

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

From Cathar Castles To Mediterranean Collioure



We've been organising walking holidays around the castles of the Cathar Country for over 25 years, so you can be sure of a quality experience: the best castles, villages, hotels and paths in a wonderfully wild landscape, before arriving at the Mediterranean and the fishing/artists village of Collioure.

7 nights, 7 walking days

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

Code :
FP2PUCC



The plus points

- **Transfers from and to Toulouse or Perpignan (others available)**
- **Luggage transfers every day so you only carry a daysack**
- **High quality, original hotels with dinner included**
- **24/7 customer service**



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

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

Whether you are a history buff, interested in the Cathars, or just enjoy the wonderful warm Mediterranean climate walking through exceptionally varied landscapes with castles, unspoilt villages, vineyards and intriguing natural phenomena (gorges, waterfalls, sheer rocky pinnacles, sandy coves "to die for"), then this is for you - especially if you enjoy authentic accommodation and exceptional regional cuisine. Private transfers ensure you only enjoy the best "bits". Alternatively, you can drive to Foix where there is plenty of secure parking, and we will take you back there at the end of the holiday.

This tour includes daily private transfers (some of them quite long). This adds considerably to the quality, enjoyment and the cost of the holiday, so the prices cannot be compared with other apparently similar holidays.

■ THE PROGRAMME

DAY 1

Arrival at Foix

We meet you at Toulouse or Perpignan airport or station (trains from Paris) and, should time allow, we take you to your first Cathar Country stronghold, Roquefixade, where you can enjoy climbing to the top of the castle to get panoramic views of the Ariège peaks before enjoying a warm-up walk nearby.

NB: It is also possible for you to drive directly to Foix and leave your car here for the rest of the week. You will then be driven back to collect your car at the end of the holiday for no additional charge.

You spend your first night at the three star Hôtel Restaurant Lons right in the historic centre of Foix, close to the castle, and right beside the River Ariège. This is a most welcoming, family run hotel that balances contemporaneity with tradition as is nowhere more evident than in its atmospheric and highly rated restaurant (eat overlooking the river). In the best sense, this is what hotel-restaurants in France used to be like - and too few are these days.

Walking time: 2h30. Elevation : +270m / -270m. Transfer time : 1h30.

DAY 2

Foix - Montségur - Puivert

We provide a transfer (to ensure you enjoy only the best "bits") so you have a marvellous walk with fantastic views, historic landscapes, and tranquillity all the way (but no great ascents or descents) to the spectacular site of Montségur. When you see its remarkably secure position, it is easy to understand how this was the last stronghold of the Cathar "rebels" - holding out for 10 months in 1244, then many being burnt alive for refusing to renounce their faith. You descend into the village, and can visit its small, but high quality, museum before we transfer you to Puivert.

Puivert is a lovely village with its own lake and sandy beach, deep in the Cathar countryside, and right on the Cathar walking path, the GR7. The Petit Verger (The Little Orchard) is a well run and most welcoming 5 room chambres d'hôtes. The rooms are large, the facilities en suite, the private gardens and woodland delightful, and the food superb in its authentic, rural style. Plus there is a superb local brewery selling authentic real ale just next door. Again, it is the sort of place that is hard to find - and a joy when it is done as well as this.

Walking time : 2h30 or 5h30. Distance : 6,5km or 15km. Elevation : + 400m or + 900m / - 400 or - 500m. Transfer time : 1h30.

DAY 3

Puivert - "Green Labyrinth" - Quillan

Today starts with a visit to Puivert's chateau, one of the best preserved, and, consequently, most interesting in the region. From there paths take you around wooded hilltops before walking through a most strange (but entirely natural) "green labyrinth" of rocks and trees. You then continue on the GR7 all the way to the ancient and attractive riverside town of Quillan, or you can choose a transfer to save the last few miles.

You stay at the impressive three star Hôtel La Chaumière right in the centre of Quillan, so perfect for a stroll and aperitif before dinner, which offers modern versions of traditional regional specialities. Not just interesting, but good too.

Walking time : 4h or 6h30. Distance : 10km or 17km. Elevation : + 250m or + 450m / - 150m or - 650m. Transfer time : 15 minutes.

