

ITINERARY

01

THE VERY BEST OF THE PYRENEES

7 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

3 NIGHTS IN SPAIN

670km

Crossing the border into Spain, on this itinerary you will discover the biggest and best scenery in the Pyrenees : the highest peak, spectacular canyons and grandiose cirques which are World Heritage sites, the miracle that is Lourdes, the highest Observatory in Europe in the clearest of skies...

01. **The Huats lake at Cauterets Pont d'Espagne** in the National Park. More intimate than Lac de Gaube.
02. **The village of Torla** with the Ordesa canyon (a UNESCO World Heritage site) in the background.
03. **The Cirque de Gavarnie**, (a UNESCO World Heritage site), as viewed from the Courade plateau (a 30 minutes walk).

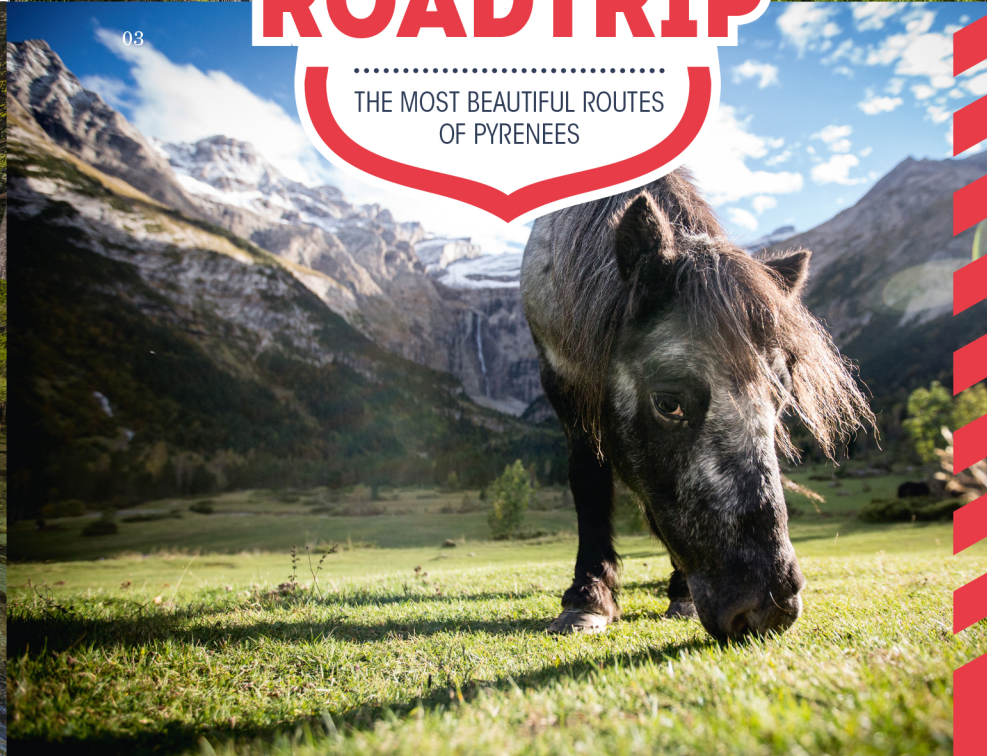
02



PYRENEES ROADTRIP

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ROUTES OF PYRENEES

03



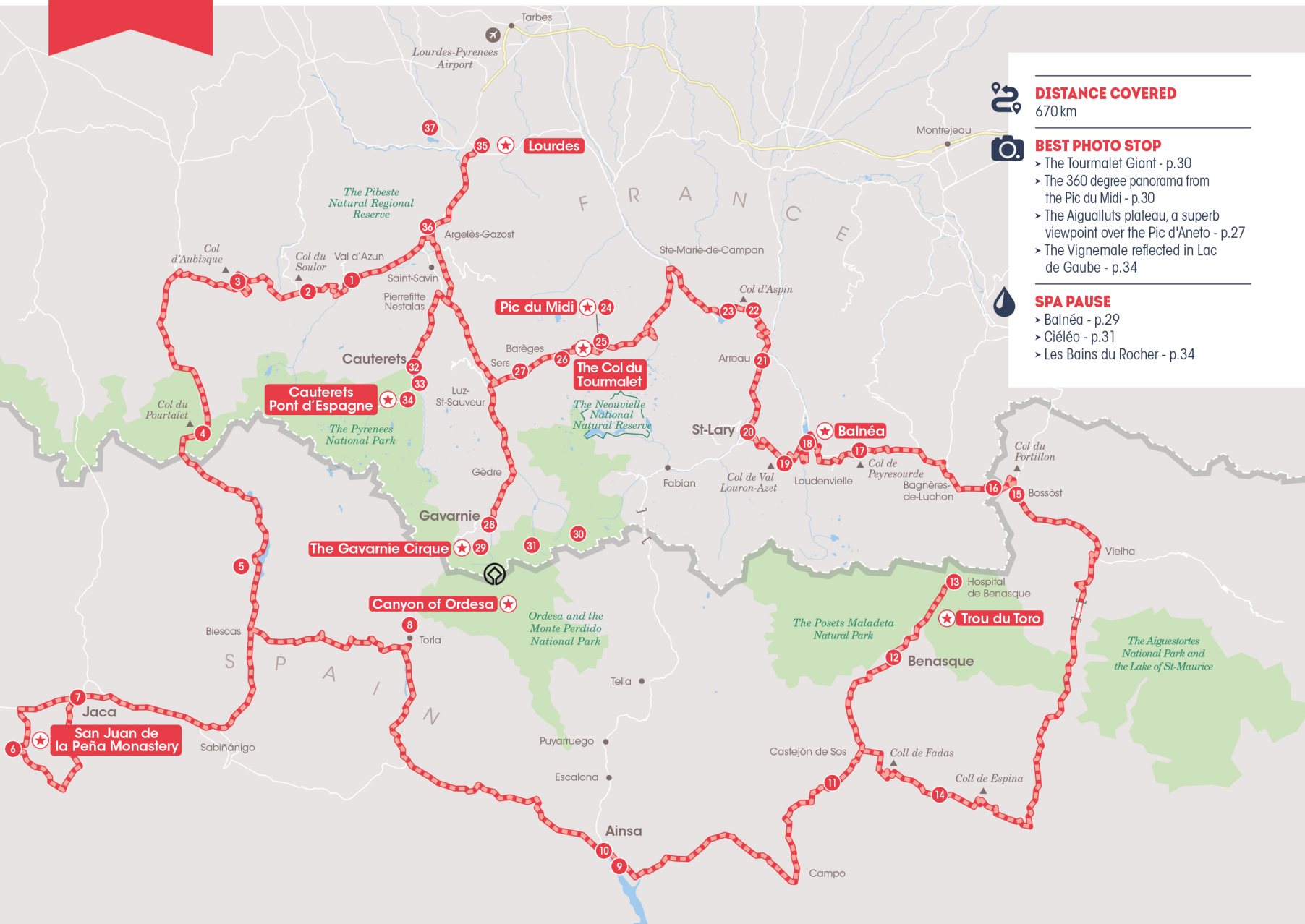
01



THE VERY BEST OF THE PYRENEES

7 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

- > **DAY 1:** LOURDES/JACA > **DAY 2:** JACA/ORDESA CANYON/AINSA
- > **DAY 3:** AINSA/BENASQUE/TROU DU TORO > **DAY 4:** BENASQUE/BALNÉA/SAINT-LARY
- > **DAY 5:** SAINT-LARY/PIC DU MIDI/GAVARNIE > **DAY 6:** GAVARNIE/CAUTERETS
- > **DAY 7:** CAUTERETS/CAUTERETS-PONT D'ESPAGNE/LOURDES > **DEPARTURE**



DISTANCE COVERED

670 km



BEST PHOTO STOP

- > The Tourmalet Giant - p.30
- > The 360 degree panorama from the Pic du Midi - p.30
- > The Aigualluts plateau, a superb viewpoint over the Pic d'Aneto - p.27
- > The Vignemale reflected in Lac de Gaube - p.34



SPA PAUSE

- > Balnéa - p.29
- > Cieléo - p.31
- > Les Bains du Rocher - p.34

THE VERY BEST OF THE PYRENEES

LOURDES/
JACA

Via
Bernués

180km/3h 53

Via Santa Cruz
de la Serós

158km/3h 17

DAY 1

Lourdes > Pourtalet mountain pass (Spain): 88km/1 h 57

> Leave Lourdes airport or for those coming by car leave the A64 autoroute at the junction for Lourdes. > At Lourdes follow Argeles-Gazost on the D821 (23km/12 mins). > At Argeles follow Arrens-Marsous on the D918. > Follow the D918 to the Col du Soulor (29 km/50 mins), then onto the Col d'Aubisque (2km/4mins). > Follow the road as it descends the Col d'Aubisque, now in the Pyrenees Atlantique department, to the village of Eaux Bonnes. > As you leave the village turn left towards Spain on the D934. > Passage of the Col du Pourtalet (44km/51 mins) to enter Spain, the D934 becomes the A136..

Pourtalet mountain pass > Jaca: 54 km/58 mins

> Descend the Tena valley to Jaca (54km/58mins).

Jaca > Monasterio San Juan de la Peña (via Bernués): 38km/1 h

Jaca > Monasterio San Juan de la Peña (via Santa Cruz de la Serós): 13km/16 mins

> Cross Jaca and follow the Pamplona direction, and San Juan de la Peña Monastery by the Col d'Oroel and Bernués (38km/1h). > Or the direction San Juan de la Peña Monastery by Santa Cruz de la Serós (13km/16mins).

GOOD TO KNOW: *If your departure point or your plane's arrival time do not allow you to complete the whole of this itinerary on day 1, we can offer a hotel around Jaca or in the Tena valley (we will adapt according to your timings). You can then visit the Monastery of San Juan de la Peña the following day before heading to the Ordesa canyons.*

