



Detail of a mosaic on the front of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in the Sanctuary at Lourdes.



The road slopes gently down into the Aníscló Canyon, revealing ever more astounding views at each turn.



A shepherd and his flock in the Gavarrie-Monte Perdido mountain range.

ITINERARY
04

JEWELS OF THE PYRENEES

Four exciting days travelling across the French and Spanish Pyrenees. Marvel at the expansive landscapes. Discover wild, tucked-away places. Be moved by sacred spaces. Pamper yourself in the thermal spas. And give your taste buds a treat...

4 DAYS / 4 NIGHTS
1 NIGHT IN SPAIN

- **DAY 1:**
LOURDES
- **DAY 2:**
GAVARNIE/TOURMALET
PIC DU MIDI/SAINT-LARY
- **DAY 3:**
AÑISCLÓ CANYON/AINSA
- **DAY 4:**
MOUNTAIN LAKES ROUTE
/BALNÉA



DISTANCE COVERED
➤ 365km

BEST PHOTO STOP

- The waterfall at the Cirque de Gavarnie – p.80
- The 360° view from the Pic du Midi – p.81
- The Añiscló Canyon – p.84

SPA PAUSE
➤ Balnéa – p.87

JEWELS OF THE PYRENEES

LOURDES

DAY 1 15km / 18mins

Lourdes-Pyrénées Airport > Lourdes: 15km / 18mins

> Leave Tarbes-Lourdes-Pyrénées airport or if you are coming by car, leave the A64 autoroute following signs for Lourdes. *15km / 18mins*

Why not follow millions of visitors from all over the world and explore Lourdes? There is no need to be a practising catholic, or even a Christian - people come to see the Grotto, to touch the rocks, gather water from the springs, light a candle, and walk carrying a flaming torch. These rituals are as much pagan, superstitious or magic as they are religious. A unique personal experience that touches everyone.

The Sanctuary in Lourdes ①

The Sanctuary, is the area around the grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette. Located next to the river, it has various places of worship, including three basilicas.

The Grotto

This is the beating heart of Lourdes. The grotto was the scene of 18 visions. There is a statue of Mary in the niche where the Virgin appeared.

The slender, white **Basilica of the Immaculate Conception** is perched above the rocks of the grotto.

Below it is the **Basilica of the Rosary**, which is decorated with superb Venetian mosaics by G.D. Facchina who also decorated the Opéra Garnier in Paris.

The Basilica of Pius X is a crypt constructed beneath the esplanade. It is thought to be one of the largest shrines in the world and has facilities for 20,000 pilgrims.

📍 The Sanctuary is located at the bottom of the town by the banks of the Gave. We recommend parking in one of the public car parks and walking to the Domain. There are seven gateways. Head for the Porte Saint-Michel, which leads to Rosary Square and has the best view.
www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

The Pic du Jer funicular railway ①

The Pic du Jer towers over the town and is easily recognisable thanks to its large cross, which is illuminated at night. You can reach the summit - which is at an altitude of around 1000m - in a few minutes by taking the one-hundred year old funicular railway. It is a delightful trip. A footpath leads to the viewpoint, where you can see a unique 360° view of Lourdes, Tarbes, Pau, the Argeles-Gazost valley and the Pyrenean peaks.

📍 Located on the edge of Lourdes (59 Av. Francis-Lagardère) • www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

The Lourdes Castle and its Pyrenean museum ①

Built on a rocky outcrop, the castle - which is classified as an historic monument - overlooks the Marian Sanctuary. A relic of its Medieval past, it now houses the Pyrenean Museum. Be sure to storm the fortress and climb the 104 narrow steps to the top of the keep. The view is magnificent. You can

also find out about the famous legend of Charlemagne which is the origin of Lourdes' coat of arms.

www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

On the beach in Lourdes ②

By the lake, Mary's town becomes a beach resort! A floating pool provides a bathing area that is supervised by lifeguards. For the more active, there is a wide range of sporting activities available, including pedalo hire, kayaking, paddle boarding, 3 mountain-bike trails (green, red and black), an 18-hole golf course, fishing in the lake, or you could just go for a walk. A 6km footpath circles the lake. It is an easy walk that rises by only 50m. The beach is also a pleasant place to have lunch on the terraces of the lakeside restaurant.

