



Hiking the Pyrenees

French and Spanish Pyrenees, 10-Day Option

July 11-20, 2008

Plan your arrival for July 10

Plan your departure for July 21

French Pyrenees, 6-Day Option

July 11-16, 2008

Plan your arrival for July 10

Plan your departure for midday July 17

Wilder than the Alps, the grand, sculpted mountains of the Pyrenees form the natural border between France and Spain. Splendid trails lead to the magnificent cirques, lake-spangled basins, and knife-edged summits of France's Pyrenees National Park. On the Spanish side follow trails that lead through the spectacular canyons of the Ordesa-Monte Perdido National Park, one of Europe's oldest. In 1997, the United Nations inscribed a portion of the French and Spanish Pyrenees near the French village of Gavarnie and the Spanish village of Torla on its list of World Heritage Sites. Here, nature over the eons has carved three stupendous glacial cirques including the renowned Cirque de Gavarnie and a 3,000 foot deep canyon called Ordesa—Spain's "Grand Canyon." Explore trails that take you into the heart of these "world class" natural wonders. You'll also explore the lush Marcadau Valley whose trails lead to high basins full of some of the most beautiful alpine lakes in the Pyrenees. Revel in a region where languages, food, and culture mix and flow. The Pyrenees are a feast for all your senses!

Day 1

Overnight in Cauterets

Lunch & dinner included

Meet in Pau and travel to the mountain town of Cauterets on the threshold of the Pyrenees National Park. Cauterets is your base for three nights. By vehicle, ascend the winding road to Pont d'Espagne ("Bridge to Spain"). Enjoy an afternoon warm-up hike by following a streamside path past a series of rushing cascades and waterfalls through beautiful montane woodlands back to Cauterets.

Day 2

Overnight in Cauterets

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Transfer to the Pont d'Espagne in the Pyrenees National Park. Hike past meadows, waterfalls, and rushing streams in the lush landscape of the exquisite Marcadau Valley. The nearly level terrain of the Cayan Plateau offers easy walking through meadows laced with winding streams and punctuated by tall pines. Marcadau is a corruption of the Spanish mercado, which means "market." The name reflects the importance of the valley as an ancient trading route across the Pyrenees. The Marcadau Valley was a crossing route for those on the medieval pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. Continue on to the Refuge Wallon at the junction of five mountain valleys close by the border with Spain. Gnarled pines grace the well-watered meadows around the refuge. A lovely stone chapel and a backdrop of high peaks completes the scene! Energetic hikers can undertake a strenuous 10-hour loop hike (known as the Circuit des Lacs) past a string of exquisite, rock-rimmed lakes. If you're lucky you may see wild chamois (called *isards* in the Pyrenees) or even the elusive *lammergeier* in flight.

Day 3

Overnight in Cauterets

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

This morning travel a short distance to la Frutière at the mouth of the Lutour Valley. A beautiful trail ascends the valley passing through lush, streamside meadows to arrive at the glistening waters of lovely Lac d'Estom. If you

desire, continue beyond the lake to the “lip” of the Cirque d’Estom-Soubiran, one of the most pristine high-country areas in the French Pyrenees. Trail access into the Cirque d’Estom-Soubiran is often not possible due to snow conditions, but if conditions permit safe passage, you can follow a marked path to Lac de Labas and Lac des Oulettes, two of several gem-like lakes set in this vast cirque. If entry into the cirque is not possible, you can follow the Sentier d’Arailié ascending open slopes to arrive at the Col de Arailié, a mountain pass that provides a trail connection with the neighboring Gaube valley.

Day 4

Overnight in Gavarnie

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Return to the Pont d’Espagne for a chance to explore the Vallée de Gaube which leads to the base of Vignemale—highest peak in the French Pyrenees. If the weather cooperates, you can gaze upon the peak that lured the 19th century Pyrenean mountaineer, Henry Russell, to climb it 33 times! Hike to the still waters of Lac de Gaube, the renowned “mirror of Vignemale,” hemmed in by mountain slopes. Ascend the increasingly open valley beyond Lac de Gaube and past the foaming Cascade Esplumouse to the Refuge des Oulettes. From here, you can enjoy a stunning view of the vertical north face of Vignemale. Return to the trailhead and continue by vehicle to Gavarnie. Our hotel in Gavarnie is situated “front and center” before the sheer walls of the stunning Cirque de Gavarnie. Settle in for a three-night stay. Hardy hikers can walk to Gavarnie by ascending beyond the Refuge des Oulettes to the Hourquette d’Ossoue, a lofty pass high on the shoulder of Vignemale. From the hourquette a trail descends into the Ossoue Valley which leads to Gavarnie.

Day 5

Overnight in Gavarnie

Breakfast & lunch included

Gavarnie trails beckon! Hike into the awe-inspiring Cirque de Gavarnie by following a switchbacking trail that ascends to the meadows of the Plateau de Pailla. Continue on the trail as it descends gradually into the Cirque de Gavarnie. Portions of this trail follow natural limestone ledges and are similar to the faja trails in Spain’s Ordesa-Monte Perdido National Park. For a more strenuous outing, you can hike to the lofty Hourquette d’Alans for views into wide and lonely Cirque d’Etaubé before making the descent into the Cirque de Gavarnie.

