

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

The Secret Canyons Of Europe



Sierra de Guara is somewhere to visit sooner not later. Its canyons are seriously impressive, but it is a region that has so much more to offer those who discover its wide ranging glories on foot - and we have developed an itinerary that enables you to experience the very best of it.

**10 nights - 9
magnificent walking
days**

- Minimum required 1
- From point to point
- With luggage transportation
- Self-guided

Code :
FP2PUGU



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The plus points

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- **A magnificent and dramatic landscape packed with history**
- **Canyons, waterfalls, vultures and ancient tracks largely unexplored by English speakers**
- **Authentic and characterful hotels with great regional cuisine and wines**

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

As spectacular as they are unknown, the magnificent canyons in the Sierra de Guara National Park, south of the Pyrenees and in the heart of ancient Aragon, offer some of the most exhilarating and rewarding walking anywhere in Europe because it is a landscape that offers so much. Geologically, it is a limestone plateau with mountains rising to nearly 7,500 feet, and canyons with cliffs falling hundreds of feet. Naturally, it's got tumbling streams, impressive waterfalls, and a multitude of rivers that eventually become the Ebro. Historically, it's as rich as it has become agriculturally poor. Medieval towns, beautiful perched villages, abandoned farms, castles and hermitages, there is so much to discover. Then there is a thriving culture in the region that matches a new generation of characterful boutique hotels, and an emerging cuisine that combines the traditional with the contemporary. You can probably tell we are rather enthusiastic about it - and think you may be as well.

■ THE PROGRAMME

DAY 1

The best airport (or rail station) for this exceptional holiday is Zaragoza (sometimes Anglicised as Saragossa; frequent flights from London) where we can arrange to pick you up (tariff available on request), and take you to the delightful small town of Ainsa in the foothills of the Spanish Pyrenees with its magnificent medieval main square, historic houses, arcaded streets, cobbled alleyways, 11th century castle, 12th century church - and great views of Monte Perdido (Mont Perdu in French) dominating the other peaks. (In fact, Lourdes is almost the same transfer time and distance.)

You stay close to the Plaza Mayor at the wonderfully atmospheric and historic Hotel Los Siete Reyes, the Seven Kings. It blends its ancient stone walls and beamed ceilings with contemporary style and facilities in a way that many attempt but few succeed so well.

Transfer time from Zaragoza: 2.5 hours.

DAY 2

Ainsa via Santa Maria de Buil to Arcusa. Your walk starts by using an historic bridge to cross the Cinca river (named by Julius Caesar, but called the River of Olives by the Moors), then climb gently through pine forests and pastures reminiscent of many a Western movie before arriving at the tiny village of Santa Maria de Buil renowned for its fossils and superb 11th century church of St Martin. Dominating the village is Buil hill on which there was once a castle (more a watchtower actually) as this was once the defensive line against the Moors, and your route now takes you through Saratillo to the pleasant village of Arcusa where the castle also dates from the 11th century, and is in line of sight with Buil.

Hotel Tierra Buxo is a completely new hotel made of stones reclaimed from local buildings. That shows you the dedication of Marta and de Romain - previously luxury hoteliers in Paris - to create an exceptional hotel in an exceptional location that combines all the character and history of the region - and the lovely village of Arcusa - with contemporary minimalist interior design - and that combination is also reflected in its superb cuisine.

Walking time: 6.5 hours. Elevation: + 500m / - 500m.

DAY 3

Arcusa via Betorz to Lecina Plus UNESCO Prehistoric Caves. You really are now in canyon country, but the ridgeway paths enable you to see the best of them without having to go up and down them (as the ascent and descent statistics below prove). You walk up to Santa Maria de la Nuez (two historic churches and a hermitage) through occasional oak woods, passing dry stone shepherds' huts, and on "balconies" hanging above canyons riven by water over millennia, not least the impressive Vero river. Then there's the attractive village of Betorz, surrounded by olive trees and centred on its 16th century church, before arriving Lecina hanging high above river valleys that contrast white limestone, green oak and olive trees, and golden wheat fields, yet with high, often snow capped mountain peaks dominating it all. You will also have time to visit the wonderful UNESCO Heritage prehistoric caves at Barfaluy with paintings of animals as well as human foot and hand prints. Well worth it!

You stay tonight in the truly authentic rural hotel ("hostal") of Choca de Guara. It's small, family run, full of character, yet offers good quality rooms, and great regional food much of it coming from Miguel's own garden, and the farms of family and friends. It feels just right when you are exploring this unspoilt region where traditions are still highly valued.

Walking time: 4 hours. Elevation: + 150m / - 200m.

DAY 4

Lecina via Rio Vero to Alquezar. You will see much evidence today that this region has barely changed in thousands of years. Spectacular canyons made by Nature not man. Cliffside footpaths that have been used for many thousands of years. Prehistoric cave paintings (not least at Arpan and Mallata) still there for you to see right up close. The nests and lookouts of eagles and vultures as they themselves float in the thermals above you. Then there's the memorable descent into the Vero valley with its crystal clear, jade coloured waters and Roman bridge before you climb up the other side of the valley to arrive at the magnificent village of Alquezar for two nights. You'll soon appreciate why.

