

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

The Best Pyrenean Winter Walks



Truly memorable yet remarkably easy, guided snow-shoe winter walks that feature some of the most iconic mountains and valleys in the Pyrenees - especially in winter - not least the UNESCO Heritage site of the Cirque de Gavarnie. You stay in a wonderfully authentic, yet fully modernised, farmhouse rather than anonymous hotel.

7 nights - 5 active days

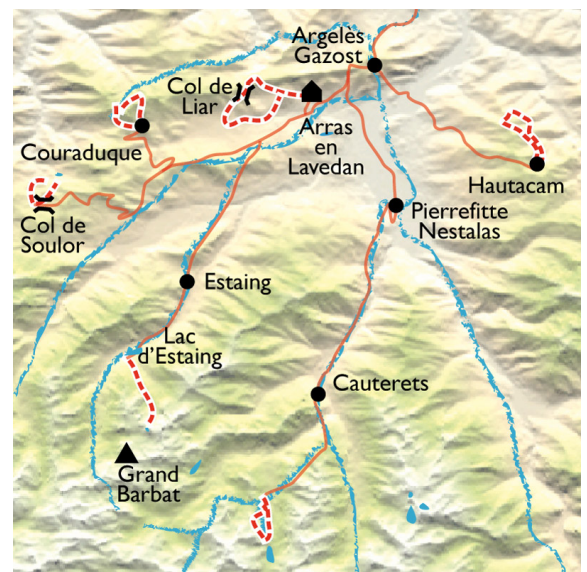
- Minimum required 5
- Center based
- With luggage transportation
- Guided

Code :
FP6PUAZ



The plus points

- **Where you stay**
- **Where you walk**
- **What you discover**
- **How amazing the Pyrenees are**



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

https://www.purelypyrenees.com/best_pyrenean_winter_walks.html

Perfect for anyone who loves walking, mountains and snowy landscapes, this holiday uses snow-shoes to enable you to easily and comfortably discover wonderful paths, frozen lakes and waterfalls, high peaks, the inspirational tranquillity of the Pyrenees and its jaw-dropping beauty. In a small group with an English speaking guide, you reach places others simply can't and don't visit in winter. And the accommodation...? Well, it's one of our favourites in the whole of the Pyrenees because of its location, character, hospitality and cuisine.

■ PROGRAMME

DAY 1

Saturdays: we meet you at Lourdes airport to take you to our hotel in Lourdes for this first night, or if you arrive by train (fast services), you can simply walk the 50 metres to the hotel. You are then free to explore the historic city of Lourdes. If you arrive at Toulouse, then we recommend taking the train or hiring a car, although we can arrange a private transfer for you.

The comfortable three star Hotel Beauséjour is right in the city centre, and in easy walking distance of all places of interest.

Airport transfer time: 15 minutes

DAY 2

You can choose to arrive in Lourdes on Sunday (with the price lowered accordingly). Until 18.30 on the Sunday, you are free to explore the city, walk in the surrounding hills (we supply detailed route instructions, and usually they are snow-free). Then you are taken to your accommodation for the next six nights where you will meet your your English speaking guide, and the other group members (minimum 5; maximum 15).

You are fortunate to be staying at one of our favourite places in the whole of the Pyrenees. Why? Well, four main reasons: Les Gerbes has a magnificent location with inspiring panoramic views across the beautiful Gave valley - one of the most attractive valleys in the Pyrenees; it is an historic Bigourdan farmhouse that has been completely yet sensitively modernised to provide the best possible mix of old and new; you have free access to the jacuzzi in the evening, the hospitality and the cooking are not only exceptional, they are just what you want and expect in French mountains in winter; it is excellently located to provide easy access to some of the very best winter walks in the Pyrenees. It is not an "hotel", and we think all the better for it. This is among the best of authentic Pyrenean accommodation, and you will have the chance to see how accurate this description is before testing the cuisine with a special first night gastronomic experience.

