpacking and we recommend you have a 40 litre rucsac – and no smaller than 35 litres. **All three refuges require you to bring a sheet sleeping bag and a towel.**

Please restrict the weight of your main luggage to a single 20kg bag. Sports bags and suitcases are fine.

We strongly recommend that you do not leave any valuables or any object of high value in your main luggage. When your luggage is transferred and then delivered to the next hotel, it is likely that it will be left in the reception area or in an unattended back-room. We recommend that you lock your luggage and clearly label it with your name, address and mobile phone number.

Airport transfers

We arrange an airport pick-up from Toulouse Blagnac Airport on Day 1. Please inform us in advance of your flight number and arrival time. Please let us know if you are extending your stay in France either at the beginning or end of the trip.

The joining point is in the Arrivals Hall at Toulouse Blagnac at 13:00hrs (1pm).

If you miss your pre-arranged transfer you should call us for information on how to get to the start of the trek: any costs incurred will be your responsibility. Please note that it is 2 hours by private bus to Luchon: a taxi would be expensive. You may need to transfer by public bus and/or train.

You are welcome to arrange your own transport to the hotel in Luchon, at your own expense, but there is only street parking which you have to pay for.



We arrange a drop-off at Toulouse Blagnac Airport on Day 11. We aim to be there between midday and 1pm (12:00-13:00hrs). Most airlines will require a 2-hour check in. If you need to be at the airport earlier, you will have to make your own arrangements.

Transport during the tour

All transfers to the walks are included in the price of the tour.

The transfer from the airport to Luchon is in a private bus and takes 2 hours. The transfer at the end of the trip to the airport takes 3 hours in a private bus.

We take 3 other shorter transfers: two are 30 minutes, one is 50-60 minutes.

Staff

Throughout the trip, you will be accompanied by a qualified International Mountain Leader who has a First Aid certificate and carries a First Aid Kit.

Weather

In the late summer, daytime temperatures can vary from 15-28°C in the valleys to 0-25°C at higher altitudes (at the cols and ridges it can be cold and windy). It all depends on whether the sun is out and it can often feel hot. At night the temperature is 5-15°C in the valley and can drop close to 0-5°C at the night stops at the refuges. However, inside the refuges it will be warm.

As with all mountain ranges it can rain – either as frontal weather (coming off the Atlantic Ocean) or as thunderstorms after a hot day – and you should come prepared for this. It can be cold and windy at higher elevations and snow is not unknown. We pay special attention to the local weather forecasts and will adjust the day-to-day itinerary if we feel it is necessary to get the best from your tour.

Clothing and equipment

- Good walking boots: leather or fabric and should be worn-in before you arrive.
- Full set of good-quality waterproofs – jacket and trousers. Gore-Tex is recommended: a 'pac-a-mac' is not good enough.
- Trousers or skirts, short trousers.
- Swimming costume.
- T-shirts and tops that includes a jumper or fleece jacket.
- Rucsac that will give you enough room to carry a few clothes plus other items for the overnight periods when you do not have access to your main luggage: 40 litres is recommended – and no smaller than 35 litres.
- Sun hat, sun cream, sunglasses, water bottle, warm woolly hat and gloves.
- Torch, blister kit, any personal medicine.
- **Small lightweight towel for the nights in the refuges.**
- **Sheet sleeping bag or silk liner for the nights in the refuges.**

For the night stops when you will not have access to your main luggage we recommend you carry a change of underwear, socks and T-shirt, basic toiletries and a torch – please remember that you will have to carry it all. You will need to carry your picnic lunch and will probably have your camera and blister kit with you.

Although it may be cold outside at night, it will be warm inside and so down jackets are not needed. However, if you intend to do a bit of stargazing at the refuges a small, lightweight down gillet or jacket might be welcome.

Extra expenses & money

There are ATMs in most of the towns. France and Spain part of the Euro Zone - so you'll



need Euros. You can use credit cards in most places, though Amex seems to get commonly refused. When trekking, euros cash are accepted everywhere.

You will need extra money for drinks and evening meals not included. In addition, postcards, souvenirs, snacks you might buy at mountain refuges and any optional activities. Most towns have cafés, map shops and outdoor stores with a small range of equipment.

Typical costs

These are approximate costs: you can spend more or less than indicated.

Dinners	Allow €25-30 for each of the five dinners.
Lunch	You need to buy one lunch in Gavarnie and for the two days when transferring to and from the airport. Allow €7-20 depending on whether you eat a picnic or eat at a restaurant.
Misc	Wine (€20-25), beer (€5), soft drinks (€3), cakes & snacks, coffee.

Passports, visas and insurance

It is essential that you are in possession of an up to date and valid passport. You must check the visa and entry requirements of your chosen destination and any countries that you may be stopping off at en-route. Whilst we are able to offer general advice to British citizens, personal circumstances such as criminal records, may affect your eligibility to enter certain countries. It is therefore your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct documentation to gain entry into your chosen destination(s). For any further information, please consult the relevant embassy or for British residents visit: www.fco.gov.uk

Adequate and valid travel insurance is compulsory when you travel with us and it is a condition of accepting your booking that you agree you will have obtained adequate and valid travel insurance for your booking by the date of departure. We recommend that you take out insurance as soon as your booking is confirmed.

We recommend that your travel insurance includes repatriation, that you are covered for trekking in the French and Spanish Pyrenees up to 2800 metres, helicopter rescue, all the activities mentioned in this dossier and any optional activities you may take part in. You must check with your insurer that you have adequate and valid cover for your tour. Anyone who does not have insurance will not be allowed to take part in the tour until cover is arranged. This is part of our booking conditions.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of this dossier immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from clients. You will be informed of any major changes to your trip but small changes may just be added to this dossier.

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