For this first day you will leap straight into some dramatic scenery... on the border crossing, and the spectacular Soulor, Aubisque and the Pourtalet mountain pass, it is a great introduction to the Pyrenees. You will discover your first Pyrenean marvel, the Monastery of San Juan de la Peña.

The Azun valley 1

A lovely green valley dotted with picturesque villages of stone houses with their slate roofs. It has strong farming traditions and the local cheese is famous.

www.valdazun.com

▲ The Soulor mountain pass 2

A beautiful view from this 1474 m high mountain pass. The surrounding high mountain pastures are grazed by cows, horses and sheep. It is a great spot to observe vultures and other birds of prey. The Soulor is also home to the only collective cheese maturing facility in the Hautes Pyrenees. Jojo tends to over 3000 cheeses brought to him by the farmers of the Arbeost valley and the Bearn.

▲ The Aubisque mountain pass 3

After a further 10km you are on the top of the Aubisque mountain pass at 1709 metres of altitude. The top is grassy and rolling and offers fine views over the Ouzom valley and the surrounding peaks. The descent is in a series of zig-zags and passing through several tunnels. You will no doubt see the sheep, cows and horses which roam in total freedom.

▲ The Pourtalet mountain pass 4

At 1794 m of altitude this mountain pass is located between the peaks of the Pourtalet and the sharp summit of Aneou to the west. The view from the top is vast, for Count Henry Russell the colours of the gentle rolling scenery on the Spanish side offer a first taste of Africa.

★ THE MONASTERY OF SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA 6

An obligatory stop for the pilgrims of Santiago de Compostella

After your descent of the lovely Tella valley we now take to the higher ground on the Sierra de Peña, a great area to admire the Pyrenees and the kingdom of Aragon. As you leave Jaca in the Pamplona direction there are signs indicating San Juan de la Peña by two routes. Do not hesitate in taking the longer itinerary, on your left by the Oreol and Bernues mountain pass. The road has more zig-zags but it passes through some wonderful scenery and offers many superb panoramas over Aragon. It is a great way to reach the ancient monastery of San Juan de la Peña. It is built into the red rock which almost seems to be eating it up, or maybe just protecting it. The monastery is a masterpiece of Romanic art, and is unique in its style in the Pyrenees.

The site actually has two monasteries: the lower older one from the 11th and 12th centuries, and the higher newer and baroque one from the 17th century, which houses two historical information centres.

📍 Follow the Pamplona direction, signs will show San Juan de la Peña. There is parking at the newer monastery. The older one is reached on foot.

www.monasteriosanjuan.com

🚶 A short walk on the balcony of the Pyrenees

From the parking pass behind the new monastery, follow the walls of the building, the start point for the route is at the angle of the building. Follow the path to the first junction then turn right and follow the alley to the 'balcony over the Pyrenees', a magnificent viewpoint with a panoramic view over the range from the Pic d'Orhy in the west to Monte Perdido in the east. Return by the same route.

