

Cathar Crossing Guided Trail

Tour Style: Trails

Destinations: France, Spain & Mediterranean

Trip code: XLLDW

Trip Walking Grade: 4



HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

Discover the fascinating story of the last of the Cathars, as you follow their footsteps as they fled from France to Spain, along the path of the Bon Hommes. A time forgotten landscape of legend and great natural beauty will accompany you each day as you traverse the Pyrenees. Enjoy a snapshot of different cultures as you cross from country to country; France, towards Andorra, and lastly, Spain.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Experienced Local Guide
- All transport and luggage transfers on walking days
- 'With flight' holidays include return flights from the UK and hotel transfers
- Full Board en-suite accommodation
 - 7 breakfasts, 7 lunches, 7 evening meals

HOLIDAYS HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the stunning Pyrenees mountains on foot
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- Visit medieval towns
- Toast the life and legend of "Bon Hommes" as you complete your crossing



ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrival In Toulouse

Transfer from Toulouse to the medieval town of Foix, where you spend the first night. If time allows take time to visit the castle of Count Gaston Fébus or stroll around the medieval city.

Day 2: Montségur To Comus

A coach transfer of 45 minutes will take you to the beginning of today's walk at Montségur and to meet your leader.

You'll meet at the Castle where you can enjoy magnificent views of the valleys and mountains around you. You'll also enjoy an introduction to Cathar history and legend on your visit to this famous castle, before traversing the spectacular Frau gorges where the Mediterranean influence is more present.

A 30 minute coach journey then takes you to the spa town of Ax-les-Thermes for the night with its hot springs and thermal baths. (If time allows enjoy a relaxing time in the wellness centre "Les Bains du Couloubret"- 18.50€ for 2 hours).

9½ miles (15km) with 2,500 feet (750m) of ascent and 1,500 feet (450m) of descent.

Day 3: Ax-les-Thermes To Mérens

Today we take a short train transfer to Mérens and a beautiful walk, giving close-up views of the high mountains of Ariège. Taking shepherds' paths and forest trails, we reach the high-point of the day with spectacular far-reaching views of the Pyrenean chain. Descending through the meadows and woods surrounding the village of Mérens, we can revive our feet in the natural springs, before taking the short train or bus journey back to Ax-les-Thermes.

8 miles (13km), with 2,650 feet (800m) of ascent and 2,350 feet (700m) of descent.

Day 4: Porta To Bellver De Cerdanya

Today we take a 40 minute coach journey on the famous route to Porté Puymorens and the Mediterranean Pyrenees. From here we begin our ascent to the Portella Blanca (8,257ft above sea level), and the border of France, Andorra and Spain.

Crossing into Spain, the landscape changes yet again, as we are greeted by the stunning sight of the Sierra del Cadi. You'll be rewarded by beautiful scenery as you cross into Spain. A short transfer from the end of your walk takes you to your hotel.

This is the longest day, as you cross the border and it involves a very early start.

14½ miles (23km), with 3,350 feet (1,000m) of ascent and 3,600 feet (1,100m) of descent.

Day 5: Bellver De Cerdanya

Continuing in the footsteps of the Cathars, our walk continues south, to discover the stunning Sierra de Cadi massif, and on towards the Moixero's peak. The landscape now has a much more Mediterranean feel to it.

7 miles (11km), with 1,750 feet (525m) of ascent and 1,600 feet (480m) of descent.

Day 6: Baga To Gosol

From Bellver we take a 20 minute transfer to Baga where we begin our walk through the heart of the Cadi-Moxero national park and in the shadows of the emblematic fortress of Pedraforca's Peak. Our trail ends today at the town of Gosol with its castle, a place of refuge for many Cathars.

10 miles (16km), with 2,650 feet (810m) of ascent and 2,500 feet (770m) of descent.

Day 7: Fumanya To Berga

The final chapter in this legendary journey leads us from Fumanya (after a short transfer from Gosol to Fumanya), to the Cathar sanctuary of Queralt, the 'balcony of Catalonia', and through the Mediterranean forest to Berga, where we can toast the life and legend of the "Bon Hommes", and enjoy the final section of our journey.

9½ miles (15km), with 1,400 feet (420m) of ascent and 2,900 feet (870m) of descent.

Day 8: Departure Day

Free time in Berga before your transfer to Barcelona airport which takes just over an hour.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotel Lons - Cathar Crossing

The Hotel Lons (1 night) is located in the historic centre of Foix, 5 minutes walk from the imposing castle, "Château de Foix". Formerly a coaching-inn, Hotel Lons has been owned and ran as a hotel by the Lons family for over half a century.