www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

★ THE TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION ①

To be experienced once in a lifetime

Each evening, thousands of visitors and pilgrims gather to walk behind the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes with candle-flame torches in their hands. The procession goes from the Grotto to the square in front of the Basilica Our Lady of the Rosary. The crowd is dense, spontaneous, and includes all sorts of people in a joyous atmosphere that is full of energy. Even as a simple spectator you will be seduced by the beauty of the thousands of lights that set the town aglow. But the jubilant atmosphere will also make you want to join in, something that even unbelievers can enjoy. So put reason to one side - everyone is welcome in this crowd, and there is no need to be a believer to join in. It commits you to nothing except the enjoyment of an new experience.

Every day from April to October at 9pm (lasts 1½ hours). Torches can be obtained inside the Sanctuary.

www.lourdes-infotourisme.com

🔗 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

🌙 Evening and night in Lourdes ①

📍 WORTH A DETOUR

> The Pyrenees Animal Park

Take a break between Cauterets and Lourdes and stop at the Pyrenees Animal Park near the junction for Argeles-Gazost. Here you will see a different side to nature. Discover the animals who live in this green and rocky environment. There are large carnivores such as bear, wolves and lynx, along with smaller ones including genets, martens and beech martens, and also mountain species such as vultures, fallow deer and Pyrenean chamois.

Allow about 2 - 3 hours. In the park, you will find: 1 restaurant, 1 bar, 1 shop and 3 picnic areas.

📍 On the Lourdes side of Argeles-Gazost (60 bis avenue des Pyrénées - 65400 Ayzac-Ost)

www.parc-animalier.com

🍴 RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> L'Alexandra at Lourdes

The arresting sculpture of saucepans and other cooking utensils on the façade will draw you in to this restaurant. Very popular with the locals for 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 -

65 100 Lourdes

☎ +335 62 32 50 59

> Pizzeria Da Marco at Lourdes

In a cosy rustic setting, the restaurant serves colourful, aromatic pizzas, even for dessert.

📍 45, rue de la Grotte - 65100 Lourdes

☎ +335 62 94 03 59

GAVARNIE/PIC DU MIDI/ SAINT-LARY

DAY 2

141.6km/3 hours

Lourdes > Gavarnie: 48.6km / 54 mins

> Leave Lourdes on the D821 to Argelès-Gazost. At the end of the main road, follow signs for Luz-Saint-Sauveur (16km / 16 mins). Just before you reach the village, turn right towards Gavarnie (20.3km / 28 mins).

Gavarnie > Tourmalet > Pic du Midi: 42km / 1 h

Leave the village of Gavarnie following signs to Luz-Saint-Sauveur (19km / 30 mins). In the village, turn right following signs to Barèges and Col du Tourmalet. Go over the mountain pass and descend to La Mongie (19km / 24 mins).

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

Leave La Mongie and go back to Sainte-Marie-de-Campan (18km / 23 mins). In the village, turn right following signs to Lac de Payolle and Col d'Aspin (8km / 10 mins). Go down the other side of the pass. In the village of Arreau, take the D929 towards Saint-Lary (28km / 39 mins).

*The journey continues and the most beautiful views in the Pyrenees are in store for today. Whether you are standing in front of the spectacular **Gavarnie Cirque**, which is a UNESCO world heritage site, crossing the passes of the **Col d'Aspin or the Col du Tourmalet**, or on board the cable car or at the top of the Pic du Midi, we guarantee views that will take your breath away.*

The Gavarnie cemetery 4

How can you not be moved by the graves of the great Pyrenean mountaineers buried here? Amongst them, the brothers Laurent and Hippolyte Passet, along with their sons Henri and of course Célestin who was born in 1845. Célestin Passet was the great hero of Pyrenean mountaineering. For more than thirty years he broke many records, culminating in the triumph of 7 August 1889, when he cut 1,300 steps into the ice in order to climb the formidable Couloir de Gaube - a feat that was not repeated for a further 44 years.

📍 Gavarnie - by the church.