🕒 Length: 20 mins there and back.

🌙 Evening and night in Jaca and its surroundings 7

📍 WORTH A DETOUR

The Animal Park of Lacuniacha at Piedrafita de Jaca 5

This animal park is situated in a magnificent forest at 1380 m of altitude. Follow the waymarked trail to discover bison, deer, wolves, lynx, horses... you can watch them eat, sleep, looking after their young ones, there are many fine viewpoints over the surrounding countryside.

The circuit takes about 3 hours but one could easily spend a whole day in the park without needing to complete the circuit. There are picnic spots and a cafe serving drinks, sandwiches, coffee, ice-creams...

📍 22665 Piedrafita de Jaca.
As you descend the Pourtalet mountain pass (at kilometre 19 / 22 mins), turn right towards Piedrafita de Jaca on the HU-V-6102
www.lacuniacha.es

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> **The Biarritz at Jaca**

At the corner of the street, with its red frontage and beautiful terrace, this restaurant specialises in charcoal-grilled meats. Francis is the 'Asador' who officiates in the dining room, and will ensure you enjoy your meal. Aragonese cuisine is well represented.

📍 Av. Primer Viernes de Mayo, 12- 22700 Jaca
☎ +34 974 361 632

> **The Tasca de Ana at Jaca**

This traditional 'Tapera' restaurant will surprise you with the diversity of its menu - tapas, raciones, pinxos, tostadas... the complete art of tapas is here to be savoured in a convivial setting. You must try the house speciality, the 'Rodolfo', a breaded prawn served with its own dipping sauce. The decoration is typically Spanish with stone walls, wooden beams, painted and tiled ceiling. The restaurant is very popular and does not take reservations, so get there early!

📍 C/ Ramiro I, 3. - 22700 Jaca
☎ +34 974 363 621

JACA/ORDESA CANYON/AINSA

DAY 2

101 km/1 h 59

Jaca > Torla (Ordesa canyon): 57 km/1 h 05

> Leave Jaca towards the east direction Sabiñanigo. > Before entering Sabiñanigo turn left towards Biescas on the N260. > Cross Biescas, turn right and follow the N260 towards Torla.

Torla > Ainsa: 44 km/54 mins

> Leave Torla on the N260 towards Broto. > Pass through Broto, continue on the N260 to Ainsa.

After having admired it from afar, from the balcony of the Pyrenees, today you will enter into the very heart of the canyon, whose immense sheer walls remind one of the Grand Canyon in Colorado. Together with the **Gavarnie-Monte Perdido** range it is a World Heritage site, once you have feasted your eyes on its magnificent and colossal beauty one can see why. **Gavarnie and Ordesa**, on opposite sides of the same mountain are the two most spectacular sites of the whole range.

THE GREAT CANYON OF ORDESA ⑧

A World Heritage site

This is a place to explore on foot, over and over again...

One can walk along the canyon floor, following the rio, in the shade of the luxuriant vegetation. One can also take the high ground and follow one of the famous balcony routes like the Faja de Pelay, the Racun, or Las Flores. Enjoy the panoramas with breathtaking views over the whole canyon and the magnificent flora. These are very special routes and unique in Europe.

📍 Go to Torla. In the height of the season the road to the canyon is closed at Torla, a frequent shuttle bus service connects Torla with the parking at La Pradera, the starting point for most walks.



The Ordesa Valley

From the parking at La Pradera follow the wide trail that leads towards the World Heritage site monument. Follow the GR11 alongside the river Arazas. You will soon reach the Mirador de Aripas waterfalls. Water is ever present along this route on the canyon floor. You will pass close to the Cueva and Estrecho waterfalls. The footpath then leaves the forest. Above you are the gigantic canyon walls of the Sierra de las Cutas. You will soon reach the famous Gradas de Soaso, a natural staircase shaped by the waters, a series of small waterfalls as if created for giants en-route for Monte Perdido. Progressively you will reach the head of the canyon and the Cirque de Soaso. Take the time to make a small detour to admire the beautiful Soaso waterfall (the 'Horse's Tail').

☉ Length: Allow 5 hours return.
Incline : 450 m.

A shorter option

Those who do not wish to go as far as the Cirque de Soaso can stop at the Estrecho waterfall then descend towards the Aripas bridge beneath the balcony. Cross the bridge to return to your starting point by the opposite bank of the river.

☉ Length: Allow 2 hours return.



The Faja de Pelay

Follow the itinerary of the Ordesa valley to the Soaso waterfall. At the end of the canyon you will start your return by the Faja de Pelay on the other side of the river after crossing the Soaso bridge. As you have climbed to 1900m there is a superb view over Monte Perdido (3,335m) and the Soum de Ramond. The footpath runs horizontally along this natural balcony for nearly 8k. You will pass through pines and cross grasslands covered in many alpine flowers including Edelweiss. At the end of the walk you will come across the small hunters' refuge (Calcilarruego). A platform construction makes this a fabulous viewpoint, opposite are the Cirques of Carriata and Cotatuero carved into the canyon walls. As a backdrop are all the 3000m peaks of Gavarnie, a marvellous spectacle. To the west under the pyramid shaped Mondarruego is the Senda de la Cazadores (the hunters'

path), the only difficult part of the route with a steep and sinuous 500m descent back to the parking, take care.

☉ Length: Allow 6 - 8 hours return.
Incline approx: 700m.
Waymarked trails.

The Ainsa lake 9

When you arrive in Ainsa do not go straight to the higher town. We recommend that you see the magnificent lake with its turquoise waters, it is a great spot for a swim. A single bell tower pokes out from the lake, the last remnants of a flooded village. A surprising sight.

The Plaza Mayor in Ainsa 10

You can relive the times of the Reconquistadors in the Plaza Mayor in Ainsa, the capital of the kingdom of Sobrarbe! Situated between the mountains and the plains it was here that Muslims and Christians fought. The high town of Ainsa is situated on a natural promontory and is surrounded by walls, its bell towers resembles a minaret, testimony to its past. The Plaza is monumental and entirely cobbled, the dwellings are connected by arcades. During the summer the balconies of the ochre facades are decorated with hundreds of hanging flower baskets, a lovely place for a drink on the terrace of one of the many cafes.

📍 A large car-park is situated at the entry to the higher town.