Le Chalet - Cathar Crossing

A small family run hotel, where you are assured of a warm welcome, Le Chalet (2 nights) is in Ax les Thermes. The hotel has recently been refurbished, with light and airy rooms, and is renowned for its restaurant.

Hotel Bellavista - Cathar Crossing

A family run hotel (2 nights), enjoy the spectacular scenery of northern Catalonia. Set in the mountainous area of Cerdanya, part of the Spanish Pyrenees and just a short distance from the French border and Andorra. All rooms are outward-facing and en suite with telephones and TV. Free WiFi is available throughout the hotel. During the summer months guests can enjoy a game of tennis on the Bellavista's own court or a dip in the open-air swimming pool.

Hostal Cal Francisco - Cathar Crossing

The Hostal Cal Francisco at Gosol (1 night) is basic, but comfortable and clean. All rooms are en-suite and the welcome from the owners will ensure you enjoy your evening's stay. This is a small establishment and the menu offered for the evening meal is limited. It will however offer hearty food, from locally sourced produce.

Hotel Estel - Cathar Crossing

Enjoy the delightful terrace. All rooms include satellite TV. Each room has a private bathroom.

USEFUL HOLIDAY INFORMATION

Joining Instructions

A group transfer is included in the price for those who have booked the "with flight" option. If you are travelling independently but would like to use this transfer, please contact us for details.

Holiday Start: For those who have booked our "with flight" holiday, a coach transfer from Toulouse Airport direct to your first accommodation is automatically included. A representative of our partner agent will meet you upon arrival and direct you to your transfer.

Holiday Finish: Similar arrangements apply. A coach transfer to Barcelona Airport will be arranged to connect with the HF Holidays flight.

Please note that these transfers will be timed to connect with the HF Holidays' flights. We cannot make separate arrangements for guests arriving/departing at different times.

Flight details: these will be confirmed upon booking.

What To Bring

What To Take

We recommend wearing walking boots on all our walks, as these provide the best ankle support and grip. Approach shoes offer appropriate levels of grip and are fine if you're comfortable with and used to walking without the ankle support. Walking socks suitable for warm weather – major sock manufacturers such as Bridgedale make socks specifically designed for warm weather – just ensure that your footwear fits correctly if you're used to wearing thicker socks. Windproof/waterproof jacket (with hood) and waterproof trousers – these are essential at all times of the year. Shorts and T-shirts - lightweight wicking materials are best. Warm fleece & trousers Sun protection – hat, sunglasses and sun cream.

Clothing: Fleece or other purpose designed synthetic tops give good lightweight insulation and nylon or cotton trousers can provide unrestricted movement. A layering system is better than one thick top. Lightweight hat and gloves

Additional Equipment For Walking

Rucksack: this needs to be large enough to carry your picnic lunch, drink, waterproofs and spare clothing. A size of 25-30 litres is probably best. A waterproof liner as well as a rucksack cover will keep the contents dry should you be unlucky enough to encounter any rain.

Water bottle: a size of at least 2 litres is recommended.

Please take a plastic box with personal cutlery for salad/crudities given with packed lunch and plastic food bags

Sun protection: high factor sun screen and lip salve Personal First Aid Kit: containing for example plasters, insect repellent, antiseptic wipes, painkillers, blister kit, tape and personal medication.

Spare food: Leaders cannot carry emergency food for the whole party. As this walk crosses remote areas it is essential that you take some high energy food. Energy bars, nuts, dried fruit, chocolate etc are not included in your picnic so please take supplies, or pick up some enroute.

Camera/binoculars – your choice. Trekking poles - many people find these aid balance and take some of the strain off their knees during steeper descents

Safety On Your Holiday

Insurance is a condition of booking. Therefore if you have not already arranged insurance, it is imperative that you do so, and advise us of the insurance company and policy number. You must be covered for Guided trekking up to 2,517 metres (Portella Blanca Pass), helicopter rescue and repatriation to your home country. We have negotiated special holiday insurance and full details of this cover can be found in our brochure or at www.hfholidays.co.uk. There is no extra charge for pre-existing illnesses. If you would like to purchase insurance from us please call us on 020 8732 1220 or email holidayservices@hfholidays.co.uk.

Vaccinations & Health

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for France or Spain, however Tetanus is recommended. Further information can be found at www.traveldoctor.co.uk.

Useful Information

To call the UK, dial 00 44, then the number, omitting the initial 0 of the local code

Tipping

France: Service charges are included in bills, a tip of 5% to 10% in addition is normal in cafes etc.

