

## The French and Spanish Pyrenees : Gavarnie, Monte Perdido and the Ordesa canyon

*A one-week programme based in the French Haute Pyrenees and the Spanish Aragon Pyrenees, including five days of private guiding with two qualified International Mountain Leaders.*

*The first two days of the week takes in some of the highlights of the Pays Toy valley in the French Hautes Pyrenees, with possible walks including a day tour of the Neouvielle Nature Reserve – a wild granitic massif scattered with dozens of beautiful lakes and miniature pines, a visit to the Cirque de Troumouse – a gigantic glacial cirque backed by towering limestone cliffs, or a valley-based walk exploring the old villages and farmers’ trails and the ancient Sainte Marie castle . This part of the trip is based from the small mountain town of Luz-St. Sauveur, which has a charming old centre and a fascinating historic church, as well as plenty of bars and restaurants. This area has a particularly interesting history and culture, with its own unique “patois” language, local traditions and hearty cuisine. Surrounded by some of the highest and most dramatic 3000m+ peaks of the Pyrenees, the valleys have lush pasture, stone barns and picturesque perched villages.*

*For the second part of the trip we cross on foot through to the Spanish Pyrenees and the Monte Perdido National Park to visit the Ordesa canyon – also part of the Gavarnie & Ordesa World heritage site. Our trek takes us from the lush green meadows of France through the iconic Breche de Roland pass into the sculpted badlands of Spain. The highlight of this trek is the night spent at the head of the Ordesa canyon, known as the Grand Canyon of Europe. In Spain we visit the charming mountain village of Torla, with its cobbled streets and tapas bars, before returning to France on foot on an ancient pilgrims’ trail. Parts of this route were also used by prisoners during World War II escaping from France into the Spanish Pyrenees.*

### SUMMARY PROGRAMME (7 nights)

Day 1 *Arrival, night in the pretty market town of Luz-St. Sauveur*

Day 2 *Cirque de Troumouse day walk, night in Luz-St. Sauveur*

Day 3 *Neouvielle Lakes day walk, night in Luz-St. Sauveur*

Day 4 *Rest day*

Day 5 *Gavarnie-Ordesa mini trek day 1 – Col des Tentes, Breche de Roland, overnight at the Goriz mountain refuge*

Day 6 *Gavarnie-Ordesa mini trek day 2 – Ordesa canyon to Torla village, taxi transfer to Bujaruelo camping*

Day 7 *Gavarnie-Ordesa mini trek day 3 – Bujaruelo refuge to Col des Tentes, via the Port to Boucharo. Night in Luz-St. Sauveur*

Day 8 *Depart*

### DETAILED PROGRAMME

Day 1: *Arrive, night in the picturesque market town of Luz-St. Sauveur*

Our base for the first four nights is the charming “Hotel les Templiers”, based in the heart of the old town of Luz beside the interesting fortified Templars church. Spend your first afternoon strolling up to the Chateau Ste. Marie – a ruined 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century castle overlooking the town, or follow in the footsteps of Napoleon III and Empress Eugenie and visit the Chapel of Solferino and the Pont Napoleon – an impressive single-spangled arch bridge, spanning almost 300 feet above the gorge of Luz.



Day 2: Day walk –the Cirque de Troumouse, also part of the Gavarnie UNESCO World Heritage site.

This walk departs from the tiny hamlet of Heas, 1519m, which was a stop-off point on the escape route to freedom of escaped prisoners smuggled through to Spain during World War 2. The walk begins with a steep, but steady 400m ascent on a good trail to the Cabane de l’Aguila. From here we leave the path and climb through grazed meadowland to our high point at 2200m, and an unforgettable lunch spot overlooking the glacial U-valley. Now we traverse round into the Cirque de Troumouse itself, with a good chance of seeing marmots playing amongst the boulders. Exploring the cirque, we have time to visit an abandoned shepherd’s cabin before returning to Heas on a zig-path directly out of the mouth of the cirque.

Timing : 6-7 hours walk, 700m ascent and descent.