Evening and night in Ainsa 10



MIX AND MATCH

Combine with «The Sierra de Guara». A one-day adventure exploring the Sierra, which has 70 canyons. p.109

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> **El Duende at Torla**

This is a famous restaurant of the region and very popular. The cooking is excellent and the food well presented. The decor of rustic chic reflects the local village architecture. Whether your preference is for meat or fish, you will not be disappointed. We recommend the house special - rib of beef.

It is best to book, and in high season at least two days ahead.

📍 C/ de la Iglesia. - 22376 Torla

☎ +34 974 486 032

> **La Cocinilla at Torla**

A bright and spacious restaurant, a fine stone building with a rustic chic decor. The restaurant specialises in meats cooked over an oak fire, you can eat in the dining room or on the terrace. All the produce is local from the Broto valley.

📍 Calle Fatás - 22376 Torla

☎ +34 974 486 243

> **La Carrasca Tapas Bar at Ainsa**

At the corner of the old village square, this tapas bar immediately whets your appetite. The colourful and varied 'Pinxos', 'Raciones' and 'Tapas' displayed on the bar are a feast for the eyes. The cooking is 100% local. You can eat on the pretty terrace or inside seated on wine barrels. Expect a cheerful welcome.

📍 Plaza Mayor, 18 - 22 330 Ainsa

☎ +34 974 500 021

> **Callizo at Ainsa**

Located in the Plaza Mayor of Ainsa this restaurant offers all the flavours of Aragon. Summer truffles, beef from the Broto valley. Only two tasting menus are available but what menus! Each dish is a work of art and promises an explosion of flavour created by the chef. It is a superb gastronomic experience.

📍 Plaza Mayor s/n - 22330 Ainsa

☎ +34 974 500 385

AINSA/BENASQUE/ TROU DU TORO

DAY 3

61 km/1 h 17

>Leaves Ainsa towards the south on the N260 in the direction of Arro, Campo et Castejón de Sos. >Before you enter Castejón de Sos turn left off the N260 to take the A139 towards Benasque (Venasque).

*Get going early as today you are going to meet the master of the Pyrenees, the **Pic d'Aneto**, at 3,404m it is the highest in the Pyrenees. It is a summit as legendary as Mont Blanc and equally is a mecca for mountaineers. Even though it is not a difficult ascent, we are not proposing that you climb it! But feast your eyes on this mystical mountain, the Trou de Toro literally swallows all the waters coming off its glacier.*

Défilé de Ventamillo 11

Leave Ainsa on the N260 towards Campo then Benasque.

Just before the vilage of Seira take a look to your left, there is a lovely ancient bridge over the river Esera, it has a stone arch and steep sides. As you leave Seira you will be entering 'Congost de Ventamillo', an impressive gorge of several kilometres in length. It is not that high but is very narrow with surprising steep walls.

Benasque 12

Benasque is a typical Pyrenean vilage with its stone houses and slate roofs. Its setting is extraordinary, surrounded by the

highest peaks of the Posets - Maladeta natural park, the view from the village is magnificent and much loved by mountaineers. The old village is charming with its narrow cobbled streets, its typical houses, and of course its cafes to enjoy some excellent pinchos!

www.benasque.com

★ THE TROU DU TORO Ⓝ

Posets – Maladeta Natural Park

The waters of the Aneto glacier disappear into the Trou de Toro to reappear on the other side of the mountain, in the Eye of Jupiter. Even the names evoke poetry and mystery, one could believe that one is back in ancient Greece. But it is not a myth and the place is fantastic. Situated in the very heart of the Posets – Maladeta natural park, the Trou de Toro is only accessible on foot. It is an easy walk of 1h15 return.

📍 From Benasque (Venasque) take the road to the benasque baths. After the road which descends to the baths take the next right towards "Hospital de Benasque", and the parking of the Llano de l'Espital and la Besurta. In the high season the road is closed at Llano de l'Espital, but you can reach the parking at la Besurta by shuttle bus.

🚶 **The Trou du Toro (or the Forau d'Aigualluts)**

From the parking at la Besurta follow the S2 footpath towards the Rencluse refuge. At a junction continue on the S2, the trail passes in front of a cabin and then climbs towards a large plateau at the end of which is the Trou de Toro (or the Forau d'Aigualluts). Make the extra effort to reach the Aigualluts plateau from where you can admire the Aigualluts waterfall with the glacier and the summit of Aneto behind. Take a photo for the social media, you will make a lot of people jealous!

Return by the same route.

🕒 Length: 1h15. Incline: 140 metres.

🚶 **The Toro mountain pass Lake**

Follow the previous route to the Aigualluts plateau then cross the plateau and follow the trail which goes up the Escalat valley. The steep slope of the first section soon vents out as you enter the small valley to eventually reach the head of the valley at Molla

d'Escaleta (2,175m). From this plateau the trail to cross the Torro mountain pass (2,241m) and to reach the lake of the same name on the other side. This north side is the border with Catalunya.

Return by the same route.

🕒 Length: 3h15. Incline: 390m.

🌙 Evening and night in Benasque 12

📍 WORTH A DETOUR

The village of Ancilles

Here all the streets are cobbled, every house has its interior courtyard and is Renaissance style doorway, and all is beautifully conserved. Too charming for words!

📍 At 1.6km from Benasque.

🍴 RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> La parilla at Benasque

The colourful facade and the hanging baskets of geraniums welcome you to this family restaurant. A young generation of chefs create wonders with locally sourced ingredients. Truffles, ceps, game... one eats local and seasonal produce. For desserts one must try the "abuela" (grandmother!) Fantastic value.

📍 Carretera de Francia s/n - 22440 Benasque.
☎ +34 974 551 134

> Ansils at Benasque

You will feel at home chez Maria! The dining room with its diamond shaped ceiling is unusual. The cooking is inventive and cleverly blends locally sourced ingredients with mediterranean flavours. Each dish is a surprise. You must keep some space for their famous desserts!

📍 Calle - 22440 Benasque.
☎ +34 974 551 150

BENASQUE/BALNÉA/ SAINT-LARY

DAY 4

162 km/3 h 27

Benasque > Bossòst: 95 km/1 h 54

> Leave Benasque in the direction of Castejón de Sos. Follow the N260 towards Laspaules. Continue for 14.8km then turn left on the N230 towards Vielha. Cross through Vielha and continue on the N230 towards France and Bossòst.