DAY 4

Quillan - Puilaurens - Gorges de Saint Jaume - Caudies de Fenouillèdes

We transfer you this morning to the remarkably well preserved castle of Puilaurens, which certainly saved the lives of many fleeing Cathars as it was protected from Crusader attack by being Aragonese property. From there you walk through interesting countryside to contrasting Fenouillet: its Cathar castle impressive but now in ruins, its tiny village completely restored, and much praised. You now walk through the "secret", and surprisingly narrow, Gorges de Saint Jaume with its overhanging rocks, wooden bridges, waterfalls, and sense of history almost hanging in the air. Soon after you pass through woods and vineyards to arrive at the charming 15th century pilgrimage chapel of Notre Dame de Laval, and then your destination for today, the pleasant and characteristically rural village of Caudies de Fenouilledes.

You stay in the charmingly simple converted winery that is the Relais de Laval. It offers a welcoming ambience, and a gastronomic tour of Roussillon cuisine, which includes elements from the north (foie gras), the west (cassoulet), the east (shellfish), and the south (Catalan stews etc) - not forgetting the local wines, and particularly the aromatic aperitif Muscat.

Walking time : 4h30. Distance : 11,5km. Elevation : + 550m / - 800m. Transfer time : 30 minutes.

DAY 5

Caudies - Gorges de Galamus - Peyrepertuse - Cucugnan

You start today with a transfer to the spectacular Gorges de Galamus - huge cliffs almost touching in parts, houses built into and under rock faces, a beautiful, fast flowing river (a favourite with canyoneers), and the wonderfully located, carved out hermitage of Saint-Antoine. In complete contrast, you then walk through the high altitude "garrigue" (typical Mediterranean low level, soft leaved shrubs and small trees) under vast blue skies (usually!) to arrive at the magnificent eleventh century castle (two castles actually) of Peyrepertuse, called a "ship in the sky" because it seems to sail across the plateau surrounding it. You can now choose a transfer, or walk down to Cucugnan.

You stay at the charming, four bedroom, two star Auberge du Vigneron (winemaker), which is an excellent example of an authentic restaurant with rooms as the food and wines are undoubtedly the stars of the show here. Expect to be surprised by the quality, innovation, style and taste of the dishes you will enjoy here. It's the perfect antidote to flashy, expensive city restaurants!

Walking time : 5h or 6h30. Distance : 15km or 19km. Elevation : + 650m or + 750m / - 750m or - 850m. Transfer time : 30 minutes.

DAY 6

Cucugnan - Queribus - Collioure

You begin the day with a very pleasant 2 hour stroll along the GR7, Cathar Country footpath, to "inaccessible" Queribus, one of the last refuges of the Bons Hommes, which provides an inspiring view of the blue, blue Mediterranean from its imperious, lone peak situation. This is appropriate as we then transfer you to that Mediterranean at the unforgettable fishing and artists' village of Collioure. You can simply stroll around the colourful village, explore its castle (one last castle, this one where the sea laps its foundations) and museum discovering more about Braque, Matisse and Picasso (among others) who all painted here, or you can take one of several walks that follow paths up through vineyards then back along the cove packed coastline with sandy beaches for a welcoming swim.

You stay at the three star boutique Hôtel Mas des Citronniers in the centre of the village, a short stroll from the water's edge and set in its own extensive gardens. You dine in one of our favourite restaurants in the village.

Walking time : 2h30. Distance : 4km. Elevation : + 450m / - 150m. Transfer time : 1h30.

DAY 7

Collioure - Banyuls

This is certainly a memorable last day walking along this most attractive - and surprisingly unspoilt - section of the coast where the Pyrenees descends to meet the Mediterranean resulting in vine-covered hillsides, views up to the Pyrenees, dominated by the 8,500 feet Mount Canigou, and a "scrunched up" coastline filled with small, and some tiny, coves and creeks, many with overhanging trees and flowering bushes, sandy beaches, and beckoning turquoise waters, not least the rather larger Paulilles beach. You pass by an old windmill, the fort at St Elme, and walk out onto Cape Béar and Cape Ullastret before arriving, reluctantly perhaps, at Banyuls sur Mer, the traditional Mediterranean destination for an Atlantic-Mediterranean walk.

Your last night is spent at the beachside three star Hôtel Les Elmes with its stylish rooms, most with sea views, and gourmet restaurant on a terrace overlooking the Mediterranean. It's a wonderful place to end your journey, and the food is good too.

Walking time : 4h30. Distance : 13km. Elevation : + 500m / - 500m.

DAY 8

End of stay

After a relaxing (and perhaps somewhat melancholy) breakfast on the terrace, we transfer you back to Toulouse airport or station.

Transfer time : 1h or upto 2h30m.

Elements beyond our control (the weather, 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.