The Pont Napoléon at Luz-Saint-Sauveur 5

After leaving Gavarnie, and before tackling the climb up to the famous Tourmalet pass, pause for a while in Luz-Saint-Sauveur, where routes to the most famous Pyrenean sites meet. This village owes its many treasures to the Empress Eugénie, who started the fashion for thermal spa resorts. It was, however, on the orders of Napoleon II - who was taking a thermal cure at Luz-Saint-Sauveur with Empress Eugénie - that the bridge named after him was built in 1860. It is at the edge of the village on the road from Gavarnie. This

★ THE CIRQUE DE GAVARNIE 6
A World Heritage Site

Starting in the bustling, picturesque village, head for the end of the road where the cirque suddenly looms up in front of you. This is when you start to feel the thrill and run out of superlatives to describe it. The famous novelist, Victor Hugo, described it as 'nature's colosseum'. An easy and fascinating 30-minute walk, horse or donkey ride along a mountain stream (the Gave de Pau) and across the Courade plateau brings you to the viewpoint indicator at the cirque. Press on a bit further and you will reach the L'Hôtellerie du Cirque restaurant and bar. There you will find a superb view of the highest waterfall in France.

www.gavarnie.com

spectacular structure consists of a single arch with a span of 47m and is located 66m above the deep gorge of the river Gave. It provides an unusual location for bungee-jumping fans.

★ COL DU TOURMALET 6

A Mythical summit

After climbing for 19 km (12 miles) you will reach the world-famous Col du Tourmalet pass - scene of the most epic climbs of the Tour de France. At an altitude of 2,115 metres, it is the highest road pass in the Pyrenees and an unparalleled viewpoint.

📷 Selfie with the Giant 6

This three-metre-high statue of a cyclist 'dancing on the pedals' is nicknamed 'Octave' in honour of Octave Lapize, who, in 1910, was the first cyclist to cross the Col du Tourmalet. It is one of nine Tour de France sculptures that were originally located in the A64 motorway service area at the gateway to Hautes-Pyrenees. At the end of the autumn, the Géant is taken down to spend the winter in the valley. And

on the first weekend of June there is a celebratory cycle ride to escort him back to the summit.

★ PIC DU MIDI 7

The most beautiful view in the world


The descent of the Col du Tourmalet pass zig-zags down the bare slopes as far as the resort of La Mongie. After just four kilometres (2½ miles), it is already time to stop at the station for the Pic du Midi cable car. Boarding the cable car is like getting on a giant fairground ride. After a spectacular voyage, you reach the summit of the Pic du Midi, which is at an altitude of nearly 3000 metres. Up here, on the huge viewing terraces you can contemplate the most beautiful view in the Pyrenees - the site is listed for its stunning scenery. You will be able to see peaks stretching out across 300 km and it has the clearest view of the stars in Europe.

🕒 Allow about 2 hours to enjoy exploring the Pic du Midi.

📍 Located at La Mongie as you descend the Col du Tourmalet.

🔗 MIX AND MATCH

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



The Pyrenean summits surrounded by a sea of clouds at the end of the day - viewed from the viewing terraces of the **Pic du Midi**.


The Payolle lake 8

After the bare, rock-strewn slopes of the summit, the road from Le Tourmalet descends to the green meadows of the Campan valley. At Sainte-Marie-de-Campan, bear right towards the Lac de Payolle and the Col d'Aspin.

Nestled in a hollow surrounded by fir trees, the Lac de Payolle is the perfect escape. This is prime grazing land, and you are bound to come across a family of cows at a bend in the path.

▲ The col d'Aspin 9

At the first bend as you climb towards the pass, you can see the old marble quarries. The green marble quarried here, which is veined with red, pink, black and white, was used at Versailles and the Paris opera house. After winding through a forest of tall firs you will reach the Col d'Aspin (1489m). Wilder, quieter, and also lower than its neighbouring passes, the Col d'Aspin offers a pleasant route that has what are probably the most extensive views. Its summit is a protected grazing area for cows and horses and there are no buildings. There is, however, a car park so you can stop and enjoy the superb views of the Pic du Midi, Arbizon and the Aure valley safely. The gentle slopes of the pass make it an ideal place for a gentle stroll along the ridges.

 *Leaving the car park, a panoramic walk along the Pla del Naou follows a ridge southwards and takes in views of the Aure and Campan valleys. To the north, footpaths lead to the Col de Beyrède and Signal de Bassia.*



From the Col d'Aspin,
the **Pic du Midi** dominates the landscape.