Bossòst > Loudenvielle (Balnéa): 46 km/1 h

> Leave Bossòst towards France, Eth Portillon (the Col du Portillon). > You enter France at the Portillon mountain pass (14km/14mins). > Descend the mountain, pass through Saint Mamet then Bagnères-de-Luchon. As you leave Bagnères-de-Luchon turn left towards the Peyresourde mountain pass (26km/37mins). > Cross the pass and descend to Estarville. > Turn off the descent to the left towards Loudenvielle (6km/9mins).

Loudenvielle > Saint-Lary: 21 km/33 mins

> Leave Loudenvielle towards Genos (2km/3mins). > At Genos follow the direction of the Col de Val Louron-Azet then left to Saint-Lary (19km/30mins).

*This is the longest day of your road trip, but the itinerary takes you through magnificent scenery. There are 5 cols or mountain passes on the programme so many superb panoramas to enjoy. Half way along the route we suggest a stop at **Bossòst**, a pretty village much appreciated by the French from over the border who enjoy shopping here. It could be the ideal lunch stop. And as you reach journey's end a reward awaits... a relaxing and soothing spa bath at the **Balnéa** spa, in the open air, surrounded by mountain peaks.*

A little corner of Ireland 16

After leaving Castejón de Sos and Bisaurri you will reach the Fades mountain pass with fabulous views. From here and to the Espina mountain pass the route passes through high mountain plateaux, a last chance to admire some of the magnificent summits. This traverse across rolling grasslands reminds one of the Ireland or Scotland, but in the heart of the Pyrenees.

Bossòst 16

This is the last village before crossing the border, it has many restaurants and shops which are favoured by the French.

The Garonne river traverses the village, its source is not far. Take the time for a stroll around its narrow streets. The village is situated just 20km from Luchon by the Portillon mountain pass.

▲ The Portillon mountain pass 16


With its modest altitude (1239m) and its few zig-zags the Portillon mountain pass offers an easy route from Spain (Bossòst) into France (Luchon). The road passes through beech and pine forests.

▲ The Peyresourde mountain pass 17

Leave Luchon in the direction of the Peyresourde mountain pass. The pass is wide and the view magnificent. Do stop at the famous wooden cafe for a crepe, just 50 cents each, 12 for €4.50, go for it! Whilst the patron is making the crepes he will show you his collection of Chinese puzzles. But we had better get going... as you continue up the pass there are many interesting villages along the way, each has its own treasures - Roman chapels, precious treasures, superb frescos to thank God for the rewarding exchange of goods, mainly leather and wool with Spain, taking place after the discovery of the New World.

The Genos Loudenvielle lake ¹⁸

As you come down off the Col at the village of Estarvielle drop down to the valley bottom and the genos Loudenvielle lake. There are many lovely walks along the water's edge.

 *There is an circuit of an hour maximum and on the flat. But take the time to climb to the towers of Genos and Loudenvielle to enjoy the view. A local legend says that an underground passage connects them both.*


 Yellow waymarkings.  Lenght: 1 h.

★ BALNÉA ¹⁹

The premier spa centre in the French Pyrenees

It is finally time to slip into the arming waters of the Balnéa spa. The view from the waters is of 3000m peaks dressed like a wall as if to protect the quiet of the valley. Admire this view from the soothing warm waters of the outdoor lagoons, remembering that just a few hours ago you were up amongst these summits.

2 hours pass. Massages by reservation.

 On the shore of the Genos Loudenvielle lake.
www.balnea.fr

▲ The Val Louron-Azet mountain pass ¹⁹

After this relaxing stop you take to the road for one last mountain pass- the Val Louron mountain pass. At the top the road passes through vast pastures, a favourite take-off



point for paragliders and hanggliders. The descent off the pass will bring you to Saint-Lary in a famous Pyrenean valley and a luxurious stop for the night.

🌙 Evening and night in Saint-Lary ²⁰

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS



> Er Occitan at Bossòst

A real gastronomic experience at a great price. A creative cuisine mixing Catalan, local market produce and international influences. A warm welcome.

 66, Calle Mayor - 25550 Bossòst.
 +34 973 64 73 66

> La Grange at Saint-Lary

Selected by Michelin inspectors "a restaurant chic and welcoming with a strong mountain ambience. The food is tasty and flavourful, made from the best local ingredients, trout tartare, local lamb chops, plum tarts... a very good restaurant."

 13, Route d'Autun - 65170 Saint-Lary-Soulan.
 +335 62 40 07 14

SAINT-LARY/PIC DU MIDI / GAVARNIE

DAY 5

93 km/2 h 07

Saint-Lary > Pic du Midi : 51 km/1 h 07

> Leave Saint-Lary and follow the RD929 towards Arreau (12km/17 mins). > As you leave Arreau turn left on to the Col d'Aspin (16km/22 mins). > Pass over and descend the Col and continue to Sainte-Marie-de-Campan (8km/10 mins). > Turn left on to the Col du Tourmalet, continue to La Mongie (18km/23 mins).

Pic du Midi > Gavarnie : 42 km/1 h

> Leave La Mongie and continue up the Col du Tourmalet (4km/6 mins) then descend to Luz-Saint-Sauveur (19km/24 mins). In Luz turn left in the Gavarnie direction, keep going until you reach Gavarnie village (19km/30 mins).

Our adventure continues and today holds many surprises. From **Saint-Lary** follow the RD929 towards Arreau to reach the **Pic du Midi** by crossing the **Aspin mountain pass**. After a thrilling cable-car ride you enjoy the greatest panorama in the Pyrenees from the top at nearly 3,000 metres. You then cross the famous **Tourmalet mountain pass**, scene of so many dramas of the Tour de France before spending the night in the sensational setting of **Gavarnie**. But do not be impatient, you will have plenty of time tomorrow to discover this World Heritage site.

Arreau 21

Situated where the Neste d'Aure and Louron rivers meet, Arreau is a typical Pyrenean village which merits a halt for a cafe after admiring its famous market hall, the half-timbered houses, its castle and church. As soon as you leave Arreau turn left on to the Aspin mountain pass. This road is regularly used by the Tour de France, it initially climbs gently than more abruptly after the village of Aspin Aure to the top at 1,489m.