Spain: No added service charges on the final bill at any hotel restaurant or bar. It is common to leave 5% -10% tip for services.

Electricity

The electric current in France and Spain is 230V; 50Hz. Power points have two round or flat holes. You will need an adaptor for any appliances brought from the UK.

ATM Availability

There are Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) in the larger towns in which we overnight (Foix, Ax-les-Thermes, Berga) for changing Euros.

HOW TO BOOK

When you're ready to book, you can choose to **book online** or book **over the phone**. Our website offers secure online booking for our holidays, is available 24/7, and offers more in-depth information about all our holidays. If you prefer to call us, our experienced and knowledgeable team are available to answer any specific questions you have and can offer guidance as to which holiday is best suited to your needs.

Our office is open: Monday to Friday: 9am – 7pm Saturday & Sunday: 9am – 1pm Bank Holiday Monday: 9am – 1pm

PAYING YOUR DEPOSIT

To secure the holiday of your choice, you will need to pay a deposit: UK & European Holidays: £150 per person and Worldwide Holidays: £250 per person. You can pay your deposit by debit or credit card with no additional card fees charged or make an online BACS payment directly into HF's bank account, please see details under BACS payments. You can also pay your deposit by cheque within seven days of booking. Cheques should be made payable to 'HF Holidays Ltd' with your booking reference / Order ID on the back.

ASSOCIATE'S FEE

Non-members can join our holidays by paying an Associate's fee of £10 per person per holiday. Alternatively, full life membership is available from £100 – visit hfholidays.co.uk/membership for details.

BACS PAYMENTS

Please quote your booking reference / Order ID when you make your payment online: Bank Name: Svenska Handelsbanken AB (publ) Account Name: HF Holidays Ltd Account Number: 35923304 Sort Code: 40-51-62 IBAN: GB92HAND40516235923304 Swift / Bic Code: HANDGB22

Once we have received your booking and deposit, we will send a confirmation invoice to the lead name. Please check this carefully. For bookings 'with flights' it is essential that the names on your booking confirmation invoice match those on your passport for bookings overseas. Please advise us immediately of any errors. Any name changes after the balance of your holiday has been paid will be subject to a fee levied by the airline.

MANAGE MY BOOKINGS

Payments can also be made through the Manage My Booking function on our website. Click on the link at the top of our homepage. This is available to all customers who provide an email address at the time of booking.

YOUR FINAL BALANCE

The balance is due 10 weeks before departure. As with paying your deposit, you can pay your final balance by debit or credit card, make an online BACS payment directly into HF's bank account or pay by cheque.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is an important part of any booking and essential for one of our holidays. HF Holidays works

with specialist. Insurance Brokers Campbell Irvine Direct. For more information or to obtain a quote call them on 01702 427 236 or visit hfholidays.co.uk/insurance

PEACE OF MIND

ATOL:

The air holidays and flights in this brochure are ATOL-protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 710. In the unlikely event of our insolvency, the CAA will ensure that you are not stranded abroad and will arrange to refund any money you have paid us for advance bookings. For further information visit the ATOL website atol.org.uk

MEMBER OF ABTOT:

HF Holidays is a member of ABTOT (The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited) which provides financial protection under the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 for HF Holidays Ltd and in the event of their insolvency, protection is provided for the following: 1. non-flight packages commencing in and returning to the UK; 2. non-flight packages commencing and returning to a country other than the UK; 3. flight inclusive packages that commence outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland, which are sold to customers outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland. 1, 2 and 3 provides for a refund in the event you have not yet travelled. 1 and 3 provides for repatriation. Please note that bookings made outside the UK and Republic of Ireland are only protected by ABTOT when purchased directly with HF Holidays Ltd.

TRIP NOTE VALIDITY

These Trip Notes are valid based on the date printed at the bottom of the page. They will occasionally be updated post booking and pre-departure. We will send you the latest trip notes prior to departure through a link in your pre departure documents or we can send you a copy in the post if preferred.

In booking this trip you should be confident in your ability to participate in all activities described in these Trip Notes. If you have any doubt about your suitability you should call HF Holidays and ask to speak to one of the team about this itinerary.

The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. Where differences exist between the Trip Notes and our current brochure, the Trip Notes supersede the brochure. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; so please be prepared to be flexible where necessary. At times, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned due to weather conditions, political, physical or other factors. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

PRICE GUARANTEE

We promise that our earliest published prices will always be the best and if we reduce our holiday price after your booking has been confirmed, we will pass this reduction on to you. Our price promise applies if any subsequent offer price is for an identical holiday, duration, location and date and does not cover any optional extras, flights or additional services.

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