





Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

Once In A Lifetime Winter Walking

A wonderful week of guided winter walking featuring the finest highlights of the heart of the Pyrenees - including the UNESCO Heritage site of the Cirque du Gavarnie and the stunning Pic du Midi - while staying at an exceptionally charming hotel. Starts Saturdays or Sundays.

7 nights - 5 walking days

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

Code :
FP6PUGA



The plus points

- **Superb walks with snow shoes ("raquettes") - easy to learn, easy to walk**
- **The UNESCO Heritage Cirque de Gavarnie - and so much more**
- **A characterful hotel renowned for its cuisine and warmth (in every sense)**
- **English speaking guide with the bonus of French and international guests**



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

<https://www.purelypyrenees.com/once-lifetime-winter-walking.html>

It's absolutely essential for a successful winter holiday that where you stay is somewhere you thoroughly enjoy and appreciate. That's why you stay in the archetypal mountain village of Viscos in a charming, characterful and very hospitable three star hotel with an excellent reputation for its cuisine. On each of the snow shoe walking days (typically 3-4 hours walking), your expert guide takes your small group to an exceptional location where you will discover paths and panoramas that will quickly convert you into a snow shoe fanatic! That these locations include the Cirque de Gavarnie, the stunning Lac de Gaube and the 9,500 feet Pic du Midi (you don't walk all the way up!) makes it a holiday we guarantee you will not stop talking about.

■ 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 you can choose to arrive in Lourdes on Saturday, or Sunday (with the price lowered accordingly). Either day, 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 to all places of interest.

Transfer from Lourdes airport: 20 minutes

DAY 2

Until late on the Sunday afternoon, you are free to explore the city, or walk in the surrounding hills (we supply detailed route instructions, and usually they are snow-free)

At the end of the day, you meet together with your English speaking guide and the other group members (minimum 5; maximum 15) for an introductory session before the short transfer to the hotel in Viscos where you will be staying for the rest of your holiday. You will have time to settle in before a welcoming aperitif, and your first gastronomic experience.

The three star Hotel La Grange aux Marmottes is everything you want in a mountains-in-winter hotel. It has a perfect location in the interesting village of Viscos, and is super attractive from the outside, yet it is inside that it really comes into its own in the cosy, log fire public rooms, the restaurant and the stylishly contemporary bedrooms. The only thing you won't see are marmottes because they are hibernating deep under the snow.

Transfer time: 40 minutes

DAY 3

Monday. You begin your snow shoe winter walking experience with a lesson from your guide (as required). In truth - and unlike both downhill and cross-country skiing - it requires minimum equipment, little tutoring, negligible stress, and is easily picked up by simply doing it! Perhaps surprisingly, though, you will find that it is far less physically demanding, and far more enjoyable, as you often walk on virgin snow with few if any people anywhere nearby. After a short transfer, your first 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). It makes you feel rather insignificant, but also very privileged as it is not somewhere you can visit in winter without a guide.

A second well earned, comfortable, warm and well fed night at La Grange aux Marmottes.

Walking time : 3 to 4 hours. Elevation : + 500m / - 500m. Transfer time: 25 minutes

DAY 4

Today you will enjoy a comparatively easy walk (3 hours or so, and less than 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.

La Grange aux Marmottes will welcome you back with hot showers, comfy armchairs, log fires and a good dinner. Just what the doctor ordered.

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

DAY 5

You may well have never heard of the Aygues-Cluses valley, but expect that you'll be talking about it afterwards. It is an attractively winding valley with frozen streams and waterfalls. Eminently photographable, and perfect for snow-shoe walking. However, it also leads to the magnificent Néouvielle nature park famous for its many (and we mean many) lakes and tarns as well as huge granite cliffs that look all the more exhilarating covered in snow and ice. A stop in the mountain village of Barreges on the way there and/or back gives you another perspective on life in these mountains as it was, and as it is.

La Grange aux Marmottes hosts you again.

Walking time: 4 hours. Elevation: + 650m / - 650m. Transfer time: 20 minutes.

DAY 6

No apologies for a second walk around the Cirque de Gavarnie, especially as it offers very different elevations, perspectives and, above all, panoramas. Although there is one major waterfall, the Cirque has at least ten that elsewhere would be tourist attractions in their own right. Frozen they are certainly some sight! Plus those huge cliffs, a glacier inside the Cirque (much reduced these days), and gentle, often forested paths, and you have a whole world to discover afresh.

La Grange aux Marmottes awaits your return. Can't life always be like this? Afraid not!

Walking time: 2 to 3 hours. Elevation: + 300m / - 300m. Transfer time: 30 minutes.

DAY 7

Well, if you thought the Cirque was impressive, wait until you get to the top of the 9,500 feet Pic du Midi de Bigorre although you will find that an observatory beat you to it. (Some of our summer walks, let you stay a night up here, and include a private night sky observatory session). You'll be pleased to know that you don't walk up anything like 9,500 feet, but the path and the mountain tops do provide you with the most marvellous range of 360° views including, on a clear day, right down (and down) to the plains to the north, and over the waves of mountains west and east. It really is a special way to finish the walking part of your holiday.

At La Grange aux Marmottes, however, a final surprise (well, not much of a surprise now) awaits you with a celebratory dinner for your last night. It should be one to remember.

Walking time: 4 hours. Elevation: + 600m / - 600m. Transfer time: 30 minutes.

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: 40-50 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 17.30 in front of Lourdes railway station where you will meet your guide, and be taken to the holiday hotel.

END OF STAY

On the Saturday at the end of the holiday, we will get you to Lourdes train station by 09.30, and Tarbes-Lourdes airport by 10.00 in time for the London flight.

PARKING

If you are driving, then there is parking near Lourdes station, and at the Viscos hotel.

GUARANTEED DEPARTURE FROM (PERS)

5

GROUP LIMITED TO ABOUT (PERS)

15

LEVEL

Each day the time spent on your snow-shoe walking journey will vary between 2 and 5 hours including rests etc. The total daily ascent/descent will range from 200 to 650 metres (600 to 2,000 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. On some days, there are shorter and longer options.

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

The accommodation consists of: one night in a 3 star hotel in Lourdes for Saturday arrivals. (Sunday arrivals will have the cost discounted); 6 nights in an exceptional 3 star hotel in Viscos.

MEALS

Meals: continental style breakfast at the Lourdes hotel, and each morning thereafter. There will be special dinners on the first and last nights at Viscos, and on other nights the restaurant offers a menu of local gastonomic specialities for you to choose from. Hotel supplied picnics for each walking day are also included. Wine and other drinks are not included in the holiday price.

TRANSFERS

Transfers are by minibus or taxi.

ALL INCLUDED EXCEPT

Drinks, lunches 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.

■ **ÉQUIPEMENT**

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.

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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!

■ INSURANCE

According to the regulation of our profession, La Balaguère 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

La Balaguère is a founding member of Action for Responsible Tourism.

The label "Action for Responsible Tourism" was awarded The Balaguère 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

■ CONTACT US

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■ NOTES