🌙 Evening and night in Saint-Lary 10

📍 WORTH A DETOUR

> Troumouse cirque

Leave Gavarnie on the D921 towards Gèdre. Just before the village, turn right on to the D922 towards the 'Cirque de Troumouse' in the Héas valley. The road leads straight to the Troumouse cirque. You will be amazed! Troumouse is something else - a Goliath among cirques, it is even bigger than Gavarnie. Ramond de Carbonnières, the famous

18th-century explorer, estimated that it could contain 10 million people! Another curiosity is the fact that the plain that stretches out in front of it is unusually flat. This makes it a paradise for marmots! After the popular Gavarnie and the immense Troumouse, it is time to go and see the isolated Estaubé cirque.

📍 *Leave Gavarnie on the D921 towards Gèdre. Just before the village, turn right on to the D922 towards the «Cirque de Troumouse».*

🍴 RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> Lunch at the Pic du Midi

Marc Berger, the chef, says, "Cooking at altitude remains a considerable problem: water boils at 92°C and the dry air means ingredients dry out more quickly. Taste perception also changes at altitude and cooking must be done on electric appliances. In these unusual conditions, my team achieves daily feats and serves original dishes made with quality ingredients, even in the fast-food area."

📍 Pic du Midi (reached from La Mongie)

> **La Brèche de Roland Hotel and Restaurant at Gavarnie-Gèdre**
Housed in one of the oldest residences in Gèdre, which has been elegantly restored. Odile and Philippe Pujol are cut from the same cloth as their beautiful house, and are cheery and welcoming. Gourmet cuisine served in an elegant setting.

📍 65120 Gèdre. ☎ +335 62 92 48 54

> **L'Atelier at Luz-Saint-Sauveur**
In the former family tailor's shop, which opened in 1910, local boy Bruno offers 'hand sewn' dishes full of Pyrenean flavours. He has a wealth of experience with the greatest chefs and will thrill you with his skill in historic surroundings with a pretty terrace facing the peaks.

📍 12, avenue de Saint Sauveur - 65120 Luz-Saint-Sauveur. ☎ +335 62 92 85 22

> **La Grange at Saint-Lary-Soulan**
Described in the Michelin Guide as: «a chic and welcoming restaurant with a resolutely mountain atmosphere. The exquisite, well-flavoured cuisine is made with excellent regional produce and includes trout tartare, local lamb chops and prune tart. An excellent restaurant.»

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

> **La Mangeoire at Saint-Lary**
The chef, Clément, carefully blends local flavours, gently bastes meats in their juices and artistically garnishes his dishes. Each plate brings together his creativity, warm heart and high expectations. A complete delight for the eyes and tastebuds.

📍 18 route de Soulan - 65170 Saint-Lary-Soulan
☎ +335 62 99 50 20

> **La Pergola at Saint-Lary-Soulan**
This location is as legendary as the name of its owners. For the Mir family, skis on their feet and medals round their necks are a daily occurrence. In this family business, full of family memories, your palate is in for a treat as you sample the valley's cuisine.

📍 25 Rue Vincent Mir - 65 170 Saint-Lary-Soulan
☎ +335 62 39 40 46

SAINT-LARY/AÑISCLO CANYON/AINSA

DAY 3

102 km / 2 h 17

Saint-Lary > Escalona (Añisclo Canyon): 56 km / 1 h 03

> Head south following signs to Spain. Go through the Bielsa-Aragnouet tunnel then follow signs for Ainsa.

Circular route through the Añisclo Canyon: 34 km / 59 mins

> Just before Escalona, turn right towards the Añisclo Canyon. The road is one-way during the summer and makes a circular route. Follow signs for Buerba, then Puyarruego and Escalona. Return to the main route.

Escalona > Ainsa: 11km / 12 mins

> Head south from Escalona following signs to Ainsa.

Today you are heading for Aragon on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. Explore 'Los Rios', the stone villages and the gleaming Spanish sun. Go through the Aragnouet-Bielsa tunnel and the wild and magical Canyon d'Añisclo is all yours. You can swim in the turquoise waters of the natural pools formed by the river before returning to the village of Ainsa, capital of Sobrarbe, with its fortified square.

