

Pyrénées : Mystic Castles of the Pyrenees - 2nd Section

From Quillan to Foix

7 days, 6 nights

6 days walking

From the Mediterranean to the Pyrenees Ariegois, in the heart of the sun blessed Corbieres region, or between Montsegur and Foix you can find the secret trails and castles of the chateaux cathares.

Imposing stone castles built high up on rocky crags or pogs.

These fortresses are the symbol of a tragic, political intrigue and drama that shook the South of France. This walking holiday combines a historical interest that stirs the imagination, as well as some memorable walking through lush, unspoilt mountains and valleys.

This walking trail is divided into two sections, the first week's walking is from Queribus to Quillan and the second week from Puivert to Foix.

We offer this itinerary as a weeks walking, or you can link the two weeks together to complete the whole trail.

Tour Aventure Trekking

Agence de voyages LI 02A.06 0002 - Garantie Financière de 137204€ : APS - Contrat RC : n°86 410 716 Gan Eurocourtage IARD

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Program

Day 1 : Quillan to Puivert

From Quillan, you will discover on this first walk part of the Pyrenees that has a strong Mediterranean influence. The trail leads through olive groves and vineyards, then a pleasant scrubby vegetation of box trees, shady oaks and juniper that give a subtle fragrance to the air. Crossing undulating valleys and hillsides, a castle will eventually come into view, the castle of Puivert. In its time, the castle was far more festive than military, it was the castle of the troubadours. The imposing site gets ever nearer, a splendid ridge walk will lead you towards the castle doors. It is possible to explore the castle's towers, dungeons and the famous hall of musicians. This feudal castle was a hive of activity in the XII century, a meeting and performance place for the most famous troubadours of the era. The village of Puivert itself also represents an interest and vestige to the past, the museum of Quercorb has a superb exhibition that really evokes the life in the area at the end of the last century. There is a model of Puivert castle showing how it would have been in the XIV century. Please note you have the option of making this walk one hour shorter by taking the taxi from Quillan to the village of Ginoules. Alternatively, you also have the option to be transferred directly from Quillan to Puivert, to explore the village and visit the castle only.

Distance : 21km, duration : 5h45, altitude gain : +700m, descent : -495m.

Day 2 : Puivert to Belcaire

Today's trail stays for the most part in the forest, the Cathare footpath traverses the forest of Lescale and Picaussel in the direction of the Pays de Sault, a vast, airy, wide open plateau situated high up between 950 and 1300m. The plateau is the gateway towards the high mountain summits. Does, stags and roe deer are at home in these thick fir tree forests, if you don't have the chance to observe them, you will surely see their tracks and hear them nearby. The forest is also home to foxes, squirrels and weasels and just thirty years ago lynx, wolves and bears would also have been present. During this day's walking you will be surprised by the diversity of the vegetation and different species of trees such as oak, fir, silver birch and ash. On the outskirts of the forest the land is covered with box trees, heather and juniper. The villages of Espezel and Belcaire have a traditional architecture typical of the style found in the mountain villages between 900m and 1000m; slate roofs and houses huddled closely together concentrated around the church and interwoven with small alley ways.

Distance : 21km, duration : 6h, altitude gain : +583m, descent : -25m.

Day 3 : Belcaire to Montségur

Today's walk offers a wonderful transition of scenery. The trail will lead you into the county of Ariège and the Pays d'Olmes by a footpath that was used at the beginning of the century by the local inhabitants as a simple means of communication and commercial exchanges. It was the main route between the Pays de Sault and the Pays d'Olmes regions. The lay of the land dictated the routes and so the natural passage of access between the villages of Comus and Montségur was by the Frau gorge. For one kilometre the gorge is notched out of high chalk walls, the path passes between cliffs soaring impressively straight up, vertically, towards the sky. The name itself Frau means fear, or apprehension. Before penetrating into the gorge you will pass through the picturesque, rural villages of Camurac and Comus. It is here in these out of the way corners that the phenomenon of the inquisition hit particularly hard in the Pays de Sault and the lands of Ariège during the XII and XIII centuries, the views are captivating. The castle of Montségur balances high on a rocky pog, a high mountain pinnacle that is a very emblematic symbol. It was built between 1204 and 1211 by Raimon de Péreille at the request of the local Cathare clergy. This site was to become during the first part of the XIII century the religious capital of the Cathare church. You will discover in Montségur a place and atmosphere that is quite out of the ordinary.

Distance : 18km, duration : 5h30, altitude gain : +660m, descent : -770m.

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Day 4 : Around Montségur

The site of Montségur, the very bastion of the Cathare resistance, certainly requires an additional day for exploring. The layout of the village is surprising, the houses and buildings are in long curved lines one after another, they flank the mountainside in a well defined pattern and are linked by small streets and pedestrian walkways. There is a Cathare museum and some art and craft shops. From the museum a pathway leads to the foot of the pog, a high rocky buttress, it takes about 30 mins to walk up to the summit where you arrive at a sumptuous belvedere. The panoramic view extends for miles around across the Massif de Tabe, with the Pic de Soularac and further East the Frau mountain. Having visited the castle, a circular walk in the direction of the ridge of Taulat will allow you to discover high altitude mountain plains, still used to graze the local cattle.

Distance : 12km, duration : around 4h30, altitude gain : +775m, descent : -775m.