OPTIONS: a variation of this walk is also available, at an easier level with a maximum of 300m ascent/descent and 4-5 hours of walking.



Day 3: Day walk – a tour of the Neouvielle Lake District

A day exploring the Neouvielle Nature Reserve, above the valley of Baresges. This walk, considered to be one of the most beautiful sections of the GR10 long-distance trail, climbs along the Aygues Cluses (clear waters) valley through a picturesque landscape of granite blocks and miniature pines. We pause for lunch at the Lac de Madamete, where baby trout might take their chance to nibble any toes seeking a refreshing dip in the lake! After lunch we continue our ascent to the Col de Madamete, with an optional summit scramble to the Pic de Madamete at 2657m. The view from the peak across the Neouvielle Reserve is stunning. Our descent takes us through more boulders via the Lac Nere and Lac d’Etscombous – a tough, but extremely rewarding route for experienced walkers.

Timing : 8 hours walk, 1000m ascent and descent (optional ascent of Pic de Madamete, +150m)



OPTIONS: Alternatively there is also the possibility of a relaxed sight-seeing day, with a visit to the botanical gardens at the Pont de la Gaubie before driving towards La Mongie, stopping at the Col du Tourmalet for a brief leg stretch or a longer walk up to the Lac d’Oncet. We can then take the cable car up to the Pic du Midi observatory, to see the museum and admire the incredible views across the entire Pyrenean mountain chain. Price per person for the Pic du Midi cable car is 36 €.

#### Day 4: Free day

Days 5 - 7: A three-day mini-trek from France into Spain *Depart from the Col de Tentes to cross into Spain via the Breche de Roland. 1 night at the Goriz refuge, 1 night at Bujaruelo camping (refuge accommodation).*

Day 5: A momentous day's walk, beginning with a climb to the Col de Sarradets, which offers spectacular views across into the upper reaches of the Cirque de Gavarnie and the Grande Cascade (highest free hanging waterfall in Europe). From the refuge de Sarradets, there is a 1 hour steep climb takes us to the Breche de Roland. The trail is over scree and crosses the nub of the Breche glacier, but it is a well travelled route. From the Breche de Roland we have panoramic views back into France and across the Monte Perdido National Park into Spain. After a good stop to admire the views, we descend on a scree path to the Milaris plateau – a grassy plateau surrounded by karstic rock formations and the impressive limestone wall of the French frontier. The route is mainly on an easy path, with a short scramble in a limestone chimney. Soon afterwards the Goriz refuge, 2160m, pops into view, in its commanding position at the head of the Ordesa canyon.

Timing : 7 hours walk, 14 km, approx. 600m ascent, 650m descent.



Day 6: *A long day's walk following the length of the Ordesa canyon on the Faja de Pelay cliff-side trail, then taking the GR11 route into the historic Aragonese village of Torla. Short taxi transfer to the Bujaruelo valley.*

Today's walk takes us along the length of the Ordesa canyon, but avoids the well-travelled base of the valley in favour of a high-level path in the South wall of the canyon, from where we have superb views back towards the peaks of the French border. The day begins with a rocky descent towards the head of the canyon, crossing limestone pavement, before picking up the Faja de Pelay cliff path. This route is not technically difficult, but has some sense of exposure due to the far-reaching views and look-out points overlooking the canyon itself. At the end of the Pelay trail there is a steep zig-zag descent into the canyon bottom, where we meet the long-distance GR11 walking trail.

In the afternoon, we have a long but leisurely descent beside the Ordesa river as it rushes down the valley through a series of cascades. At the entrance to the village of Ordesa, there is a superb blue river pool if anyone fancies an afternoon dip. We have time to enjoy a beer and perhaps sample the local tapas before a short transfer the Bujaruelo campsite, with comfortable dormitory-style accommodation and hot showers!

Timing : 8 hours walk, 20 km, 1600m descent.



Day 7: Walk back to France following the pilgrims' path over the Port de Boucharo. Celebratory final night back in Luz-St. Sauveur.