Crossing into Spain ①

A tunnel barely two miles long takes you through the middle of the Pyrenees and into a different country. Welcome to Aragonese Spain. Here, everything is ochre and flooded with light by the strong sun. Head for Ainsa, capital of Sobrarbe, which is built on a rocky outcrop around its ancient castle. However, be sure not to miss some wonderful detours.

Tella ②

Five kilometres after Lafortunada, take the road to the right. It leads to the village of Tella, the valley's former look-out-post. From here you can see one of the most beautiful views in the Pyrenees stretching out in all directions. To the west, you can see Ordesa and Monte Perdido, to the east, Peña Montañesa and the Cinca valley.

★ THE AÑISCLO GRAND CANYON ⑬
The Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park

After rejoining the road to Ainsa, just before Escalona, take the road on the right that climbs the gorges of the Añisclo Canyon (towards Fanlo). The road goes deep into the canyon, it is narrow but there is no need to worry as it is one-way. After about 10 km there is a car park in a hairpin bend from where you can set off on a pretty walk that leads (in less than 30 minutes) to the Ermita de San Úrbez hermitage, which is nestled in a hollow beneath the cliffs. Return to the road and continue to the next crossroads. Turn left towards Buerba. Stop for a moment at the pass to see the breathtaking views of the Añisclo Canyon and Monte Perdido. Complete the circular tour with a stop at Puyarruego where you can swim in the natural pools of the river. Then rejoin the main route at Escalona.

🚶 La Ermita de San Úrbez

Follow the path from the car park to cross the superb Romanesque bridge over the Rio Bellos to the Hermitage of San Úrbez. Take the same path to return.

☉ Takes : 30 minutes round trip

🚶 Alternative route back (circular walk): continue along the path that leads on from the Hermitage of San Úrbez as far as the next crossing (near a spring). Leave the main path to go

down to the Rio Bellos, cross the bridge and climb the path opposite. Pass two viewing platforms then go down to the Rio Aso. Cross the footbridge and return to the starting point

Climb: 100 metres. ☺ Takes: 1 hour (there and back)

Foray into the Añisclo Canyon

After the Hermitage of San Urbez, at the first junction by the spring, follow the wide path opposite which goes into the Añisclo Canyon as far as the Sangons bridge. Return by the same route.

☺ Takes: 1 extra hour (there and back)
Waymarked paths.

The Ainsa lake

When you arrive at Ainsa, don't head straight for the upper town. We recommend exploring the magnificent lake with its turquoise waters. A solitary bell tower - the sole remnant of a submerged village - stands in the middle of the expanse of water. An astonishing sight.

The Plaza Mayor in Ainsa

Relive the age of the 'Reconquista' on the Plaza Mayor in Ainsa, capital of the Kingdom of Sobrarbe! It was here, between the mountains and the plains, that the Muslims and Christians clashed. Ainsa's upper town, which is located on an outcrop, circled by a high wall and has a minaret-like bell tower, recalls these forgotten epics. Monumental in size and completely paved, the Plaza Mayor is bordered by ancient residences linked by arcades. In the spring and summer months the balconies on the ochre-coloured stone façades are covered in brightly coloured flowers making the café terraces a pleasant place to take a break.

 A large, paid car park is located on the edge of the upper town.

Evening and night in Ainsa

MIX AND MATCH

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





Ainsa and its 'Plaza Mayor'

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS



> **Casa Angela at Puyarruego**

A typical Spanish inn in a traditional house perched on the hill with a superb terrace and an incredible view of the Rio Bellos. The food is home-made by Angela and served by her son Paco. Great people in a great place.

 Plaza Mayor - 22363 Puyarruego
 +34 974 50 50 13



> **Callizo at Ainsa**

In the main square in the old town of Ainsa you can sample the flavours of Aragon. Summer truffles, beef from the 'Valle de Broto' - there are only two tasting menus, but what menus! Each dish is a work of art and the ingredients are to the fore. A surprise and a feast for the eyes are guaranteed. Then comes the taste - a explosion of flavours brought perfectly together by the creative chef. A true gastronomic experience.

 Plaza Mayor - 22330 Ainsa
 +34 974 500 385

> **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

AINSA/THE MOUNTAIN LAKES ROUTE/ LOUDENVIELLE – BALNEA

DAY 4
121km/2h 42
> Ainsa > Oredon lake car park: 67 km / 1 h 23

Head north out of Ainsa towards France and the Bielsa-Aragnouet tunnel. Go through the tunnel and take the D173 to Saint-Lary. Go through Aragnouet. At Fabian, turn left onto the road to the lakes.

