

# Cathar Castles, from Quéribus to Foix

## Your route in brief

- Walk in the heart of the Cathar country, between castles, vineyards, gorges and Pyrenees
- Accommodation in hotels and guesthouses, with swimming-pool (1 night)
- A warm climate, adapted to walking all year long !!

## Strong points

- Discovery of the Cathar castles : Quéribus, Padern, Peyrepertuse, mystic Rennes-le-Château, Puivert, Montsegur, Roquefixade, and beautiful Foix
- Crossing the terrific Galamus and Frau gorges



Between the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean Sea, in the heart of the sunblessed region of the Corbières you will find the imposing, mystic stone castles of the châteaux cathares. These castles represent a tragic, political and religious intrigue that shook the South of France and marked the region.

During the week's walking you will discover landscapes of immense natural beauty, lush valleys and rolling hills. You will discover an interesting page of France's history along with some good local food and wines. The trails pass through a whole variety of terrain, each day is different, the vegetation, the 'garrigue' is fragrant and often full of colour.

Your itinerary follows the 'Cathar Trail', a footpath that stretches from Port La Nouvelle to Foix.

We can supply you with GPS tracks for the entire route, just ask us !



## •PROGRAM

### **Day 1 : Start of holiday in Quillan**

Your holiday starts in Quillan at 3 PM in front of the railway station, transfer by taxi to Duilhac-sous-Peyrepertuse. Check into your accommodation and investigate the village of Duilhac-sous-Peyrepertuse situated at the foot of Peyrepertuse castle.

### **Day 2 : From Padern to Duilhac via Queribus**

From the Château of Padern, the trail leads through the fragrant garrigue vegetation and past rolling vineyards to arrive at the prestigious castle of Quéribus. This high citadel is a real eagle's nest, perched precariously on the rocky crags at 788m. This chateau was the last stronghold to remain secure during the crusade of the Albigensians in 1255. The surrounding scenery is grand, the views stretch to the Fenouillèdes, the plains of Roussillon and the Corbières. You take a trail that will lead you back to the village of Duilhac.

- Distance : 16km, duration : 5h00, altitude gain : +500m, descent : -500m.

### **Day 3 : From Duilhac to Cubières**

A particularly picturesque walk with the opportunity to visit Peyrepertuse castle and the Galamus Gorge that has been carved out by the river Agly. Galamus gorge has become a favourite for those practising the sport of canyoning and you can sometimes hear the echoes below as they journey down, swimming and cascading over waterfalls, tumbling through the pools and chutes of the canyon. A narrow road passes through the gorge at mid level, half way up the cliffs, it was built in 1884. Your path leads directly past the Galamus hermitage, a humble home in a cave, now a small sanctuary, the entrance is found between small oaks and a shrubby box tree vegetation.

- Distance : 16km, duration : 5h00, altitude gain : +350m, descent : -340m.

### **Day 4 : From Cubières to Sougraigne village**

You leave the village of Cubières to walk to the ravishing village of Sougraigne, set in the prettiest of country spots. You traverse the Col du Linas in the direction of the Pech de Bugarach (1230m), a dominating high mountain that occupies an important strategic position in the area and represents the gateway into the Corbières. The village of Bugarach, a few hundred metres off your trail, is certainly worth a short detour. Its castle ruins date from the XVI and XVII century, little narrow roads link houses that are one hundred years old. Once back on track you will cross over the Col de la Pourteille (694m), before dropping down to the village of Sougraigne. There is a whole mix of different trees that have been planted to combat soil erosion, such as the laricio pine, austrian black pines, cedar, larch, spruce and many beach and chestnut trees. Low stone walls, fragrant scrubby bushes, the outline of buildings and a church tower, indicate you're drawing near to the village.

- Distance : 15km, duration : 5h00, altitude gain : +600m, descent : -605m.

### **Day 5 : From Sougraigne to Pailhères**

This morning you leave Sougraigne, traversing the salty river of the Sals. The source of this river is high up in one of the valleys. In the XVII century the smuggling of salt was rife in this area and the village was particularly coveted. After the passage over the Col de la Salso at app 462m you will head in the direction of the river La Blanque towards the strange landscapes of the Haut-Razès. The trail leads along footpaths that are often in the welcome shade of enormous oak and chestnut trees. There are various natural curiosities en route, such as the Roche tremblante and the natural springs rich in sulphur and iron. Arriving at Rennes le Château there is time to visit this site and learn about the mysteries of the priest and the huge sum of money that he found. The trail continues to the village of Pailhères.