Alquezar is, officially, one of the most beautiful villages in Spain, and Villa de Alquezar, right in its centre, makes the most of its location with beautiful views from bedrooms, and beautiful bedrooms too. It's a newly built boutique hotel, yet has been so well designed and constructed that it blends into this historic village. There's a spa, swimming pool, and cool terraces to relax on (good bar service too). You dine in a local restaurant with bags of character and good regional dishes.

Walking time: 5 hours. Elevation: + 350m / - 500m.

DAY 5

Around Alquezar including Quizans Caves and Chimiachas. Canyons and caves galore today. You begin by walking past pyramid shaped, stone shepherds' huts, and a canal before reaching the bridge and ponds of Basacol - good for a cooling swim in high summer (earlier and later if you're brave) in the canyon of La Payuela before beginning to walk high above the gorge on a wonderfully memorable path that you can't believe isn't packed with tourists it's so good! Thankfully, it isn't! The UNESCO protected caves of Quizans feature prehistoric paintings. The views are panoramic south across the Aragonese plains and north to Monte Perdido and other high peaks. From there you can return to Alquezar, or (we would recommend) add an another hour's walking to the Chimiachas canyon, and its caves that include the famous prehistoric painting (in Levantine style, so it is said) of a deer.

Another warm welcome and super-comfortable night await you at the Villa de Alquezar.

Walking time: 5 or 6 hours. Elevation: + 450m or 550m / - 450m or 550m.

DAY 6

Alquezar via Radiquero and Balces to Las Almunias de Rodellar. This is great foothills walking country as you pass through oak woods and past vineyards as the sandstone of the Ebro valley meets the limestone of the Pyrenees. Radiquero is your first village, and an absolute delight renowned for its covered pasageways, and the mainly 17th century church dominating the village and landscape. From there the path takes you through Mediterranean type "garrigue", over an historic bridge, Puente deras Bruixas, and into las Capillas canyon, which garners so many incredible, amazings, phenomenables from visitors that we think you'll probably enjoy it! You then descend gently down into the river Balcès valley to certainly see the vultures nesting on the almost orange cliffs, and possibly to take a cooling dip before a bracing walk up to the col de Colmenares, and a final grateful descent into the hamlet of Las Almunias.

Casa Tejedor is precisely the sort of hotel you'd want to stay in after a good day's walking. A village location with wonderful views, a traditional style, smart, contemporary rooms, a proud reputation for regional cuisine, and a choice of shaded terrace or light filled interior for eating it. The tranquillity of its mountain environment comes as standard.

Walking time: 5.5 hours. Elevation: + 650m / - 650m.

DAY 7

A Circular Walk to the Canyon de Mascun, Otin and back. Just to make sure you get the best of this walk, we take you to the pretty village of Rodellar in one of the most stunning locations in the Sierra de Guara that also boasts the chapel of the Virgin of the Castle rising out of the canyon cliffs, and the medieval bridge of Las Cabras. You venture into the Mascun canyon with its extraordinary natural "sculptures", and climb, passing the memorable Dolmen de Losa Mora, up to the deserted village of Otin. Man has lived in this spectacular landscape for tens of thousands of years, so it's no surprise its associated with many legends - some true, some undoubtedly false, all interesting. You continue via sweeping bends with sweeping panoramic views, none more impressive than the limestone pillars of Ciudadella y Cuca Bellostas you often walk right beside. Finally, you follow the river bank back to Rodellar.

We're sure you'll welcome a second night at the Casa Tejedor.

Walking time: 4 or 6 hours. Elevation: + 450m / - 450m. Transfer time: 10 minutes.

DAY 8

Rodellar via waterfalls and abandoned villages to Paules. A sense of history and sadness may accompany you on today's walk as you discover high altitude abandoned village after abandoned village, yet the magnificent landscape may well equally inspire you. Again, we transfer you to Rodellar where you take a different route on ancient paved paths beside dry stone walls protecting fields that have been farmed for thousands of years as you'll discover in the uninhabited hamlet of Cheto with its photogenic stone barns. As you steadily climb, the views across the upper Mascun valley with those giant pillars become more magnificent and, we have to say, beautiful. The narrow gorge of Salto de las Lañas with its impressive waterfall provides shade and a change of scene before you reach the deserted Letosa, then the abandoned 12th century Santa Marina hermitage and village high up, lost and lonely before descending to the Balcès river, and a gentle climb to the farming hamlet of Las Bellostas.

We collect you for a short transfer to Paules, and the hospitable Casa El Cóndor, situated in a village of only 30 inhabitants in a stunning location. It is a 300 year old farmhouse with thick stone walls, beamed ceilings and comfortable bedrooms. It's also got a very pleasant terrace, an outdoor swimming pool, and good home cooking.

Walking time: 5.5 hours. Elevation: + 500m / - 450m. Transfer time: 10 minutes.