■ USEFUL INFORMATION

DISPOSITIONS COVID-19

Because of the added health precautions relating to COVID, you must be equipped from the start of your trip with:

- * a sufficient quantity of masks (at a rate of 2 per day minimum). Wearing a mask will be compulsory during any transport, in certain accommodation, crowded places etc.
- * zipped pockets for masks and other items such as used tissues
- * hydro-alcoholic gel
- * a thermometer to take your temperature in case of symptoms appearing during your stay
- * a pen (sometimes necessary to sign an agreement in certain accommodation).

The hosts who will welcome you (hoteliers, refuge guards, restaurateurs, transporters, local teams ...) are the people who will help to guarantee the smooth running of your stay and will ask you to conform with certain health related protocols. Out of respect for them and other people who frequent the same places, we ask you to commit to respecting the instructions given to you. Be reassured and optimistic, because as you know, hiking is an activity that will allow you long and enjoyable periods of time during which the wearing of a mask is not mandatory!

So breathe fresh air and smile!

PROGRAMME OF DEPARTURES

1 April to 31 October

MEETING POINT

We will pick you up at Toulouse airport or railway station and take you to Foix. *You are also welcome to drive to Foix directly - you will then be driven back to Foix to pick up your car at the end of the holiday for no additional charge.*

END OF STAY

At the end of the holiday we take you back to Toulouse airport or railway station. *We will also take you back to Foix to collect your car if you wish (no additional charge).*

TO GET TO THE MEETING POINT

SNCF runs overnight sleeper trains and daytime trains from Paris to Toulouse. There are flights to Toulouse from numerous British cities as well as European cities.

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 [Comparabus](#). Contrary to what the name suggests, this site proposes several different means of completing a journey, including, flights, trains, buses or car sharing.

PARKING

There is reasonably priced secure, public parking in Foix.

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

You can book extra nights before, during or after the holiday. Just contact us.

GUARANTEED DEPARTURE FROM (PERS)

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LEVEL

This holiday features comfortable rather than challenging walking, and is suitable for anybody who enjoys "a good walk". On most days there are choices of itineraries, which you can decide for yourselves each day. It can get hot in July and August, as well as much more crowded, but the temperatures are moderated by the mountains and sea breezes. We would recommend May, June and September as the best months.

LUGGAGE TRANSPORTATION

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

SUPERVISION

This is an independent, self-guided holiday.

ACCOMMODATION

You stay in double or twin rooms for 4 nights in three star hotels, and one night in a particularly good two star hotel, and 2 nights in high quality chambres d'hôtes.

MEALS

You will eat 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 picnics are not as there are no shops or cafes/restaurants en route - and you can always ask the hotel the night before to make 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; 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; booking fee of 25€ / person, entry fees; personal and travel insurance.

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.

CONTENTS OF YOUR TRAVEL FOLDER

When we have received your balance of payment for your holiday, and in the month before departure, we send you all the documentation you need: detailed itinerary showing dates, times, contact details etc; a detailed guide to your walking route (with options) and lots of cultural, historical and nature background information; formal documents (invoices, contracts etc); luggage labels etc. If you book at the last minute, we can send this information to your first night hotel.

■ 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

The area covered by this walking holiday is quite large, stretching from Foix (in the French department of Ariège) to the Mediterranean coast and passing through the French department of Aude on your way. To begin with, the Pyrenean mountains are to the South, but when you get to the coast you are actually "in the mountains" at the same time because the Pyrenees falls directly into the sea!

For most of the time, you will be walking through what the French call "Pays Cathare". This does not even coincide with any particular historic region, but is a general area overlapping Ariège and Aude where the so-called "Cathar heresy" was strong in the 11th and 12th Centuries. A large part of the population had converted to a new branch of the Christian religion - Catharism. Among other things, they believed in a type of reincarnation. The people following this religion called themselves the "bonshommes".

The official Catholic Church regarded these people as heretics and launched a campaign with the French Royalists to identify and eradicate them. Inquisitions and torture became common, and a major crusade was led in the early 13th Century to eliminate the followers of this religion once and for all.

Although this is clearly not a particularly happy episode in French history, the area now boasts a large number of superb medieval citadels and castles that were constructed shortly after the crusades to defend the new French Royalist territories from the growing kingdom of Aragón to the south (Aragón had come to occupy a large part of what is now Catalonia). No journey to the Pyrenees would be truly complete without a visit to the castles of Montségur or Queribus, or a stroll around the amazing fortified medieval city of Carcassonne.

The people in this area are proud of the region's history - some of them still consider that they have inherited a little of the bonshommes' rebellious approach to life!

The landscapes change with the climate. You start with cool, humid alpine pastures used for grazing in Ariège, and then progress through the vineyards of the Corbières.