- Distance : 19km, duration : 5h30, altitude gain : +445m, descent : -450m.

### **Day 6 : From Pailhères to Quillan**

The trail leads through varied terrain, often in forests and through a succession of small villages. The local communities are welcoming and time seems to have stood still in the squares of sleepy villages, such as Saint Ferriol or Saint Julia de Bec. The Cathare footpath crosses from valley to valley before passing through a wooded area to the foot of the Col des Trois Quilles. Having traversed the col you drop down to 555m to Quillan the capital of the Audoise. As you arrive in the town you will pass the ruins of the castle that date from the XIII century and offer an interesting panoramic view. The walking finishes today in Quillan, situated on the banks of

the river Aude. This traditionally industrial town has become an animated authentic centre and popular for tourism in recent years.

- Distance : 18km, duration : 5h00, altitude gain : +350m, descent : -440m.

#### **Day 7 : From Quillan to Puivert**

From Quillan, the trail leads through olive groves and vineyards, then a pleasant scrubby vegetation of box trees, shady oaks and juniper that give a subtle fragrance to the air. Crossing undulating valleys and hillsides, a castle will eventually come into view, the castle of Puivert. In its time, the castle was far more festive than military, it was the castle of the troubadours. The imposing site gets ever nearer, a splendid ridge walk will lead you towards the castle doors. It is possible to explore the castle's towers, dungeons and the famous hall of musicians. This feudal castle was a hive of activity in the XII century, a meeting and performance place for the most famous troubadours of the era.

- Distance : 21km, duration : 5h45, altitude gain : +700m, descent : -495m.

#### **Day 8 : From Puivert to Comus**

Transfer from Puivert to Espezel, beginning point of your walk. Through forests, discovering the Plateau de Sault, located between 950 and 1300 meters high. From the Plateau de languerail, you will discover Montsegur, Roquefixade, and the Gorges de la Frau, that will be crossed the day after. Arrival in Comus, small and typical village.

- Distance : 16km, duration : 6h, altitude gain : +300m, descent : -100m.

#### **Day 9 : From Comus to Montsegur**

This walk is a transition between Aude and Ariège. First the "Gorges de la Frau" show their magnificent cliffs diving into limestone during more than 1km. Then the path joins the village of Montségur, symbolizing resistance of the Cathar Church facing the Rome Church and the kingdom of France. The castle was taken in 1244, and all people died in a huge pyre.

- Distance : 14,5 km, duration : 3h30, altitude gain : +500m, descent : -700m.

#### **Day 10 : Around Montsegur**

The site of Montségur, the very bastion of the Cathare resistance, certainly requires an additional day for exploring. The layout of the village is surprising, the houses and buildings are in long curved lines one after another, they flank the mountainside in a well defined pattern and are linked by small streets and pedestrian walkways. There is a Cathare museum and some art and craft shops. From the museum a pathway leads to the foot of the pog, a high rocky buttress, it takes about 30 mins to walk up to the summit where you arrive at a sumptuous belvedere. The panoramic view extends for miles around across the Massif de Tabe, with the Pic de Soularac and further East the Frau mountain. Having visited the castle, a circular walk in the direction of the ridge of Taulat will allow you to discover high altitude mountain plains, still used to graze the local cattle.

- Distance : 12km, duration : around 4h30, altitude gain : +775m, descent : -775m.

#### **Day 11: From Montsegur to Foix**

The last section of the sentier Cathare has the benefit of a medieval castle at the beginning and at the end of the day. The route follows, for the most part, a ridge walk between the small village of Roquefixade and the county town of Foix. The town of Foix was a count's town and its castle, linked to Gaston Febu, is characterised by its three towers and high, unusual rocky base. Foix is Ariège's principal town and during the Summer months it is a vibrant centre of music and animation, a season of festivities, merriment and colourful markets. Market day is on a Friday morning. Transfer at the end of your hike to your accommodation to Foix.

- Distance : 17km, duration : 4h30, altitude gain : +400m, descent : -760m.

#### **Day 12 : End of holiday in Foix**

The holiday comes to an end in Foix. You can choose to visit the old town centre, to wander through the streets and to visit the castle.