▲ The Aspin mountain pass 22

It is wilder, less visited and lower than many of the neighbouring passes yet the Aspin offers a great itinerary with probably the widest panorama of all from the top. The summit is a protected site, with no buildings, just cows and horses grazing. There is a parking to pull in to to admire the view including the Pic du Midi, the Arbizon and the Aure valley. The gentle terrain at the top is perfect for a walk along the ridge. As you leave the parking there is a panoramic walk to the Pla del Naoou along the ridge to the south, it opens up wonderful views into the Aure and Campam valleys. To the north the footpaths lead to the Beyrede mountain pass and the Signal de Bassia.

The Payolle lake 23

The descent off the Aspin is through grasslands and pine forest. At the bottom are the ancient marble quarries of Payolle, whose marble was used at Versailles, Grand Central station and the Empire State building no less!

A little further on is the Payolle lake surrounded by a pine forest, a lovely place for a stroll where you will most certainly come across a family of cows enjoying the lush grass in this famous grazing area.

🔗 MIX AND MATCH

Combine with «The Tour of Baronnie». A one-day adventure exploring a secret world of hills and valleys. p.105

★ THE PIC DU MIDI 24

The most beautiful view in the world

After leaving the Payolle lake head towards Sainte-Marie-de-Campan, in the centre of the village turn left on to the Tourmalet mountain pass and follow it to La Mongie. Stop in La Mongie and climb aboard your starship, the cable-car that takes you to the summit of the Pic du Midi, the castle in the sky. In reality it is a working stellar observatory, scientists live up here to scrutinise the skies, study the sun and the galaxies. The Americans mapped the moon from here before the first lunar landing.

🕒 Allow at least 2 hours to fully enjoy your Pic du Midi visit.

📍 In La Mongie, on the road to the Tourmalet mountain pass. www.picdumidi.com

★ THE TOURMALET MOUNTAIN PASS 25

A mythical summit

4km from the cable-car station is the famous Tourmalet mountain pass. At 2115 m it is the highest road pass in the Pyrenees.

📷 Selfie with the Giant 25

On the top of the Tourmalet you will find a 3m high sculpture, Octave, named after the first rider to cross the Tourmalet in

1910 (Octave Lapize). It represents a rider climbing 'out of the saddle' and is one of the 9 elements of the 'Tour de France sculpture' at the A64 autoroute services between Tarbes and Pau. At the end of each autumn the Giant comes down from the Tourmalet to be taken back up in procession accompanied hundreds of cyclists each June.

The Laquette chairlift ²⁶

The chairlift allows access to a lovely high plateau and the La Laquette cafe, there are many splendid walks and waymarked mountain bike descents. Bikes can be hired and can be taken on the chairlift.

📍 At Tournaboup parking, 3km from Baresges on the road to the Tourmalet mountain pass.

The CIELéo spa centre in Baresges ²⁷

A fantastic space, spa waters at 34C under a huge glass-domed ceiling, with massages jets, geysers... it is a feast for both the eyes and the body. There are also showers, steam baths and a huge jacuzzi bathed in the light from the glass dome.

2 hours pass. Massages by reservation.

📍 In Baresges on the west side of the Tourmalet mountain pass, going down towards Luz-Saint-Sauveur.

www.cieleo-baresges.com

Evening and night in Gavarnie ²⁸



A LOVELY DIVERSION

> The Creperie at Saint-Justin (Sers)

Beautifully positioned on a promontory with views over the whole Tourmalet valley and over Luz and the Ardiden massif this little creperie is really worth the visit. Sit on the terrace and enjoy the crepes, Jean-Louis and Gwenaelle, the owners have many stories to tell and great advice on places to visit to offer.

📍 Access from the footbridge in the centre of Baresges (40mins walk) or from the village of Sers, drive through the village and park after 500m, the path climbs for 700m to reach St-Justin.

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> The Auberge des Trois Pics Chez Germaine at Payolle

A typical mountain auberge, no frills, known for its meats cooked over a beech fire, its garbure and myrtille tart.

📍 Lake of Payolle – 65710 Campan.

☎ +335 62 91 81 10

> Lunch at the Pic du Midi

Marc Berger, the chef; "Cooking at altitude is a real challenge, water boils at 92C, the air dries out the food very quickly, the perception of flavour changes too at altitude, and we can only cook by electricity. In these very unusual conditions, my team daily rise to the challenge in our restaurant by offering a range of original dishes made from quality produce, the same goes for our fast-food outlet".

📍 Pic du Midi (access from La Mongie)

> The Hotel - Restaurant

La Breche de Roland in Gedre
The building is one of the finest in Gedre and has been carefully restored. The personality of the owners Odile and Philippe reflects their lovely building, joyous and warm. The interior is refined and the cooking is gourmet.

📍 65120 Gèdre.

☎ +335 62 92 48 54

GAVARNIE/ CAUTERETS

DAY 6
50 km/1 h 18

> Leave Gavarnie heading towards Luz-Saint-Sauveur on the RD921 (20 km). > Take the turning for Sassis/D12. > Continue for 2 km. > At the junction turn left towards Lourdes/D921. > Continue for 9 km. > At the roundabout take the 2nd left to Cauterets/D921. > Follow to Cauterets for 11 km, then Cauterets to Pont d'Espagne for another (7 km).

*Today is the day for the big show! With a ticket to meet a world famous celebrity - the **Cirque de Gavarnie**. It will be a day full of emotion. The cirque is one of the great natural wonders, its immensity is staggering, everybody can only stare in admiration and feel humbled by its enormity and great beauty. At the end of the day you will be in Cauterets ready for the best seats for the Garden of Eden of the Pyrenees: Cauterets Pont d'Espagne.*

★ THE CIRQUE DE GAVARNIE 29

A World Heritage site

Firstly the village, lively and charming and then at the end of the street it appears... It is now that you will be spellbound and words inadequate. The master wordsmith Victor Hugo described it as "a coliseum of nature". With an easy 30 minute walk along the river bank and across the Courade plateau you will reach the orientation point for the Cirque. You can do this on foot, horseback or mule. Go on a bit further and you will reach the Hostellerie de Cirque. From here you can really appreciate the sheer size of the cliffs and admire the longest waterfall in France. But what about the other Cirques?

www.gavarnie.com

The Cirque de Troumouse 30

Leave Gavarnie on the D921 towards Gedre, just before the village turn right on to the D922 Direction Cirque de Troumouse and the Heas valley. The road leads directly into the Cirque de Troumouse. Once up and inside the Cirque you will not believe your eyes! Troumouse is gigantic, a Goliath, even bigger

than Gavarnie. The famous 18th century explorer Ramond de Carbonnières estimated it could hold 10 million people! Another curiosity is the rolling grasslands within the Cirque which are a favourite playground for marmots. So after the famous Gavarnie and the gigantic Troumouse it is time to visit the third Cirque, the solitary Estaubé.