You later reach the coast at Collioure. The final mountains tumble down directly into the sea, but they are no longer anything like the high alpine pastures of the Central Pyrenees. Here, there are cacti and Mediterranean scrub and the weather is much more reliable. The wonderful smells of lavender, thyme and rosemary are never far away. The most significant weather feature would be the strong "Tramontana" wind, which can sometimes be quite relentless.

Politically, this part of the Mediterranean is divided between France (department of the Pyrénées Orientales) and Spain (province of Girona). However, both parts form part of Catalonia and recently (2017) the part that is south of the border claimed independence from Spain. This independence has not been officially recognised by any other European nation, but many people will insist that they are now independent. The situation is likely to develop significantly over the coming years, but the subject can be quite a thorny one, so you should be aware that the opinions of local people should be respected whether you happen to agree with them or not.

The towns of Banyuls and Collioure cannot be missed - Banyuls is famous for its terraced vineyards overlooking the Med (feel free to taste the local wine!), and Collioure for its picturesque harbour and lighthouse, inspiration to great artists from the fauvism movement such as Matisse or Derain. From the coast, you will notice one mountain standing out from the rest as you look inland - the mighty Canigou (2784m). Purely Pyrenees also runs trips to climb this mountain!

There are some gorgeous landscapes in this part of the world, which can also change several times in the same day. The transition between the seaside and the mountains is immediate - you just have to climb up a little and contemplate this tortured coastline with the plains of Roussillon to the North and the Empordà to the South. Not to mention the fantastic sunrises over the Med!

Architecture speaking, the castle in Collioure (with the sea lapping at its outer walls) has to be visited.

If eating is your thing, then there is paella, grilled sardines, fresh anchovies, Catalan sausages or crema catalana just to name a few specialities.

■ INSURANCE

According to the regulation of our profession, Purely Pyrenees is covered by a Civil Professional Liability. However, each client must hold an individual civil liability as well as an individual multi risk guarantee in order to protect themselves from incidents or accidents that may occur before or during their hiking trip.

We remind you that a credit card covers, in general, only assistance in repatriation and not the cancellation of your trip, and this only provided you use the card to pay for the total of the trip.

We offer a choice of three insurance options which you can purchase at the time of booking.

Package 1: simple cancellation insurance at 2.5%

This insurance provides reimbursement of the amount incurred (excluding fees and the cost of insurance) in case of cancellation due to one of the following causes: serious accident, illness or death of insured, spouse or person accompanying them, and certain family members.

Package 2: simple cancellation insurance and assistance / repatriation at 3.7%

This insurance allows, in addition to the benefits described in the plan No. 1; - To benefit from assistance in case of illness or injury during the trip and covers your return home if necessary. - A reimbursement paid on a pro rata basis (excluding transportation costs and with a waiting period) in the case of an interruption of your trip following an accident, the death of a loved one or other specified accidents.

Package 3: Package "super multi-risk": 4.8%

This insurance offers, in addition to the benefits described in the packages No. 1 and No. 2, - A wider cancellation insurance with the repayment of amounts incurred (net of deductible) in case of cancellation for any justifiable reason including an exceptional and unexpected event. - The management of some of the costs incurred at the time in case of return not linked to an exceptional and unexpected event. - Compensation (capped) for loss, theft or destruction of baggage. - Payment of compensation for delayed baggage delivery of more than 48 hours.

The rapatriation is not valid for all countries, please check with us before subscribing the insurance.

You will receive with the confirmation of your booking an extract of the general conditions of contract chosen (in french). Take this document with you on your journey. The validity of all guarantees corresponds with the travel dates indicated on the invoice and applies only to services sold. For departures and returns postponed, please contact us. Warning: If you buy only the contract No. 1 (simple cancellation insurance), this means that you need to have your own insurance, repatriation assistance (related notably to certain credit cards). We advise you to check your contract and cover guaranteed. In this case, we ask you to tell us when you book the name of your insurance company and your policy number. You will assume, therefore, the responsibility of certain risks, especially in the advance payments of certain costs.

Important: If you must use the assistance during the trip, you must obtain the prior consent of Europe Assistance before taking any action or incur any expenditure by telephoning: 33 1 41 85 85 85 and quoting the number of contract: 58662860

■ ACTING FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Purely Pyrenees is a founding member of Action for Responsible Tourism.

The label "Action for Responsible Tourism" was awarded Purely Pyrenees in 2009. It is controlled, 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](http://www.tourisme-responsable.org)

■ CONTACT US

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Purely Pyrenees is a brand created by La Balaguere SAS.

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■ NOTES

