

ASTEP AHEAD

custom guided journeys

WESTERN PYRENEES JOURNEY

This is a nine-day introduction to one of Europe's most beautiful, and relatively unexploited mountain ranges: The Pyrenees. Here we can delve into the past, and learn about the rich history of the area, from before the Romans to the Moors, and on to modern times. We travel in the most modern train the "Ave", and by the oldest means - on foot. Our journey includes an opportunity to cross the Pyrenees from the Spanish Guarrinza Valley to the French Aspe Valley. There will be no lack of variety!



9-DAY WESTERN PYRENEES CULTURE & HIKING (APRIL-JULY OR SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER)

Days 1&2	Boutique Hotel in Alquézar (Aragón, Spain)
Days 3-5	Family run Bed & Breakfast in Hecho Village, Hecho Valley (Aragón, Spain) or Boutique Hotel in Tramacastilla, Tena Valley (Aragón, Spain)
Days 6 & 7	Family run country hotel in St Etienne-de-Baigorry (Basque Country, France)
Day 8	Bilbao (Basque Country, Spain)
Day 9	Last day. Transfer to Bilbao Airport or train station.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

A morning in Zaragoza, the capital city of Aragon, rich in history and perfect for glancing back into the history of the Moorish occupation of Spain. The canyons and history of Alquézar in the Guara Mountains. The valleys of the high Pyrenees, with their ancient villages, steep sided oak and beech covered slopes, and its grazing lands – rugged and beautiful. St Etienne-de-Baigorry is a delightful taste of France, lush, green, warm, beside a cool river, and on one of the French routes of St James' Way.

ACTIVITIES & GENERAL TRIP DESCRIPTION

This trip explores the central and western Pyrenees. The history and aspect of some of the old towns and villages will be a highlight. While the food is good, this is mostly a mountainous region inhabited by shepherds and country folk, and meals tend to be tasty, wholesome and otherwise simple. There are gastronomic restaurants in some of the places we visit, most notably in the Basque area. Anyone wanting to enjoy the most of the Pyrenees should be prepared to be outdoors, and should expect plenty of hiking in these mountains. These hikes can easily be tailored to the group, and can vary from 3 hour rambles to full day expeditions. The cost of all hikes and midday picnics are included in the price. If bad weather or the desires of the group require a meal indoors at lunch time, a selection of tapas are included, but not set menus and la carte meals.

Museum entrance, optional activities or church entrance is not included in the trip. Activities that are possible but not included are - mountain biking; road biking; canyoning (spring months); white water rafting (spring months); cross country skiing (winter months); alpine skiing (winter months); alpine cross country skiing (winter months); gliding; hang-gliding; paragliding; catch & release fly fishing (April-September); spa & massages; golf; horseback riding; sports matches (soccer, Basque pelota etc) - to name a few. Naturally winter activities are only available if there



is snow (generally from December - March). If the groups is interested in any of these, it is best to arrange them beforehand.

GROUP SIZE & FLEXIBILITY

The group size determines to some extent the flexibility of the trip. We include 1 van (and guide) for up to 5 guests, so groups of 6 or more people have more guides and flexibility. Public transport is limited in most of this area.

JOURNEY DIFFICULTY

The activity level can be tailored to suit the group. It is recommended that all group members have similar aspirations for the level of activity required, and this is essential for groups of 5 people or less. Participants must be able to hike on uneven ground for at least 2 hours. The weather is highly variable, and while it is often sunny, rain is possible at any time of year, and it may snow any time from October - May.



DESCRIPTION

ALQUÉZAR, GUARA MOUNTAINS, ARAGÓN

Your guide will meet you at the Zaragoza *Delicias* railway station. There are regular express trains from Barcelona's Sants and Madrid's Atocha stations to Zaragoza. From here it is a few minutes' drive to the Aljafería Palace where a local historian will guide you around this amazing palace, as well as some parts of Zaragoza.



The oldest visible architecture in the Aljafería Palace is the Troubadour Tower, built in the 9th & 10th century AD - a period when the Taifa (or state) of Zaragoza was governed by the Banu Tujibi family. There are also examples of architecture from the later Medieval Christian period, which began with the conquest of Zaragoza by Alfonso I the Batallador in 1118 AD.

Under the Catholic Kings - Ferdinand and Isabella - in the late 1400's, more renovations were made, supervised by a Mudejar (a muslim who remained in Christian lands after the Reconquista) craftsman, Faraig de Gali. The Aljafería Palace now houses the Cortes (Regional Parliament) of Aragon. We stroll from the Alfajeria, through the streets of the old sector of Zaragoza, before finding somewhere for lunch.

After a tapas lunch in Zaragoza we drive to the medieval town of Alquézar, situated on the edge of the Guara mountains at the foot of the Pyrenees. If we arrive early we may take an hour's hike into Alquézar. We stay in a small boutique hotel in the middle of Alquézar.

Included - Breakfasts at the hotel. Picnics or snack lunches. Set menu dinners in the nearby area, including one 3 course dinner at a select local restaurant.