Transfer time: 25 minutes

DAY 3

After breakfast, you can have a snow-shoe lesson with your guide. Unlike every other forms of snow travel, snow-shoeing is easy to learn (spoiler alert: it's walking!), quick to master, and not much more tiring than ordinary walking. That's why you'll be eager to get started. You are taken to start at a magnificent location: the 4,500 feet high col de Soulor, a feature of the Tour de France, yet for winter walking it offers fairly level high altitude walking with marvellous panoramic views all around including, far below, the plains of Pau, nearer the traditional villages of the Azun valley, and, way above, the peaks of the Pyrenees. In fact, your total ascent is under 1,000 feet. It is a real pleasure and a privilege to be walking on this circular route to Soum lake and the mountain refuge of Cantau because, simply, you'd never dare to discover it without a guide. Yet this is a comparatively easy walk lasting upto 4 hours with frequent stops, and a picnic supplied by Les Gerbes.

All the same, you will appreciate the comfort and warmth of Les Gerbes before tucking into a well earned dinner.

Walking time: 3 to 4 hours. Elevation: + 300m / - 300m. Transfer time: 40 minutes

DAY 4

Today your walk starts at the beautiful high altitude Estaing lake with pine forests and some of the Pyrenees' highest summits reflected in its waters - if it's not frozen over! Here you are walking in the highly protected National Park of the Pyrenees, and will follow tracks through pine forests, along open valleys, and beside streams and waterfalls (probably frozen to provide excellent photographic opportunities). Your guide leads you gently to an especially high valley - the Ilhéou - dwarfed by the granite heights of Grand Barbat and Maleshores among others. It's an inspiring and very satisfying walk, but, again, will last no longer than 4 hours, and the total ascent is only a little more than 1,000 feet.

Les Gerbes will welcome you back.

Walking time: 3 to 4 hours. Elevation: + 350m / - 350m. Transfer time: 30 minutes

DAY 5

Today you will enjoy a comparatively easy walk (3 hours or so, and around 1,000 feet of ascent/descent), but discover some of the many joys of snow-shoe walking - not least going to places the vast majority of people don't/can't visit in winter. You start at the high arched stone-built Pont d'Espagne where you will see the first of many frozen waterfalls that often look more like dramatic ice sculptures. You walk up beside streams and through pine forests to reach the legendary Gaube lake dominated by the pinnacle that is Vignemale - 10,000 feet high, and the highest mountain in the French Pyrenees. The lake will be frozen, and everything snow covered. It really does look like virgin territory.

By now, Les Gerbes feels like home in the very best senses.

Walking time: 3 to 4 hours. Elevation: + 350m / - 350m. Transfer time: 1 hour 45 minutes

DAY 6

Hautacam is a renowned Tour de France destination, and a downhill ski resort at well over 5,000 feet - but that's not why you are here today. Now you've got your snow-shoe legs working well, there's a little more ascent/descent today (still less than 1,500 feet), but absolutely worth it primarily for the incredible views. You walk along ridges with amazing views all around including the mesmerising Pic du Midi, other major summits (your guide will identify all of them for you) and the lovely in summer/dramatic in winter heart shaped Isaby lake. You may be reading this thinking "what? More peaks, lakes and snow?" but you won't when you are there we promise!

A hint of sadness creeps in as this is your penultimate night at Les Gerbes.

Walking time: 4 to 5 hours. Elevation: + 450m / - 450m. Transfer time: 1 hour 20 minutes

DAY 7

Yes, we admit it. We have kept the best til last. Your walk takes you gently up to the Saugué plateau for your first sight of the magnificent Cirque de Gavarnie. Victor Hugo called it the colosseum of nature, an understatement when you stare wonderstruck at the 4,900 feet cliffs and 1,300 feet waterfall (the second largest in Europe) - frozen in winter, of course, and arguably even more dramatic as a consequence. It makes you feel rather insignificant, but also very privileged as it is not somewhere you can visit in winter without a guide. However, there is no wonder at all that this is a UNESCO Heritage site. You walk across the well named Bellevue plateau as well as the La Prade plateau before returning to the village of Gavarnie. Your last snow-shoe walk ever? We doubt it!

Your last night, and a final gastronomic dinner to say au revoir to your guide, your new found friends, and Les Gerbes.

Walking time: 4 hours. Elevation: + 350m / - 350m. Transfer time: 2 hours

DAY 8

After breakfast on Saturday morning, sadly we have to take you to the train station in Lourdes, or to Tarbes-Lourdes airport. A la prochaine!