📍 On leaving Gavarnie follow the D921 towards Gedre. Just before the village turn right onto the D922 towards Cirque de Troumouse.

The Cirque d'Estaubé 31

As you descend from Troumouse and after passing through Héas, turn left towards the Lac des Gloriettes. There is parking at the lake. It is a superb easy 2 hour walk to reach the Cirque, there is also a waymarked circuit around the lake, allow 1h30. The area is famous for its superb variety of wild flowers.

The Gloriettes lake at the bottom of the valley leading to the Cirque is accessible by car.

📍 Descend from Troumouse, pass Héas, then turn left towards the Lac des Gloriettes.

The Gavarnie cemetery 28

The little cemetery at Gavarnie, next to the church, houses the graves of many great Pyrenean explorers. Amongst them are Laurent and Hippolyte Passet, two brothers, and also their sons Henri and above all Célestin. He is the great hero of Pyrenean exploration and mountaineering. For over 30 years he made many first ascents culminating in his great triumph on the 7th August 1889 when he climbed the redoubtable Couloir de Gaube, a climb which was then not repeated for 44 years. He had to cut 1,300 steps into the ice to do it.

📍 Gavarnie - next to the church.

🌙 Evening and night in Cauterets 32

WORTH A DETOUR

The footpath between the Tentes mountain pass and the Port de Boucharou

A very easy walk, on the level, which takes you into Spain! Fabulous views over the 3000m peaks of the Cirque de Gavarnie. The path is just 1.5km long and has a sign board at the start explaining the geology, history and local legends.

📍 *From Gavarnie village take the road to the ski resort, continue to the parking at the Tentes mountain pass (about 10 km).*

The Breche de Roland

It is a 2 hours walk over difficult terrain from the Port de Boucharou to reach the Sarradets refuge, proper mountain equipment is essential, then less than an hour to reach the Breche and fabulous views into the Spanish Ordesa.

Notre Dame des Neiges

A short walk of 20 mins to reach the statue of Notre Dame de Neiges, from where there is a great view over Gavarnie village and the Cirque. There is also a great view along the Ossoue valley towards the Vignemale and its glacier.

📍 *Take the road towards the ski resort, pull into the parking at the Grange de Holle refuge after 1.5km.*

The Panorama from the Pic des Tentes

From the parking at the Pic des Tentes a trail leads up to the Pic des Tentes, a round grassy summit, allow 30 minutes.

The view over the surrounding summits is breathtaking, many of whom are over 3,000m - the Marboré, the Taillon, the Vignemale, with a great view to the Breche de Roland too. One can even see the Pic du Midi in the distance.

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

➤ **Auberge de la Munia at Héas**
A fabulous setting close to the Chapelle Notre-Dame d'Héas. On the menu - local garbure Bigourdan, mutton casserole with Madiran, myrtille clafouti...

📍 Héas - 65120 Gèdre - ☎ +335 62 92 48 39

➤ **The Hostellerie du Cirque at Gavarnie**
An hour walk from Gavarnie village but what a setting! Situated literally

beneath the mighty walls of the Cirque with a great view over the waterfall. Snacks and drinks at very reasonable prices.

📍 65120 Gavarnie - ☎ +335 62 92 48 02

➤ **The Abri de Benquès at Cauterets**
Food to please the eyes and the tastebuds! A huge choice of carefully prepared dishes, taster dishes served on slate to whet your appetite. Recommended by the Michelin guide.

📍 In Cauterets at La Raillère on the way to Pont d'Espagne.

☎ +335 62 92 50 15

CAUTERETS/CAUTERETS-PONT D'ESPAGNE/LOURDES

DAY 7

45 km/1 h 15

Cauterets > Cauterets-Pont d'Espagne : 7 km/17 mins

➤ Leave Cauterets to the south, towards Cauterets-Pont d'Espagne (7 km/17 mins)

Cauterets-Pont d'Espagne > Lourdes : 38 km/58 mins

➤ Leave Cauterets-Pont d'Espagne, pass through Cauterets village, take the RD920.
➤ Continue for 10 km to the village of Soulom. ➤ Take the direction of Lourdes (18,5 km).

Today will be gentle, peaceful and revitalising. After an exploration of the Garden of Eden of the Pyrenees that is Pont d'Espagne we head for Lourdes for an unusual experience. And if you can get up early you can start the day with a relaxing session in the soothing waters of the **Bains de Rocher spa centre in Cauterets**.

Cauterets 32

This small mountain spa town welcomed Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Beaudelaire, Debussy... All the high society came here, it became a centre for the Romantics. Follow in their steps along the Boulevard Latapie Flurin and admire the sculptures and monumental doorways dating from the Belle Epoque period.

www.cauterets.com

The ancient bus station 32

An astonishing building, totally in wood, and located at the entrance to the town. It is actually the Norwegian pavilion from the Universal Exhibition in Paris of 1889.

The National Park centre 32

For a better understanding of the area visit The National Park centre for information on the Isard, the countryside, water and walks. There are tactile markers to explain the walking trails of the valley.

📍 Cauterets - Place de la Gare.

Berlingots 32

At the beginning of the 19th century the local doctors recommended that those coming for the spa waters should suck sweets to take away the sulphurous smell of the waters. So the berlingot was invented! Nowadays four shops in Cauterets continue to make and sell these sweets.

The Lutour and Cerisey waterfalls 33

Head towards Pont d'Espagne, there are a succession of thundering waterfalls along the roadside, the journey itself is a real show. Firstly stop at La Raillère where the Lutour waterfall is signposted, cross the footbridge and there it is in the forest. Then continue to Pont d'Espagne, the Cerisey falls can be seen from the road, if you approach you will most certainly

be drenched in spray.

📍 La Raillère • 2.5 km after Cauterets, towards Pont d'Espagne.

★ CAUTERETS-PONT D'ESPAGNE 34

The Garden of Eden of the Pyrenees

As you reach the Puntas parking area you have already crossed into the National Park and the site of Cauterets / Pont d'Espagne, one of the most visited sites in the Pyrenees National Park. It is a fabulous area, full of life, which water crashing from all directions. The Marcadau valley offers easy walks in a sublime setting of mountain pines, flowery meadows with towering rocky peaks all around. One can take the chairlift to Lac de Gaube, a beautiful turquoise lake beneath the mighty Vignemale, the highest mountain in the French Pyrenees, the setting of the lake is pure magic.