DAY 9

Paules via Capramonte and Choro de Coñolmundo to Sieste. Today's route begins by taking you gently up a remote and wild valley up to the high plateau of Capramonte with its breathtaking horizon to horizon views contrasting with the mundane fields and walls of a farming community. There is then an equally gentle descent to the abandoned village of Morcat where everything was built with solid stone contrasting with the ever changing panoramas across the Pyrenees. You descend further to the absolutely delightful gorge of Choro de Coñolmundo with its clear, yet jade tinted, waters tumbling over serious waterfalls into pools begging to be swum in. You follow the river Sieste to the village of the same name where you spend tonight. An up and down day, but a constant pleasure, we think.

Hotel L'abadia is packed with history. Originally a 16th century fortress, it became a monastery, and many features have been tastefully retained including its deep stone walls and beamed ceilings, an oil "well", a grape press, and farming tools. The bedrooms are light, comfortable, and have distinctive original paintings in every room. There is a shaded terrace with panoramic views, and a good restaurant featuring local specialities.

Walking time: 5.5 hours. Elevation: + 500m / - 450m.

DAY 10

Sieste via perched villages to Ainsa. It's back to where you started today, but there is a huge amount to be enjoyed en route. In essence, you walk on ancient, often ridgeway, tracks across the "garrigue" and through pine woods enjoying exceptional views of the Pyrenees, and particularly the imposing 7,500 foot rocky outcrop of Peña Montañesa. Yet the route is punctuated with an abandoned hermitage, and unspoilt, captivating perched villages like Latorecilla and Guaso, stone built to resist both winter storms and summer temperatures, and representing the fortitude of these traditional mountain communities, some of which still thrive to this day. It would be fanciful - but fun - to think that's partly because the Escojuganderos - the small constructions open to the four winds - have indeed blown the evil spirits away as intended. The last section of this canyon experience takes you along the banks of the Cinca river back to beautiful Ainsa. Congratulations! A walk well done!

You again stay close to the Plaza Mayor at the wonderfully atmospheric and historic Hotel Los Siete Reyes. A welcome return we are sure, and there's no better place for a last night's celebration.

Walking time: 5 hours. Elevation: + 500m / - 400m.

DAY 11

After breakfast, you can make your own way home, or we can to arrange to take you to Zaragoza airport or railway station.

Elements beyond our control (the weather, your levels of fitness, logistical risks, other miscellaneous reasons) may lead us to modify the programme. We aim to please, but your safety will always be our priority.

In July and August (and rarely at other times), exceptional temperatures may cause us to change the itinerary for your protection, comfort and enjoyment. We recommend early morning starts with middle of the day finishes, particularly if the weather is hot and sunny.

■ PRACTICAL 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!

DATES

February to November, but we would particularly recommend May, June, September and October.

MEETING POINT

The holiday begins at the hotel in Ainsa (20.00 arrival latest), although we can arrange transfers from Zaragoza airport or rail station.

END OF YOUR TRIP

The holiday ends at the hotel in Ainsa, although we can arrange transfers from Zaragoza airport or rail station.

PARKING

There is plenty of parking available near the hotel in Ainsa.

DEPARTURE GUARANTEED FROM (NO. OF PARTICIPANTS)

1

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

This itinerary features comfortable rather than challenging walking, and is suitable for people who are reasonably fit and enjoy a good day's walking. You are mainly in the foothills rather than in the high mountains. Typically, there is 4 to 6 hours steady walking with ascents and descents of upto 650 metres. In July and August it can be very hot for all day walking, and some rivers and waterfalls will have dried up. As there can be the need to cross streams and small rivers, we recommend carrying a lightweight pair of trainers or similar.

LUGGAGE TRANSFER

We will transfer your luggage to the next hotel, so all you need carry is a daysack with your choice of essentials plus picnic.

TRIP FORMAT

This is an independent, self-guided holiday.

ACCOMMODATION

You stay in double-twin rooms in authentic hotels with en suite facilities.

Do remember that in Spain breakfast and dinner are usually served later than elsewhere, and dinner is rarely served before 21.00.

MEALS

The cuisine is often regional in character, and all the better for it. Picnics are not included, but you can shop for them locally, or order them the night before from the hotels (pay locally).

TRANSFERS

Usually transfers are in people carriers, mini-buses, cars or taxis.

THE PRICE INCLUDES

10 nights dinner, bed and breakfast; people transfers as detailed; luggage transfers each walking day as required; detailed walking directions; 1:25,000 maps as required; 24/7 customer phone service.

THE PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE

The journey to the start point and from the finishing point; menu choices at extra cost; all drinks; lunches; entry fees; booking fee, 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.

YOUR TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

When we have received the balance of payment for your holiday, and in the month before your departure, we send you all the documentation you need: a detailed itinerary showing dates, times, contact addresses etc; a detailed guide to your walking routes, often also including a lot of cultural, historical and nature background information; formal documents (invoices, contractual terms and conditions etc); luggage labels etc. If you book at the last minute, we can send information to the first night's accommodation.

■ EQUIPMENT

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 liters 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)

FIRST AID KIT

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

OTHER DETAILS

- camera and why not a novel, your watercolours or other desires...
- your identification documents.

■ 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 repatriation 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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