Transfer time: 35 minutes

Some elements of this itinerary are beyond our control, such as weather, the conditions of roads and footpaths, and the abilities of some group members, so that very occasionally we may have to modify the programme. While your satisfaction is our priority, so must your safety and health, and that of other participants.

■ PRACTICAL INFORMATION

MEETING POINT

This holiday for English speakers has a fluent English speaking guide as well as being for French speakers. It starts on Saturdays to coincide with the weekly flight from London Stansted to Lourdes - by far the lowest cost, fastest and most direct journey from the UK.

Saturday arrivals: we will meet the London flight, and take you to the hotel in Lourdes, then leave you free to explore the city.

Sunday arrivals: if you choose to arrive at Toulouse by air or train, we recommend you catch a train to Lourdes, although you could drive your own car or hire a car.

Sunday meeting point: whichever way you travel or day you arrive, the meeting point is at 18.30 in front of Lourdes railway station where you will meet your guide, and be taken to the holiday accomodation.

END OF STAY

On the Saturday at the end of the holiday, we will get you to Lourdes train station by 09.00, and Tarbes-Lourdes airport by 09.30 in time for the London flight.

PARKING

If you are driving, then there is parking near Lourdes station, and at Les Gerbes.

GUARANTEED DEPARTURE FROM (PERS)

5

GROUP LIMITED TO ABOUT (PERS)

13

LEVEL

Each day the time spent on your snow-shoe walking journey will vary between 2 and 4 hours including rests etc. The total daily ascent/descent will range from 300 to 450 metres (900 to 1,500 feet). This is far less than a summer walking holiday, and is intended to be comfortable for anyone who can walk for 4 hours or more in hills and valleys.

LUGGAGE TRANSPORTATION

You only need carry a small rucksack for any personal items, extra clothing, camera etc. The hotel provides a picnic each walking day, which you will be expected to carry.

SUPERVISION

We have found that our customers really enjoy being in a small group that includes both English and French speakers. The minimum group size is 5, and the maximum is 15. There is no minimum/maximum for English speakers. The guide will speak at least good conversational English, and usually speak fluent English, or be bi-lingual.

ACCOMODATION

Les Gerbes is a wonderfully located, superbly modernised, authentic Bigourdian farmhouse that has been awarded 4 "chambre d'hotes" stars. The charming bedrooms have double or twin beds, and private bathrooms with shower. Downstairs there is an attractive lounge with bare stone walls, locally made wooden furniture and, importantly after a day's walking, a bar! In a cabin on the terrace is a jacuzzi for you to enjoy when you please - after the walk is pretty popular as you might imagine.

Due to the constraints of ancient and thick stone walls, two bedrooms have to have glass fronted showers that are accessed directly from the bedroom. Single occupation of double-twin rooms is possible at a supplement. Please contact us.

MEALS

Meals: continental style breakfast at the Lourdes hotel, and each morning thereafter (copious quantities!). There will be special dinners on the first and last nights at Les Gerbes, and on other nights meals consist of locally sourced traditional dishes with contemporary twists. Wine and coffee is included with each dinner. Hotel supplied picnics for each walking day are also included.

TRANSFERS

Transfers are by minibus or taxi.

ALL INCLUDED EXCEPT

Drinks other than with dinners at Les Gerbes, lunches except on Day 1 and Day 2, entry charges (none anticipated) and insurance are not included.

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.

■ EQUIPMENT

For the upper body : whatever the region or the season, the principle of having 3 breathable layers (T-shirt - sweater or warm jacket - waterproof / windproof overwrap) is perfect in most situations.

Opt for clothes that dry quickly - synthetic fibres - and do not wear cotton (it dries too slowly => uncomfortable). Wool is a natural fibre that also has excellent qualities and, thanks to new manufacturing processes, is experiencing a strong comeback in the manufacture of outdoor clothing.

Remember to cover yourself before you get cold, and especially to take layers off before you get too hot: sweat is the enemy of the hiker-especially in winter-because it moistens clothes that then quickly become chilled. Avoid anoraks, which can turn a pleasant hike into a real ordeal!