Day 6

Overnight in Gavarnie

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Transfer to the Col de Tentes, a mountain pass near the Spanish frontier. Hike to the Refuge Sarradets just below the legendary Brèche de Roland. If you’re sure of foot you can continue on a never-to-be-forgotten hike into the brèche itself. Stand in this enormous notch at the top of Gavarnie’s cirque wall and gaze over the magnificent Ordesa Canyon into Spain. Legend has it that the brèche was carved by the sword of Roland, nephew of Charlemagne, in the 8th century. SIX-DAY FRENCH PYRENEES TRIP OPTION CONCLUDES THIS DAY.

Day 7

Overnight in Torla

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Travel to the Spanish stone village of Torla at the mouth of Ordesa Canyon. You can choose to hike to Torla via the pass called the Port de Boucharo on one of the old pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. From the Port de Boucharo, the trail descends into Spain’s Ara River Valley. Near the valley floor are some wonderfully old specimens of the red-berried European yew (*Taxus baccata*)—called *tejo* in Spanish. The path eventually arrives at the picturesque stone bridge that spans the Ara River at San Nicolás de Bujaruelo. The path continues downstream through beautiful stands of white fir (*Abies alba*)—known as abeto in Spanish—to the mouth of the Bujaruelo Valley and Torla. Alternatively, you can travel to Torla by vehicle via the mountain pass known as the Col de Pourtalet. Torla is your base for three nights.

Day 8

Overnight in Torla

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

A brief shuttle ride transports you into the Ordesa Canyon with its 800 meter high glacier-carved walls. Hike to the spectacular Circo de Soaso by way of the main trail along the canyon floor. The trail passes through beautiful beech

forests and leads past the lovely Cascada de la Cueva (“waterfall of the cave”) and the stair-stepped cascades of the Gradas de Soaso. From the Circo de Soaso, you can retrace your steps to the trailhead or return via the Faja de Pelay—a natural limestone ledge that contours the south canyon wall about 2,000 feet above the floor of the canyon. The walk along the Faja de Pelay is one of the classic hikes in the Spanish Pyrenees—spectacular and dramatic and well within the reach of an experienced mountain walker. The views from the Faja de Pelay are magnificent and include Monte Perdido and the conspicuous notch of the *Brèche de Roland* (*Brecha de Roldán*, in Spanish). Across the canyon, the wall of the Muralla de la Fraucata rises sheer and imposing. Eventually the trail reaches the Refugio y Mirador de Calcilarruego from where the Senda de los Cazadores (“Hunter’s Path”) descends in a series of switchbacks to the valley floor.

Day 9

Overnight in Torla

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Explore the narrow defile of the Añisclo Canyon. Hike up to the mostly abandoned mountain hamlet of Sercue before beginning a descent to the floor of the Añisclo Canyon from Portiello. Explore the depths of the canyon where waterfalls plunge over limestone cliffs, and dark beech forests offer welcome shade. For a rugged adventure, you can follow a steeply ascending trail from the floor of Ordesa Canyon to gain the lofty Faja de las Flores, a natural, horizontal “groove” etched in canyon wall. Proceed along a trail set into this faja (“strip of land”) 3,000 feet above the floor of the canyon. This is truly a five-star hike and without doubt one of the most thrilling trail experiences available to hikers in Europe!

Day 10

Overnight in Pau

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Travel back to Pau, France via the Tunel de Bielsa. En route, stop for a hike at the remote mountain-top village of Tella. Pine, rosemary, lavender, and boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*)—known as *boj* in Spanish and *buis* in French—line the fragrant path as it loops by four stone chapels dating from the 11th to the 16th centuries. Take time to enjoy the peace of the surrounding mountains before continuing the journey to Pau. Lodging and a farewell dinner in Pau is included tonight as is your breakfast tomorrow.

Other Details about this Trip

French and Spanish Pyrenees, 10-Day Option

Trip Dates: July 11-20, 2008 (Trip Leaders: John Osaki & assistant)

Price: \$3,240

Single Room for entire trip: \$375

Meeting Point: Hotel in Pau, France on the morning of July 11. We suggest you spend the evening of July 10 in Pau. The cost of lodging for the evening of July 10 is not included in the trip price.

Departure Point: Tour services conclude after dinner in Pau on the evening of July 20. Your lodging for that evening and breakfast the following morning are included in the trip price. We suggest you plan your onward travel connections from Pau for July 21.

Accommodations: Ten nights total at small hotels in Cauterets, Gavarnie, Torla, and Pau. All rooms with private bath. Ten breakfasts, ten lunches, and nine dinners are included.

French Pyrenees, 6-Day Option

Trip Dates: July 11-16, 2008 (Trip Leaders: John Osaki & assistant)

Price: \$2,835

Single Room for entire trip: \$250

Meeting Point: Hotel in Pau, France on the morning of July 11. We suggest you spend the evening of July 10 in Pau. The cost of lodging for the evening of July 10 is not included in the trip price.

Departure Point: Tour services conclude after dinner in Gavarnie on the evening of July 16. However, your lodging for that evening, breakfast the following morning, and transfer to the rail station or airport in Pau on the morning of July 17 are included in the trip price.

Accommodations: Six nights total at small hotels in Cauterets, and Gavarnie. All rooms with private bath. Six breakfasts, six lunches, and five dinners are included.