Not Included - Drinks, laundry and extras (phone calls, room service, extra meals etc).

Included Activities - Hikes.

Extra activities (not included) - Mountain bike excursions, fly fishing, horse riding, rafting, canyoning, caving, rock climbing, visits to vineyards and an olive press.

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HECHO VILLAGE, HECHO VALLEY, ARAGÓN

It is 2½ hour's drive from Alquézar to Hecho village - an unspoiled and very pretty mountain village where the locals speak their own Aragonese dialect. Trip guests stay for two nights at a cosy family run Bed & Breakfast style hotel with en suite rooms and one of the best-known restaurants in the valley. The guides stay in their own homes.

From Hecho village we explore the Hecho Valley on a gentle walk along a 2000-year-old Roman road above a deep gorge. We might also hike high up the valley and return via a different route through ancient forest and alongside a raging mountain stream. We see bronze-age burial circles, neolithic dolmens and enjoy magnificent views of the surrounding peaks. Another wonderful circular walk explores a side valley beneath Bisaurin (2669m), the highest peak in the area. We pass yew trees, some of which have been dated at 1500 years old, and should see marmots, chamois and many birds of prey. We return to the start of the walk through high alpine pasture and beech forest.

Included - Breakfasts at the hotel. Picnics or snack lunches. Set menu dinners in the nearby area including one 3 course dinner at the hotel, and one similar meal either at the hotel or at a select local restaurant.

Not Included - Drinks, laundry and extras (phone calls, room service, extra meals etc).

Note: Laundry not available at the hotel.

Included Activities - Hikes.

Extra activities (not included) - Gliding, fly fishing, cross-country skiing, horse riding, rafting, canyoning, caving, rock climbing, archery.



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TRAMACASTILLA, TENA VALLEY, ARAGÓN

It is 2 hour's drive from Alquézar to Tramacastilla village - situated high in the Tena Valley. Trip guests stay for two nights at a small 25 room boutique hotel with en suite rooms and a spa. The guides stay in their own homes.

Tramacastilla is situated on the western slopes of the Tena Valley. Close by are a myriad of hiking options, including areas of rolling hills and lakes, steep sloping forested slopes, and high and arid rugged mountain peaks. Hiking can be tailored for the group. This is also an excellent base to do other activities such as fishing or skiing (in winter), or to hike in France. The highest railway in France the *Train d'Artouste* is nearby.

Included - Breakfasts at the hotel. Picnics or snack lunches. Set menu dinners in the nearby area including one 3 course dinner at the hotel, and one similar meal either at the hotel or at a select local restaurant.

Not Included - Drinks, laundry and extras (phone calls, room service, extra meals etc).



Included Activities - Hikes, use of the spa at the hotel for 1 session.

Extra activities (not included) - Spa treatments, bicycle excursions, fly fishing, alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, horse riding, rafting, canyoning, caving, rock climbing, archery, scenic train rides (in France).

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STETIENNE-DE-BAIGORRY, AQUITAINE, FRENCH BASQUE COUNTRY

We drive north to San Sebastián for a tapas lunch, and then to the delightful village of St Etienne de Baigorry in the French Basque region of the Pyrenees, once part of the Kingdom of Navarre. We spend three nights here.



St-Etienne-de-Baigorry is situated in a valley beside the Spanish border and was once part of the Kingdom of Navarre. It is close to St Jean Pied de Port – an important pilgrims' resting place on the famous St James' Pilgrims' Way.

The family owned and run hotel we have chosen is situated on the edge of the village of St-Etienne-de-Baigorry along the Nive des Aldudes River. Food is excellent, and the atmosphere is wonderfully relaxing.

This area is known for excellent strong Iroulégué wines: the only “appellation contrôlée” wines from the Basque country. From our comfortable hotel we can hike in the surrounding hills, and along the border with Spain, visit St Jean Pied de Port, and wander the streets of this mediaeval town to shop and enjoy the gastronomy. During our three-day stay here we have included a meal at any of a choice of restaurants near St Jean Pied de Port, such as the renowned Les Pyrénées, or La Ferme Gormande in Ossès.

Included - Breakfasts at the hotel. Picnics or snack lunches at selected establishments. Set menu dinners in the nearby area including one 3 course dinner at the hotel, and one similar meal either at the hotel or at a select local restaurant, and one 4 course dinner at the Hotel des Pyrénées restaurant in St Jean Pied de Port.

Not Included - Drinks, laundry and extras (phone calls, room service, extra meals etc).

Note: No laundry service is available in this hotel.

Included Activities - Hikes and visit to the walled medieval town of St Jean Pied de Port.

Extra activities (not included) - Bike rides, cooking classes, sailing trips, surfing, wine tasting and vineyard tours.

LAST DAY

This morning participants can be transferred to Biarritz (1½ hours drive) or Bilbao (2½ hour drive) Airports.

Bilbao Airport has far more connections, including flights to Madrid, Barcelona, London, Paris, Frankfurt and Brussels.