Today we walk the length of the Bujaruelo valley, following the GR11 beside a rushing torrent as it tumbles over rounded boulders. At the medieval pilgrims' bridge at St. Nicholas de Bujaruelo there is a deep pool - another great spot for a dip. Our route then takes us on a stiff ascent back towards France and the Port de Boucharo, where we can take a last-look back across the Spanish peaks before walking back across the French border. Return transfer to Luz-St. Sauveur, and a celebratory meal on our last night.

Timing : 5 hours walk, 10km, 1000m climb.



Day 8 Depart

#### LEVEL

This trip is at the upper end of our intermediate-level walking category, in high-mountain terrain, generally on good well-travelled paths, but with some sections of sheep track, scree, boulders etc. Most walks include around 800-1000m of ascent per day, with distances of between 10 and 16km /6 to 10 miles. **PLEASE NOTE** that the two day walks are entirely flexible – we can adapt the itinerary to include longer or shorter days, however the Gavarnie-Ordesa mini trek requires advance booking of the refuges, and there is no option to change the route once the reservations are made.

Weather : Generally warm and sunny. At this time of year you can expect temperatures in the high teens to mid 20s°C but it can be significantly cooler at altitude, or warmer if we have a hot spell, particularly in Spain where the climate is typically warmer and drier. We recommend that you carry at least 1.5l of water per person, as it is best to avoid drinking from streams. You should also carry lightweight waterproofs at all times, in case of wet weather.

Equipment: This is a hiking itinerary, with no requirement for mountaineering equipment. Mattresses and blankets are provided at the refuges, so there is no need to carry any camping gear during the mini-trek expedition. You should aim to keep your pack as lightweight as possible, with just a change of clothes, spare underwear, a warm jacket or fleece, warm hat and gloves, sunhat and glasses, a basic wash kit and sunscreen, headtorch, sleeping bag liner (lightweight silk or cotton), personal first aid kit and full, lightweight waterproofs. Meals are provided at the refuges, but you will need to carry your picnic lunch each day, and around 2 litres of water. We recommend a pack-size of 35 to 45 litres maximum.

Accommodation: We will be based from the lively little market town of Luz-St. Sauveur. Situated at the base of an open, sunny valley, Luz is surrounded by high peaks and charming perched mountain villages. The town itself has shops, bars and restaurants, an historic church and castle, and thermal baths for relaxing after your day's hiking.



Accommodation in Luz-St. Sauveur is based on twin/double room share at a 3\* standard hotel, with continental breakfasts, picnic lunches on walking days and evening meals included. Drinks and extra snacks are at your own charge.

During the expedition, accommodation is at mountain refuges, which are clean and comfortable, but basic – with communal dormitories (either bunk beds or shared sleeping platforms) and simple toilet and washing facilities. The Goriz refuge does not have showers, although there are communal wash basins. There is a friendly, lively atmosphere and meals are tasty and generous. Please note that refuge etiquette demands that you take any rubbish that you might have away with you, and everyone is expected to help out clearing tables etc.

#### **PRICES:**

~~7 night programme, including additional day's guiding: £710 per person~~

~~Supplement for 5 nights single room occupancy in Luz: £125~~

~~Including 5 nights' accommodation at a 3\* hotel in Luz-St. Sauveur, 1 night's accommodation at the Refuge Goriz, 1 night's accommodation at Bujaruelo Camping, 7 breakfasts, 6 packed lunches, 7 evening meals, 5 days of accompaniment with a qualified International Mountain Leader, guide's accommodation and meals, and local minibus transport.~~

#### **IMPORTANT NOTE:**

~~This price is based on a group size of 14 people. The price would be recalculated in the case of a smaller group.~~

#### **OPTIONS:**

- ~~Return airport or railway station transfer using a local coach company. In this case, we would pass on the cost to you directly (around 30 € per person return from Lourdes airport, around 25 € per person return from Lourdes railway station, approx. 100 € per person return from Toulouse airport).~~

We are open to suggestions and we can adapt the programme to suit your specific interests and abilities.