📍 Parking at Puntas. 7km after Cauterets
www.cauterets.com

🕯 Relaxation at the Bains de Rocher spa centre 32

Before starting your day or at the end of it treat yourself to some soothing relaxation in a lovely refined setting. Huge windows, fine embroidered curtains, floors in jade, mosaics, glass pearls... the outdoor lagoon with its bubbling waters is a great spot to relax, in all weathers, at all times of the day as the waters are at 38°C.

2 hours pass. Massages by reservation.

📍 Cauterets.

www.bains-rocher.com

The Sanctuary in Lourdes 35

The sanctuary is the area around the grotto where Bernadette saw apparitions of the Virgin Mary. They are on the river bank and it is the area where people come to pray, there are three basilicas.

The grotto

It is here that the heart of Lourdes beats, in this grotto, the site of the 18 Apparitions. In the opening where the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared, a statue has been left.

The Basilica of the Rosary, in the lower part, it is decorated by superb Venitian

mosaics created by G.D. Facchina, who also decorated the Opera Garnier in Paris.

The Basilica of the Immaculate

Conception, smooth and white, perched on a rocky outcrop above the grotto.

The Basilica of the Rosary, in the lower part, it is decorated by superb Venetian mosaics created by G.D. Facchina, who also decorated the Opera Garnier in Paris.

The Basilica of Pius X is underground beneath the esplanade and can accommodate 20,000 people

📍 The Sanctuary is situated in the lower town on the river banks. Best to park in the higher town and reach them on foot. There are seven points of entry. We suggest the Port Saint Michel, which opens on to the esplanade and has the best view. Open from 5.30am until midnight.
www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

★ THE TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION 35

To be experienced once in a lifetime

From Cauterets it is down to Lourdes for a most unusual experience. Each evening thousands of pilgrims gather to walk with flaming torches behind a statue of the Virgin Mary. The crowd is dense, the ambience joyous and spontaneous. It is a moving spectacle, everybody is singing in praise of the Virgin Mary. Whether a believer or not one can feel the energy. Join in if you wish.

Every day from April to October, at 9pm (☀️ length 1 h 30). One can buy torches at the entry to the Sanctuary.
www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

The Pyrenees Animal Park 36

Located in Argelès-Gazost between Cauterets and Lourdes. It offers a superb way of looking at the natural world of the Pyrenees. Set across a green and rocky hillside you can share the intimate life of the animals, from the great carnivores - bears, wolves and lynx to the smaller ones - martins, otters and stoats, not to mention the mountain species - vultures, deer and Isard.

The visit lasts approximately 2 to 3 hours. Within the park is a restaurant, a bar, a shop, and 3 picnic areas.

📍 60 bis avenue des Pyrénées - 65400 Ayzac-Ost
www.parc-animulier-pyrenees.com

🌙 Evening and night in Lourdes 35

🔗 MIX AND MATCH

Combine with « On the road to Madiran ». A one-day adventure in the foothills of the Pyrenees exploring an intimate vineyard. p.103

📍 WORTH A DETOUR

A gourmet stop at the Refuge de Sens, chocolate maker and tea rooms

The hardest thing is to choose amongst all the delicious patisseries and crepes, not to mention the chocolates...

📍 7, rue Richelieu-Galerie des Princes - 65110 Cauterets

📍 RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

- > **Hôtellerie du lac de Gaube**
Sit on the terrace in this magical setting, above the lake and facing the mighty Vignemale, trout and other local produce.
📍 Cauterets - Pont d'Espagne, lake of Gaube 65110 Cauterets
☎ +336 74 51 56 28
- > **Hôtellerie du Pont d'Espagne**
Opposite the waterfalls of Pont d'Espagne, try their delicious Cepe omelette or other local delicacies.
📍 Cauterets - Pont d'Espagne 65110 Cauterets
☎ +335 62 92 54 10
- > **L'Alexandra at Lourdes**
The front facade, covered with pots and pans is most intriguing. A very popular venue for the locals who love its creative cuisine.
📍 3, rue du Fort - 65100 Lourdes.
☎ +335 62 94 31 43
- > **L'Embarcadère at Lourdes**
The restaurant is located on the bank of the lake of Lourdes. Completely open to the exterior, with its pretty shaded terrace, the place exudes calm and serenity. You will enjoy local dishes, gourmet ice creams and crepes.
📍 Chemin du lac, Lac de Lourdes - 65100 Lourdes
☎ +335 62 32 50 59
- > **Pizzeria Da Marco at Lourdes**
A rustic and cosy place, a large selection of pizzas, even as dessert!
📍 45, rue de la Grotte - 65100 Lourdes.
☎ +335 62 94 03 59

DEPARTURE

Before you leave the Pyrenees we suggest you rest a while in Lourdes to see its astonishing funicular railway, the castle and its lovely lake.

The Pic du Jer funicular Railway ³⁵

The Pic du Jer towers over Lourdes, it is recognisable by its enormous cross which is illuminated at night. A century old funicular railway takes you to the summit at 1,000m of altitude in just a few minutes, a voyage full of history. Once at the top an easy trail takes you to a look-out point from where there is a 360 degree panorama, over Lourdes, Tarbes, Pau the Argeles-Gazost valley and the Pyrenean peaks.

📍 Situated at the entry to Lourdes (59, av. Francis-Lagardère)
www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

The Lourdes castle and its Pyrenean museum ³⁵

The castle is perched on a rocky outcrop overlooking the town, it is a classified historical monument. Within its wall is a museum of the Pyrenees. So do hesitate

to making an assault on this impressive fortress, climb the 104 steps which lead to the top of the dungeon tower, at the top the view is superb. You can also discover the famous legend of Charlemagne who is celebrated on the crest of Lourdes.

www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

On the beach in Lourdes ³⁷

Over at the lake the town of Lourdes becomes a seaside resort. A floating basin offers a lovely spot for swimming, watched over by lifeguards. There are many activities on offer - pedalos, stand-up paddle, kayaks, 3 graded mountain bike trails, an 18 hole golf course, fishing, or simply a lovely stroll around the lake. There is an easy waymarked trail of 6k. It is a great place for taking lunch, there is a cafe / restaurant on the water's edge.

www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

The Pic du Jer
funicular Railway



ITINERARY

01

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