Day 5 : Montségur to Roquefixade

The Sentier Cathare, or Cathare footpath, progresses through the heart of the region known as the Pays d'Olmes, in past times it was a land renowned for cloth weaving, wool, fabrics and also the production of combs made from highly polished cows horns. Still in the county of Ariège, you will be traversing lush green countryside, undulating between valleys and mountainsides, the trail will lead you towards the medieval castle of Roquefixade. Crossing through the village of Montferrier and the hamlet of Coulzonne you may well run into some locals and experience a warm exchange or an interesting insight into the rural village life here.

Distance : 17km, duration : 4h30, altitude gain : +400m, descent : -760m.

Day 6 : Roquefixade to Foix

The last section of the sentier Cathare has the benefit of a medieval castle at the beginning and at the end of the day. The route follows, for the most part, a ridge walk between the small village of Roquefixade and the county town of Foix. The town of Foix was a count's town and its castle, linked to Gaston Febu, is characterised by its three towers and high, unusual rocky base. Foix is Ariège's principal town and during the Summer months it is a vibrant centre of music and animation, a season of festivities, merriment and colourful markets. Market day is on a Friday morning.

Distance : 18.5km, duration : 5h00, altitude gain : +350m, descent : -720m.

Day 7 : End of holiday in Foix

The holiday comes to an end in Foix. You can choose to visit the old town centre, to wander through the streets and to visit the castle. Duration : 2h00.

This programme is an example of the itinerary we aim to adhere to. It may be possible, if situations arise that are beyond our control, for the itinerary to be modified.

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Details

Level of difficulty

The walks are on good footpaths and trails, the terrain is varied but often rocky. You need to be used to walking and take regular exercise to enjoy this holiday.

Price

- From 01/01/2010 to 31/12/2010 : Price per person in Double room 595 €, Price per person in Single room 705 €

Supplements/reductions :

- Supplement for 5 pic-nics : 55 €/pers - Supplement to travel by taxi from Foix to Quillan : 48 €/pers

Price includes :

Half board accommodation, internal transfers, baggage transfers between hotels, the dossier containing your maps, route notes and all necessary details needed for your holiday.

Price does not include :

Entrance fees, additional transfers, drinks, picnics, additional activities, holiday insurance, travel.

Encadrement

Self-guided walking.

Carrying

You will need to carry a day sack only, with your water bottle, camera, picnic and gortex jacket.

Our bag-moving service means you can travel light during your walks.

Your main luggage - will be transported by vehicle between the different night stops. We ask you to please limit your main luggage to between 10-15kg to facilitate the transportation and carrying for the taxis. It is also important to consider that it may be necessary to carry your bags short distances around Ajaccio at the start or end of your holiday. (Consult with us for left luggage facilities)

Accommodation/food

Accommodation

- Half board In double room : 2 nights in hotels with private shower and toilet and 4 nights in chambre d'hôtes - 2 nights with private shower and toilet and two nights with bathroom outside the bedroom.

Food

- Continental breakfast (tea, coffee, milk, butter, jam)
- Evening meals in gites, often based on local specialities.
- Pic-nics not included.

Starting point/end

Starting point : Quillan train station (11), Day 1 at 10h30.

If you are doing both sections of the Mystic Castles of the Pyrenees trail the night in Quillan is offered BB.

End : Day 7 at your hotel in Foix (09), after breakfast.

Organisation

We propose a self guided, independent formula. You choose your departure date and we will take care of all the rest

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between the initial rendez-vous time through to the dispersion point. We transport your bags between the hotels ,provide the maps and good walking route notes. This is a way of enjoying complete flexibility, you dictate the pace and rhythm of your holiday.

Dates

Every day from mid-April to the end of October.
(for a departure on a different date, consult us).

Number of participants

From 2 people

Access

Quillan train station.

Bibliography

Rough Guide the Pyrenees - Marc Dubin 2004
Rough Guide Languedoc & Roussillon - Brian Catlos 2004
The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade - Michael Costen 1997

Practical info

Quillan train station - tel: 0836353535. Weather information: Aude: 0892680211 Ariège: 0892680209 ACCESS: - By train : Regular trains from Matabiau train station from Toulouse to Carcassonne; then from Carcassonne, bus service SNCF to Quillan : information 0836353535, direct line (SNCF coach and bus time table). Sundays, only SNCF buses, from Carcassonne, in the courtyard inside the train station, Sernam quai, arrival in Quillan. – By car : Quillan is situated at 39km from Carcassonne, chief area in the departement of Aude, via the D118, passing through Limoux. From Toulouse, allow 140km ; motorway to Carcassonne. PARKING: - Quillan : Free parking, no surveillance: Quillan train station, opposite the hôtel Cartier. - Foix : Free parking, no surveillance: - car park situated behind Foix post office -Parking de la Vigne, situated behind the Centre Culturel de Foix. Both carparks are situated around 5mn from the hôtel Lons.

To carry in your luggage

- Bags

A small day pack for your water bottle, camera, picnic and waterproof.

A bag, rucksack or suitcase for your main luggage 10kg maximum per person.

- For Walking

Good walking shoes or boots with a good grip sole

Walking socks.

Warm fleece

Shorts and T shirts.

Swimming costume or trunks

Towel

2 Walking poles (optional)

Water bottle (one litre minimum)

Personal first aid kit with good blister protection

- For your picnics

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A good cutting knife, fork, spoon, plastic cup and plate
some plastic bags

- Sun and rain protection

Sunglasses and sun cream

Sun hat

Wind and waterproof jacket (Gore-tex stlye)

- Relaxing time

Trainers or open sandals

Warm Fleece and casual wear

With your service

The Tour Aventure team is present and always at hand to ensure the smooth running of your holiday. We are on the ground and ready to assist in any eventuality.

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