

## Hiking in the French Basque Country

A wonderful 7-day walking tour from the Pyrenees to the sea.

**Tour Code:** FR01W



This amazing mountains-to-the-sea itinerary is perfect for independent walkers wishing to enjoy the beauties of the French Basque Country in just one week. A beautiful itinerary along ancient footpaths and tracks, discovering the Atlantic Pyrenees and some of the most traditional Basque villages, as well as green and gentle landscapes. You will enjoy the hospitality of The Basques: they are friendly, modern, forward-looking, and above all very proud of their unique language, history, culture and traditions. The route starts at the ancient pilgrimage town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port and continues through unspoilt hills, green valleys, and evocative villages.

Among the highlights along the way there is the rack railway to the top of La Rhune, the highest mountain in the western Pyrenees, and the Atlantic Ocean, once you arrive at the lovely fishing town of St-Jean-de-Luz, where you will find some excellent fish restaurants.

In the Pyrenees, the "west" is not so wild and temperatures, even in the summer, are comfortable for walking, while in spring and fall the nearby Atlantic Ocean mitigates the temperatures. This is one of the more populated areas of the Pyrenees, with large coastal towns such as Bayonne, Biarritz or San Sebastian. Inland you can find rolling hills and less populated beautiful hillside villages with white houses with red and green doors and window shutters (the colours of the Basque flag): this is where you can still find traditional activities such as sheep farming and cheese production.

While walking, you will enjoy superb viewpoints overlooking the ocean and beautiful wooded valleys dotted with farms and villages. This is an independent walking holiday, perfect also for food lovers: the vicinity to the Atlantic Ocean means a variety of shellfish and seafood, but you will also find excellent local lamb and beef, local cider, black cherries, cheeses from the valleys of Aspe and Ossau, the famous Basque peppers from Espelette, and very good local fruit and vegetables. You will also taste the well-known gâteau basque and the txakoli, the region's white wine made from vines growing on terraces overlooking the ocean. Enjoy this independent

walking tour between mountains and ocean: we will offer you all the support you might need while you enjoy the experience in your own way and at your own pace.



**Starting days:** Every day from April 15<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024

**Participants:** from 1 person

**Level:** 2,5 medium

Level is medium to difficult; the walking is mainly on the foothills of the Pyrenees rather than on the mountains. On some days, you have a choice between easier or more challenging routes. You

have 4 to 5 hours steady walking with usually ascents and descents from 200 to 700 metres. You need to have walking experience and be trained.

More challenging options are 6 to 7 hours walking with ascents and descents of up to 900 metres. If the weather is really bad or you are really tired, we can transfer you to your next hotel by car.

Daily distance: min. 10,5 km / 6,5 mi - max. 19 km / 11,8 mi

Total km: short route 71 km / 44 miles; long route 82,5 km / 51,3 miles

### **Program in short**

Day 1 Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port

Day 2 Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port - Col d'Ispéguy - Iparla - Bidarray (13 km/8 mi or 16,5 km/10,3 mi)

Day 3 Bidarray - Artzamendi - Itxassou (12,5 km / 7,8 mi or 16 km / 9,9 mi)

Day 4 Itxassou - Mondarrain - Espelette (16 km / 9,9 mi)

Day 5 Espelette - Sare 19 km / 11,8 mi

Day 6 Sare - Rhune - Ascain - Saint-Jean-de-Luz (10,5 km / 6,5 mi or 15 km / 9,3 mi)

Day 7 End of tour

### **Program day by day**

#### **Day 1 Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port**

Individual arrival at your hotel in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port (located just 500m from the train station). As an alternative and with a surcharge, you can book an airport pick-up and transfer (time about 1 hour).

Your hotel is close to the centre of this little and evocative pilgrimage town in the shadows of the Pyrenees, an important stage of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela (Way of St. James). This is a great place to start your walking tour in Basque Country.

Overnight with breakfast and dinner in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.

#### **Day 2 Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port - Col d'Ispéguy - Iparla - Bidarray**

Today you will reach Col d'Ispéguy (transfer ca. 35 minutes, included) and start your itinerary here. You will enjoy very beautiful views of the magnificent Pyrenees: this is the kingdom of Griffon vultures. From here you have a choice between several routes to Bidarray, most of them unchallenging. Alternatively, there is an easy walking route between Saint Martin-de-Arrosa and Bidarray. Bidarray is today's final destination, a lovely little village nestled in a green valley, along the River Nive. No matter which route you choose: this is going to be an unforgettable day.

Overnight stay with breakfast and dinner in Bidarray.

Walking time: short route 4 hours: long route: 6,5 hours

Distance: short route 13 km / 8 mi - long route 16,5 km / 10,3 mi

Altitude: short route + 400/- 600; long route +800 / -1300 m.

#### **Day 3 Bidarray - Artzamendi - Itxassou**

Another amazing walking day! You will walk past Alpine pastures (once used by smugglers as shepherds), visit the lovely summit of Artzamendi and then start walking down along streams and little brooks. You pass a beautiful hole in the rock known as the Pas de Roland, along the River Nive: the legend says that Roland of Roncesvalles, wanted to join his troops and being late, gave a big kick in the rock to open his way ... and there appeared a lovely place with a nice beach by the water.

Finally, you will reach the evocative village of Itxassou, a little village of about 2,000 inhabitants, still crossed by River Nive, with a lovely little Basque church we recommend to visit.

Overnight with breakfast and dinner in Itxassou.