#### **Walking loop around Foix**

The itinerary offers splendid views on the valley and the surrounding mountains, leading to the Roc de Caralp.

- Distance : 11km, duration : 4h00, altitude gain : +460m, descent : -460m.

*This programme is an example of the itinerary we aim to adhere to. It may be necessary, if situations arise that are beyond our control, for the itinerary to be modified.*

## • DATES AND PRICES

### Departures

Every day from the beginning of March to the end of November. Depending availabilities and weather. Booking from 2 people.

**Consult us for group discounts.**

**Prices :** From 01/03/2019 to 30/11/2019 :

Price per person based on a group of 2/3 people	<b>1160€</b>
Price per person based on a group of 4/5 people	<b>1050€</b>

### Extras/Discounts :

- Extra single room : 250€/pers
- Extra 10 picnics : 105 €/pers
- Extra night in Quillan in halfboard : 59 €/pers
- Extra night in Quillan in halfboard in single room : 80 €/pers
- Extra night in Foix in halfboard in double room : 68 €/pers
- Extra night in Foix in halfboard in single room : 88 €/pers

### The price includes :

- Half board accommodation (11 nights)
- Transfers days 1, 2, 8 and 11
- Luggage transfers everyday
- Dossier containing maps, route notes (1 for 4 persons, given in 1st accommodation)
- GPS tracks if you ask us

### Le price does not include :

- Holiday and travel insurance
- Additional transfers
- Entrance fees, additional activities
- Drinks and picnics
- 10€ : booking fees

## • TAILOR MADE HOLIDAYS

We can put together a suitable holiday for you taking into account all your specific requests and budget. Many individuals and trekking companies have relied on us for years. With our tailor-made holidays we always aim to provide you with the best quality at the fairest price.

### If you want to :

- increase the comfort of your accommodations,
- change the duration of your trip,
- organize additional activities or visits,
- get a transfer from/to an airport,
- organize an extra night

**Contact Gaetan**  
Tél : 0033 5 34 14 51 50  
[gaetan@respyrenees.com](mailto:gaetan@respyrenees.com)

## • ORGANIZATION

We propose a self guided, independent formula. You choose your departure date and we will take care of all the rest from the initial meeting time through to the dispersion point. We transport your bags between the

accommodations ; we provide the maps and detailed walking route notes sent on the first accommodation. This is a way of enjoying complete flexibility, you dictate the pace and rhythm of your holiday. Moreover, our team will answer all your questions, and will provide all useful advice in order to make this holiday a success.

#### Your transfers during the walk :

##### Day 1 :

At 3 PM, short transfer from Quillan railway station to your accommodation in Duilhac sous Peyrepertuse.

##### Day 2:

In the morning, transfer from Duilhac to Padern

Day 8: At 8.30am, short transfer from your accommodation to Espezel, at the beginning of your walking.

##### Day 11:

At 5 pm, transfer at the end of your walk from the parking of Roquefixade, at the bottom of the village, to your accommodation in Foix.

We ask that you arrive on time for these transfers so not to cause a delay for yourselves or other passengers using the same transfer.

### • TECHNICAL INFORMATION

#### Nature of the walk

The walks are on good footpaths and trails, the terrain is varied but often rocky.

#### Level 2/5

The walks are on good footpaths and trails, the terrain is varied but often rocky. You need to be used to walking and take regular exercise to enjoy this holiday.

#### Detailed walking schedule

Detail	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Ascent	+150m	+500m	+350m	+600m	+445m	+350m
Descent	-150m	-500m	-340m	-605m	-450m	-450m
Walking duration*	2h45	5h	5h	5h	5h30	5h00
Distance	6km	16km	16km	15km	19km	18km

Detail	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12
Ascent	+700m	+300m	+500m	+775m	+400m	+460m
Descent	-495m	-100m	-700m	-775m	-760m	-460m
Walking duration*	5h45	6h	3h30	4h30	4h30	4h00
Distance	21km	16km	14.5km	12km	17km	11km

**\*Be advised :** the walking duration is given to help you in your choice, but this is an average, not including the stops during the walk, and overall walking duration is just an indication, but can be different between walkers.

#### Guide

Self-guided walking, without guide.