From Biarritz it is possible to catch a train to most places in France, or fly to Paris (mainly the regional Orly airport). In summer it is also possible to catch budget airline EasyJet flights direct to Paris Charles de Gaulle airport (from Paris Charles de Gaulle it is possible to fly to most destinations in the USA), or budget airline Ryan Air flies from Biarritz to London (Stansted) and Brussels (Charleroi).



GUIDES

Richard Cash

Richard came to the Spanish Pyrenees from England with his wife Nicky Forsyth to learn Spanish. They fell in love with the region, and Richard has been leading hiking and skiing trips since the early 1990s. Richard, the main trip guide, and the only guide if you are in 1 vehicle (5 people or less) is an expert on local history, flora and fauna.



Justin Bell

Justin has been guiding luxury safaris and Mount Kilimanjaro climbs for *Wilderness Africa* in Africa. In 2008 he and his family moved to a village near Jaca the Pyrenees region. Since then he and his wife Gillian have continued their travel services and have formed a Spanish Travel Agency – *A Step Ahead*. Justin will be the trip co-ordinator and additional driver & guide for larger groups of more than 5 people.

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COST PER PERSON IN EUROS OF THE ABOVE 9-DAY ADVENTURE IN OCTOBER 2012

Group size -	4	6 (1 van)	6 (2 vans)	8
Hecho option sharing in a twin/double room-	€ 4,540	€ 3,880	€ 5,110	€ 4,470
Tramacastilla option sharing in a twin/double room-	€ 4,940	€ 4,260	€ 5,490	€ 4,850
Trip cost single supplement -	supplied on request			

Notes: Lunch meal plans (whether picnic or tapas at select establishments) must be decided at least a day beforehand. Ground transport is provided in a 7-seater minibuses.

Included in the above trip price: Services of one professional English-speaking *A Step Ahead* driver/guide with each 7-seater minibus from the morning on Day 1 to midday on Day 9. Collection from Zaragoza Railway Station on Day 1 and drop off from Bilbao or Biarritz Airports or train stations on 9 (Only one drop-off destination possible per minibus). Accommodation as indicated in the itinerary. Meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9 are included. Generally, lunches will be tapas, bar snacks or picnic lunches and dinner will be set menus of 3 or 4 courses. Activities, aside from hiking, are not included in the cost.

Not included in the above trip price: Any soft or alcoholic drinks. Any additional menu item costs, such as dishes from a la carte menus, deluxe set menus, or meals at establishments not selected by the guide. Laundry or other room extras. Entry fees to any museum, church, historical monument or show. Any extra activity not included in the above itinerary (such as vineyard visits, surfing, kayaking, paragliding, sailing, fishing, etc). Items of a personal nature (e.g. visas, airport taxes, telephone or fax services, massages, internet services etc.). Any kind of insurance (note that all participants health must be covered by international health insurance). International flights. Any transport required outside the specifications of the itinerary (such as taxi rides, balloon rides, gliding flights, extra train rides etc). Nor are gratuities included.

EXTENSIONS & ADDITIONAL DAYS

We can arrange accommodation and guided tours in any part of the Pyrenees including Barcelona, Biarritz and Bilbao. We can design and book visits to vineyards, historical sites, specialist restaurants, other gastronomic tours, and arrange museum visits. We can arrange extra activities such as sailing, fly-fishing, bicycle riding and horseback riding trips. We can also arrange accommodation and guided tours in Madrid. Please contact us indicating your length of stay in any of these areas for details.



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A STEP AHEAD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

PLEASE SEE OUR **TERMS & CONDITIONS FOR EUROPE (2013)** DOCUMENT FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON TERMS AND INCLUSIONS & EXCLUSIONS

General: Specially requested single accommodation will be charged at a supplement. We reserve the right to substitute hotels or other accommodation and to alter the itinerary should this be considered necessary or advisable.

Deposits:

To confirm a booking -	20% of full trip cost required
60 days prior to trip -	Full trip cost required

Cancellations:

No of days prior
to trip start date

> 60

30-60

<30

Terms

The deposit is forfeited (which is 20% of full safari cost forfeited)

50% of full trip cost forfeited

Full trip cost forfeit

Insurance: While on the trip with us you are not covered by any insurance (such as personal, travel, accident or baggage loss). It is a requirement by Spanish Law for you to have private medical insurance for the duration of your stay. We also suggest that you make arrangements so that you and your property are fully insured for the duration of your trip, and you are advised to arrange adequate insurance in the unforeseen event of postponement or cancellation of your trip.



Liability: Although every possible care is taken to safeguard you and your property, we accept no liability for any accidents, injuries, or illnesses arising during the trip, nor thereafter, nor the loss or damage to your property and persons. By booking and paying a deposit for a trip, you are deemed to have accepted the liability and insurance clauses detailed in 1. the Terms & Conditions for Europe (2013) document and 2. the separate Waiver of Liability Form for Europe.

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