> Oredon lake car park > Loudenvielle: 32.9 km / 1 h 07

Leave the Lac d'Orédon car park and head for Fabian. At Fabian, turn left towards Saint-Lary-Soulan. In the village of Sailhan, turn right and follow signs for Col de Val Louron-Azet. Go over the pass and continue down to Genos (16km / 21 mins). From there, follow signs to Loudenvielle and Balnéa (2km / 3 mins).

*After your little Aragonese adventure, leave the Spanish Pyrenees, which are devoid of Pyrenean mountain streams, to encounter one of the most beautiful lakeside views in the mountains. Take **the Mountain Lakes Route** to reach **the Neouvielle National Nature Reserve**. The day's journey ends at **Balnéa** by the **Lac de Génos-Loudenvielle**, where you can bathe outdoors in naturally warm and soothing spring water, your eyes fixed on the peaks of the Pyrenees that reach an altitude of more than 3,000m.*

The Cap-de-Long dam 16

This enormous dam is more than 100 metres high and forms one of the biggest reservoirs in the Pyrenees. Like a veritable fjord, it is surrounded by the cliffs of the Pic de Néouvielle. Forty kilometres of underground galleries carry water from the barrage to the Pragnères hydroelectric power station in the neighbouring Gavarrie valley. It took seven years (from 1946 to 1953) and more than 6,000 workers to construct this extraordinary structure.

📍 On the road that goes down from the tunnel, after going through Aragnouet and just before you reach Fabian, follow the D929 to Cap-de-Long.

★ THE MOUNTAIN LAKES ROUTE 16
The Neouvielle National Reserve

Turn round at the Cap-de-Long dam. Take the first left towards Orédon onto the highest mountain lakes road in the Pyrenees. This takes you to the Lac d'Orédon (1,849m), Lac d'Aumar (2,198m) and Lac d'Aubert (2,150m). You are on the edge of the Pyrenees National Park, at the heart of the Néouvielle National Nature Reserve. How many are there? Several dozen? A hundred? No one has ever been able to count the lakes in this nature reserve. Their green and turquoise blue waters are scattered across the countryside. A small wonderland that is definitely not to be missed.

From 1 June to 30 September private vehicles are unable to access lakes Aumar and Aubert between 9.30am and 6.30pm, in order to protect the area. Leave the car at the Lac d'Orédon car park. From 9.30am - 6.30pm shuttle buses run every 30 minutes for the 15-minute trip to Lakes Aumar and Aubert. There is a commentary and description of the area during the trip. Traffic is permitted all day on the downward route.



The lakes circuit

A superb circular walk following a string of lakes and pools amongst mountain pines, rhododendrons and granite rocks.

From the Lac d'Orédon car park (1856m) take the path that leads up to the left of the road that runs alongside the lake. The path goes through a pine wood before meeting the Col d'Aubert road at a bend (45 mins). Take the path to Les Laquettes on the left. The path goes through scrubland before it reaches the first of the Laquettes. A beautiful and astonishing landscape opens out before you with the Laquettes strung out like dabs of azure surrounded by cropped grass and mountain pines. A little paradise. At the end of the Laquettes, the path rises to the right to reach Lac d'Aubert (2,150m) and its surprising peninsula. To reach the next lake, follow a wide path towards the car park. And you're there. Splendid. Lac d'Aumar (2,198m - 1½ hours) is laid out surrounded by close-cropped grass beneath the Pic de Néouvielle. After walking for 1½ hours you might decide to take the shuttle bus back to Lac d'Orédon. If you want to walk back, follow the path along the right bank of Lac d'Aumar until you get to the spillway and cross the footbridge. Carry straight on through the Passades d'Aumar pine forest towards Col d'Estoudou (2,260m). Just before the pass, turn right and go down through the forest to the mountain refuge, then on to the Orédon car park (3 hours 45 mins).

☉ Takes 3 hours 45 mins • Climb: 300 metres
• Level: easy. Suitable for families

📍 Start and finish: Lac d'Orédon car park



Col (or hourquette) d'Aubert

Take the waymarked path (Sentier de la Hourquette d'Aubert) which goes around the north-eastern side of Lac d'Aubert. At an altitude of 2,498 metres, this pass offers stunning views of the greens and turquoise blues of the lakes and Laquettes surrounded by pine forests and grassy clearings. On the other side, you will also find a fantastic view of the Barèges valley.