#### Carrying

You will need to carry a day sack only, with your water bottle, camera, picnic and goretex jacket. Our bag-moving service means you can travel light during your walks. Your main luggage will be transported by vehicle between

the different night stops. We ask you to please limit your main luggage to between 10-15kg to facilitate the transportation and carrying for the taxis.

### **Bibliography**

- Rough Guide the Pyrenees - Marc Dubin 2004
- Rough Guide Languedoc & Roussillon - Brian Catlos 2004
- The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade - Michael Costen 1997

## • ACCOMMODATION / FOOD

### **Accommodation**

- Half board accommodation in double room in hotels or guesthouse.
- Exterior swimming pool the day 4.

### **Food**

- Continental breakfast (tea, coffee, milk, butter, jam)
- Evening meals in gites, often based on local specialities, include a starter, a main course and a dessert.
- Pic-nics and drinks are not included.

## • PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Starting** : Day 1 at Quillan train station (11), at 3 PM (15h00) for the transfer at your accommodation in Duilhac sous peyrepertuse (11).

**Ending** : Day 12 at your hotel in Foix after breakfast (09).

### **How to get to Quillan :**

#### - By train :

Regular trains from Matabiau train station from Toulouse to Carcassonne ; then from Carcassonne, train or bus service SNCF to Quillan : information 36 35 (SNCF coach and bus time table).

Sundays, only SNCF buses, from Carcassonne, in the courtyard inside the train station, Sernam quai, arrival in Quillan.

#### - By car :

Quillan is situated at 39km from Carcassonne, chief area in the departement of Aude, via the D118, passing through Limoux. From Toulouse, allow 140km ; motorway to Carcassonne.

### **PARKING :**

In Quillan : Free parking, no surveillance: Quillan train station, opposite the hôtel Cartier. Caution : on July and August they may be some events on this parking, we advise you to enquire about availability before coming.

### **Practical information**

Quillan tourist office : +33 (0)4 68 20 07 78

Railway station at Quillan : 36 35

Weather forecast for Aude : +33 (0)8 99 71 02 11

## • WHAT TO BRING AND PACK

### **Bags**

A small day pack for your water bottle, camera, picnic and waterproof.

A bag, rucksack or suitcase for your main luggage weighing a maximum of 12kg per person.

The size of your bag varies upon the type of activity.

For a walker without portage : 30L minimum

For a walker with partial portage : 50L minimum

For a walker with portage : 60L minimum

### **Day Bag**

Whatever activity you participate in, you should always carry in your rucksack waterproof clothing, a picnic, a bottle of water aswell as a small first aid kit and personal belongings, a camera, a hat, binoculars etc.

### **Walking Boots**

The type of boot depends upon the activities you take part in however they are one of your most important items. They should be comfortable, waterproof and breatheable. For the best protection we advise ankle boots.

We recommend our young walkers to wear flexible walking boots with a good sole and back.

For mountain walking for more than 4 hours long we recommend a boot with a fairly ridged sole.

If you need to buy a new pair of boots we advise you wear them in before the start of your holiday. Don't wear boots that are too small because feet have a tendance to swell up.

### **Clothes**

- A wind and rainproof jacket
- A thick jumper or a fleece
- Comfortable walking trousers
- Shorts, t shirts, aswell as breathable base layers
- Spare clothes
- Swimwear and towel
- For the start and end of season, hat and gloves suitable for GR20 walks at altitude.

### **For Sleeping**

- Sleeping bag for all nights spent in the gites and mountain shelters (sheets are provided)
- Earplugs

### **For Picnics**

- Sealed plastic box (0.5L) to carry salads
- Cutlery (folding knife and fork)
- A 1L minimum flask

### **For Walking**

- Good walking shoes or boots with a good grip sole
- Walking socks.
- Warm fleece
- Shorts and T shirts.
- Swimming costume or trunks
- Towel
- 2 Walking poles (optional)
- Water bottle (one litre minimum)
- Personal first aid kit with good blister protection
- Sunglasses and sun cream
- Sun hat
- Wind and waterproof jacket (Gore-tex style)

### **Other little things**

- A pair of trainers or sandals for a night
- Glasses and suncream
- Walking poles
- Hats
- Camera
- Small toiletry bag and towel
- Torch or headlight
- A first aid kit with personal medication, blister plasters (compeed), aspirin and survival blanket.