Walking time: short route 5 hours: long route: 6,5 hours

Distance: short route 12,5 km / 7,8 mi - long route 16 km / 9,9 mi

Altitude: short route + 590/- 650; long route +880 / -890 m.

#### **Day 4 Itxassou - Mondarrain - Espelette**

Today, a nice and gentle climb to the top of Mount Mondarrain awaits you!

The mountain is 2,457 feet, but, once on the top, you will enjoy magnificent views of the waves of Pyrenean heights, a really memorable panorama.

Later, you will stroll through high pastures and valleys down to the typical Basque village of Espelette, perfectly preserved and well known for its festival of red chili peppers.

Espelette is also a variety of chili pepper (piment d'Espelette in French, Ezpeletako biperra in Basque) with denomination of controlled origin, grown in the Basque Country and particularly in the municipality of Espelette (that is why it has this name).

In Espelette, the castle and church are worth a visit and, in the village, you can also find an excellent chocolate producer (Antton). Some chocolate after a walk on the mountains could be just perfect!

Overnight with breakfast and dinner in Espelette.

Walking time: 4,45 hours

Distance: 16 km / 9,9 mi

Altitude: +620/ -760 m.

#### **Day 5 Espelette - Sare**

Another day of wonderful walking through villages and hamlets, and along country lanes and farm tracks - the remarkable Ainhoa being the highlight. The village of Ainhoa, located a few km from the Spanish border, was founded in the 12th century as a place of rest on the way to Santiago de Compostela.

Walking is easy, mainly through beautiful rural countryside: however, you will have interesting places to see, things to do, and even have a look at artisan producers of food, drinks and artifacts.

Your stay is in Sare, where you can feel the very soul of Basque culture. It has everything: architecture, gastronomy, traditional dancing, pelota, the Axuria and Rhune mountains (which you will climb tomorrow), and all just 14 kilometres from the coast. Sare boasts 253 houses dating back to the 15th century, 14 oratories and many small sanctuaries.

During your stay, do not miss the famous Gâteau Basque, a delicious cake with black cherry or custard filling, especially since, in Sare, there is a museum celebrating the cake.

Overnight with breakfast and dinner in Sare.

Walking time: 5,5 or 6,5 hours

Distance: 19 km / 11,8 mi

Altitude: +620/ -760 m.

## Day 6 Sare - Rhune - Ascain - Saint-Jean-de-Luz

This is your final stage, maybe the highlight of the trip. Today you will reach the summit of La Rhune with its 360° views east towards the endless Pyrenees you have crossed, south towards Spain, and west to the Atlantic coast. You have a choice: you can either walk up and do a steady walk (but absolutely doable) or take the magnificent rack railway, its wooden carriages slowly clattering their way to the top.

On the way up you can spot pottoks – wild mountain ponies - and red headed sheep.

Then a rewarding walk down awaits you, up to the lovely village of Ascain, the last Basque village of your trip. We will take you to St Jean de Luz (transfer time 20 minutes, included).

St Jean de Luz is one of the prettiest and liveliest towns in the Pyrenees: it boasts a lovely harbour area, bars and restaurants offering tapas and excellent fish dishes. Tonight, you are free to have dinner in one of the many places in town.

Overnight with breakfast in Saint-Jean-de-Luz.

Walking time: short route 3,5 hours: long route: 6 hours

Distance: short route 10,5 km / 6,5 mi – long route 15 km / 9,3 mi

Altitude: short route + 500/- 500; long route +880 / -840 m.

## Day 7 Departure

After breakfast, end of the Tour and of our services. Your hotel is situated just 500 metres from the train station of Saint-Jean-de-Luz.

Upon request and with an extra fee (to be made in advance), we will arrange a transfer back to Biarritz airport or a taxi to the train station in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Transfers also available to Pau or Bordeaux. Transfer time: 30 minutes

### \*Hotels:

The accommodation includes characterful, high quality hotels as well as owner-managed boutique hotels (see links above). In case the above mentioned hotels do not have availability we will search for an equivalent hotel.

### Meals:

You will eat very well, and find a surprising range of dishes and recipes, regional and traditional with an often-distinctive contemporary twist. Included (except in Espelette and Saint Jean de Luz) is a three course set menu with several choices for each course, but you can pay supplements for upgraded menus or a la carte, although most people find this unnecessary. Wine and other drinks are not included in our price, so you pay locally.

### Prices per person 2024:

15/04/2024 – 30/06/2024 and 01/09/2024 – 15/10/2024

In double room and triple room € 990

In single room € 1.340

Supplement solo traveller € 185

01/07/2024 – 31/08/2024

In double room and triple room € 1.055

In single room € 1.405

Supplement solo traveller € 185

### Included in the price



- 6 nights and breakfast
- 5 dinners (3 course menu), drinks not included (no dinner in St.Jean-de-Luz)
- Luggage transportation (max 12 kg)
- Transfers specified in the programme as included
- Detailed walking directions and descriptions
- 1:25,000 IGN maps as required
- 24/7 customer phone service.

### **Not included in the price**

- Journey to the starting point and from the finishing point.
- Transfers (at extra cost)
- Dinners on the night specified
- Lunches and picnics
- Menu choices at extra cost
- All drinks and beverages
- Entry fees
- Personal and travel insurance that we highly recommend
- Other items and all not mentioned under “included in the price”

### **Supplements**

- Pick up and transfer from either Biarritz airport or the railway station at Saint-Jean-de-Luz.
- Extra nights upon arrival and departure, available upon request.



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