

Trek the Cathar Trail

Tour Style: Guided trails
Destinations: France & Spain
Trip code: XLLDW
Trip Walking Grade: 4



HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

One for the history buffs and fans of Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code, this walk takes you through the Pyrenees mountains along the Cathar Trail – a 58-mile long-distance route that crosses from France into Spain. Explore an incredible lineup of ruined castles and chateaux that tell the tragic tale of the Cathars – a persecuted religious group destroyed by the Spanish Inquisition in the 13th century. Highlights include Chateau de Foix, the spa town of Ax-les-Thermes, and Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park – a mountainous wonderland with peaks that reach over 2,500 metres.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Full programme of guided walks led by local HF Holidays Leaders
- Comfortable accommodation
- Full-board
- All sightseeing and entrance fees (as per itinerary)
- Air-conditioned transport
- Return flights from the UK including hold baggage and airport transfers

HOLIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the stunning Pyrenees mountains on foot
- Visiting medieval towns, ruined castles, and charming chateaux
- Learning about the history of the Cathars
- Conquering one of Europe's most historic trails
- Discovering the spa town of Ax-les-Thermes
- Walking through the heart of Cadí-Moixeró Natural Park

TRIP SUITABILITY

This is a level 4 activity. 58 miles with 7-14 miles and up to 3,300 feet of ascent and 4,000 feet of descent in a day.

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.

You'll walk from Ariège to the Plateau de Sault before a 30-minute coach journey 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 3,000 feet (900m) of ascent and 2,700 feet (800m) 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 2,500 feet (750m) of ascent and 2,500 feet (750m) 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 Cadí. 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 3,700 feet (1,100m) of ascent and 3,700 feet (1,100m) of descent.

Day 5: Bellver De Cerdanya

Today, on the agenda, a nice loop on the heights of Bellver de Cerdanya. It allows you to discover the geological richness of the Sierra de Cadi and undoubtedly admire the wild vultures, these Pyrenean giants, from very close up.

7 miles (11km), with 2,000 feet (600m) of ascent and 2,000 feet (600m) 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 (15km), with 2,400 feet (700m) of ascent and 2,000 feet (600m) of descent.

Day 7: Gisclareny To Berga

The final chapter in this legendary journey leads us from Gisclareny (after a short transfer from Gosol to Gisclareny), 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 (400m) of ascent and 3,000 feet (900m) 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 run as a hotel by the Lons family for over half a century.

Le Chalet Or Hotel Restaurant Le Bellevue - Cathar Crossing

You will stay at one of the following small family-run hotels in Ax-les-Thermes: Le Chalet (2 nights) - The hotel has recently been refurbished, with light and airy rooms, and is renowned for its restaurant. Hotel Restaurant Le Bellevue (2 nights) - is a comfortable hotel located close to all the local amenities in Ax-les-Thermes.

Hotel Bellavista - Cathar Crossing

A family-run hotel (2 nights) from which you can enjoy the spectacular scenery of northern Catalonia. The hotel is located in the mountainous area of Cerdanya, part of the Spanish Pyrenees, just a short distance from the French border and Andorra. All rooms are outward-facing and en-suite with telephones and TV. Free Wi-Fi 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

This comfortable, family-run 2-star hotel is located just a few minutes' walk from the centre of town. All bedrooms have an en-suite bathroom and television. Facilities include: Sun terrace, coffee house, snack bar, bar & restaurant.

USEFUL HOLIDAY INFORMATION

Joining Instructions (With Flights)

Book your holiday 'with flights' and you can choose to depart from a range of UK airports* to your destination. For latest flight times and prices please call us on 0203-974-8865 or email reservations@hfholidays.co.uk

If you choose to book your flights with us, we automatically include return transfers between the destination airport and hotel.

Joining Instructions (Without Flights)

Alternatively, tailor your journey to suit you by booking your holiday 'without flights' and you'll have the freedom to book your own flights from your local airport.

If you choose this option, transfers are not included in the price. However, below are some suggestions to help you reach your destination:

Shared group transfer

You can still purchase a seat on our group airport transfer, but you must arrive in destination prior to the main group. It is your responsibility to book flights which allow enough time to meet our shared transfer.

Please note, all flight times are subject to change. If your arrival and/or departure time changes and no longer fits our group transfer, we will be unable to delay departure for you. Should this occur, we will refund you the cost of the transfer and you can either make your own way to the accommodation or we can book a private taxi transfer (at your expense). HF Holidays cannot be held responsible for your onward travel if you are unable to meet the transfer coach.

Private taxi transfer

Depending on your destination, we may be able to arrange a private taxi transfer for you. Please call us up to 5 weeks in advance to enquire about availability and costs for this option on 0203-974-8865.

*Subject to availability

Essential Information

It's best to be prepared for all weather conditions. To make it easier, here is a list of items you should consider packing.

Essentials

- Walking boots
- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof trousers
- Insulated jacket/top
- Walking clothing
- Walking socks (plus spares)
- Sunhat
- Gloves/mitts and warm hat
- Water bottle (minimum 2 litre capacity)
- Headtorch
- High-factor sunscreen (minimum SPF 30)
- Sunglasses with a dark lens
- Rucksack (15-30 litres)
- Mobile phone
- Personal first aid kit (containing your medication, blister plasters, etc.)
- Passport
- Visa (if applicable)
- Copy of your travel insurance policy
- UK Global Health Insurance Card (**formerly known as EHIC**)

Recommended

- Collapsible walking poles
- Swimwear and travel towel
- Snacks
- Dry bags
- Rubbish bags
- Insect repellent

Optional extras

- Camera
- Sit mat
- Flask for hot drinks
- Durable lunch box
- Gaiters
- GPS device

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

Travel Insurance

Travel 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.

We work with Campbell Irvine to provide you with competitive single and annual multi-trip insurance. Please see our website for more information and details of how to contact them for a quote: <https://www.hfholidays.co.uk/about-us/booking-information/insurance>.

For more information about healthcare abroad and its costs, please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/>.

If you are arranging your own travel insurance, please ensure it is adequate for your specific itinerary. You must

be covered for Guided trekking up to 2,517 metres (Portella Blanca Pass), helicopter rescue and repatriation to your home country.

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

Travel Insurance

Travel 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.

We work with Campbell Irvine to provide you with competitive single and annual multi-trip insurance. Please see our website for more information and details of how to contact them for a quote:

<https://www.hfholidays.co.uk/about-us/booking-information/insurance>.

For more information about healthcare abroad and its costs, please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/>.

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.

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.

Document produced: 15-06-2024