☉ Takes: 3 hours (round trip) • Climb: 350 metres
• Level: medium 📍 Start and finish: Lac d'Aubert (accessible by shuttle bus)

The col de Val Louron – Azet 18

Just before you reach Saint-Lary, turn right and follow signs for Col de Val Louron-Azet. At the summit, the road crosses vast pastures - a favourite launching site for paragliders and hang-gliders. You will be able to spot the Lac de Génos-Loudenvielle stretched out in the valley below. To get there, take the gentle descent of the col which has regular hairpin bends. At Génos, turn right towards Balnéa.



BALNÉA 19

The premier spa centre in the French Pyrenees

Finally, you can slide into the beneficial waters of Balnéa. In front of you, the peaks and mountain passes rise to an altitude of 3000 metres, like a high wall designed to preserve the peacefulness of this secret valley. You can gaze at it whilst luxuriously immersed to your shoulders in the warm waters of Balnéa's outdoor pools. As night falls, the villages of the valley light up one by one like the bulbs on a string of fairy lights each reflected in the lake. You could stay there forever.

Two-hour ticket • Massages must be booked.

📍 By the Lac de Génos-Loudenvielle - 65510 Loudenvielle • www.balnea.fr

The Genos Loudenvielle lake 19

A pleasant walk along the banks of the Lac de Génos-Loudenvielle.



La boucle du lac

A circular walk lasting at most an hour which is almost entirely on the level. But don't forget to climb as far as the Guet de Génos and Loudenvielle towers to enjoy the view. There is a legend that there is an underground passageway that links the two.

Yellow waymarks. ☉ Takes: 1½ hours



Evening and night in Loudenvielle 20

📍 WORTH A DETOUR

The village of Mont and its Roman chapel (classified as an historic monument)

Get a little higher by following the road over the Col de Peyresourde. Villages are spread out along the route. Each of them harbours an astonishing Roman chapel, a precious treasure with splendid frescos painted to thank God for the lucrative trade in leather and wool between this French valley and its Spanish neighbour after the discovery of the New World.

Choose Mont, a delightful village with 20 inhabitants and an outstanding view. Its church is the only one to have an outdoor fresco representing the last judgement and which has valiantly resisted the ravages of time. The interior is also covered with wonderful paintings. An audio guide that explains everything is available for €2.

The col de Peyresourde

The pass is wide and has an outstanding view. Take time to stop at the summit. And don't hesitate to venture into the little wooden house for the inevitable refreshments. 1 crêpe: €0.50, 12 crêpes: €4.50 Go for 12! While he makes the crêpes, the owner will lend you his collection of Chinese wooden puzzles. On the other side of the pass is the Luchon valley.



The Roman Chapel of Mont.

📍 RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

> Chalet Hôtel d'Orédon

By the lake, nestled amongst the mountain pines, the hotel has a pretty terrace with views.

📍 Lac d'Orédon – 65170 Aragnouet
☎ +336 23 05 72 60

> La Table de Saoussas at Loudenvielle

A pleasant family restaurant. The cuisine uses local produce. While you are there, visit the pretty mill on the other side of the road.

📍 Chemin Saoussas - 65510 Loudenvielle
☎ +335 62 99 96 40

> Chez Lily at Germ

A new, unique, unusual and delicious location. A bistro and arts centre located in a former sheepfold, Lily's sheepfold. Here you can sample aperitifs and tapas - the chef offers seasonal dishes using local produce.

📍 Centre de Montagne, Le Village 65240 Germ. ☎ +335 62 39 23 03

📍 A GREAT FIND

> Chez Rogé, Bistrot de Pays at Loudenvielle

A veritable institution in this village! Open continuously since 1930, first run by 'Lulu' Rogé, then by Josette, her daughter. You will also meet grand-daughter Claire and great-grand-daughters Laura and Flavie. Holiday-makers and villagers, everyone meets here for a drink, to play the card game belote and to sing Pyrenean folksongs.

📍 11, chemin de Clarabide - 65510 Loudenvielle

ITINERARY

04

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