For the lower body: do not wear ski suits. Opt for windproof and waterproof mountain trousers or possibly mountain trousers + over trousers such as « Gore-tex » . A pair of thermal under trousers can be useful according to the weather.

Pay particular attention to your choice of socks: take warm socks, which are reinforced and have flat seams (to avoid blisters). In this area too, no cotton!

For your footwear, ideally, try them out before the trip; In any case, protect the areas of your feet that are liable to blister from the beginning.

LUGGAGE

- 1 travel bag per person (or wheeled suitcase). Do not take too much luggage to avoid logistical issues for the transporter. On itinerant or semi-itinerant trips, also limit the weight of your travel bag to 10-12 kgs, as where there is difficult access to certain accommodation too much weight could jeopardize the delivery of your luggage. Do not leave fragile or valuable objects in your luggage.

- 1 rucksack of about 35-40 litres, with ventral waistband, wide shoulder straps and a well-ventilated back for your comfort. You must also be able to fix the skis to your rucksack.

EQUIP_PYR_6PPRQ

CLOTHES

- 1 hat, or cap, scarf, or fleece choker
- 1 warm, light fleece
- 1 ski mask, useful in case of bad weather
- 1 pair of warm and waterproof gloves "Gore-tex" type
- 1 pair of thin gloves
- 1 pair of spare warm mittens (or gloves) to put in the bottom of your bag
- T-shirts made of breathable material (micro fleece type) with long sleeves (1 every 2-3 days) and 1 or 2 with short sleeves
- 1 thin fleece (optional)
- 1 warm fleece jacket (even water-repellent type "softshell") or type "primaloft" (warm and compressible)
- 1 waterproof and breathable jacket "Gore-tex" type with hood
- 1 solid and waterproof mountain trousers + over trousers ("Gore-tex" type)
- 1 pair of gaiters (only if your trousers are not equipped)
- 1 pair of thermal under trousers
- Underwear
- Warm socks (at least 1 pair every 2 days) synthetic and / or wool ("Coolmax" type)
- Comfortable clothes and shoes for the evening

EQUIP_PYR_6PPRQ

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- 1 large plastic bag to slip into your backpack to protect your belongings from the weather and / or rucksack cover.
- 1 waterproof pouch with: your identity papers, details of your insurance and any other document mentioned in the formalities section
- 1 pair of good quality wrap around sunglasses (level 3 protection) + sunscreen with good protection and lip balm (all to be carried in your rucksack)
- 1 insulated gourd or 1.5 litre aluminium bottle (avoid backpack water carriers, risk of freezing)
- 1 small thermos 50 cl (optional, useful if you want to bring tea, coffee...)
- 1 plastic or aluminium cup with insulated handle 1 folding pocketknife
- For your picnic: cutlery and 1 plastic box of 0,5 litres minimum type Tupperware
- Toiletries
- Ear plugs (in case your neighbours snore)
- Tissues
- Toilet paper (burn, do not leave on the ground)
- 1 lighter
- 1 head torch or flashlight + survival blanket: to always put in your rucksack, an unforeseen delay following an incident can take place even during an easy hike
- Spare glasses (if you wear glasses)
- Camera, binoculars, drawing equipment ... (optional)

EQUIP_PYR_6PPRQ

FIRST AID KIT

- Tell the guide if you are suffering from any condition, following any treatment, or have any allergy that could complicate a medical problem in the event of an incident, or cause any possible discomfort during the hike.
- Your usual medication
- Pain medication:
- Drugs against digestive disorders
- Lozenges for a sore throat
- Elastoplast 5 or 8 cm wide x 2.5 m.
- Plasters
- Adhesive bandage + sterile compresses
- Double skin
- Tweezers
- Small scissors
- Vitamin C
- Disinfectant gel useful for washing / disinfecting hands
- Hand warmers

EQUIPMENT PROVIDED BY PURELY PYRENEES

The guide is equipped with a first aid kit but is not intended to provide for all of your needs for small issues

Security equipment (Avalanche victim detector, shovels, probes), mandatory each day

OTHER DETAILS

Do not forget your sense of humour or your curiosity!

■ NOTES

