

EXPLORE

The Pyrenees by 4x4



30 Days

28 May to 26 June, 2024

27 May - 25 June, 2025

Spain, Andorra & France

Accommodation based



Self Drive Adventures
GUIDED TAGALONG TOURS WORLD WIDE

www.selfdriveadventures.com



The Route

Please Note: Itinerary Subject to Change. Guide decides on final route as per current conditions on day of travel.

The Pyrenees...

Experience Europe in a very different way to the usual European holiday. Instead of visiting the obvious highlights we travel to a remote Europe, which most people do not know exists. Not many get to experience Europe like this.

Using 4x4s we can access the remote Pyrenees Mountain Range which stretches over 450 km, from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Mediterranean in the east and acts as a natural border between Spain and France. A trip through these mountains takes the traveller through alpine scenery, clear lakes, winding rivers, powerful waterfalls and impressive cliffs, all acting as a gorgeous background to the unique cultures that grew in the region, isolated by the mountain range. Not only will we experience stunning scenery but also wineries, quaint and picturesque villages, ancient citadels, hidden monasteries and fun off-road driving. You will be surprised at the variety of the scenery in the Pyrenees – they are high, rough and wild. We'll stay in comfortable and charming accommodation along the route. The adventure starts and ends in Barcelona famous for its buildings by Gaudi, tapas, seafood and sangria.

Highlights include: Barcelona; Penedés Wine Region; the coastal region of Costa Brava; Girona with its Gothic churches; the Cathar region of France including the UNESCO world heritage site fortress of Carcassonne and Renne les Chateau which influenced the famous "Da Vinci Code" novel; Niaux Cave, one of the last caves with prehistoric art that is still open to the public; Pic Negre the high mountain pass (2,643 metres) on the Andorran-Spanish border; Aiguestortes National Park; Boumort National Reserve; Montrebei Gorge; Tour de France routes through Gavarnie and Lourdes – the "Route des Cols"; Ordesa National Park; Mallos de Riglos; Basque Country; Bardanes Reales desert; and Vulture watching in Alquezar.

The Itinerary

1 Barcelona

Arrive in Barcelona and be transferred to hotel. Afternoon briefing followed by a welcome dinner. Two nights in Barcelona.

2 Barcelona

We will begin our day in Barcelona with a half day Panoramic sightseeing tour of the city. Free time in the afternoon in Barcelona centre to enjoy and relax in this vibrant city. Few European cities can offer you the wide diversity of cultural experiences that you'll find in Barcelona. The city also has over 4 kms of beach only a short walk from the city centre, warm sunshine most of the year, and a varied and renowned cuisine.

3 Penedés Wine Region & Montserrat

Collect our 4x4s and drive the back roads and tracks to the Penedés wine region which is one of the best-known traditional wine areas. Visit a winery accompanied by a professional vintner and wine-grower who will take us on a tour of the winery and offer generous tastes of his wine and cava. You will be able to ask questions and learn everything you ever wanted to know about Spanish (Catalan) wine and cava. We continue onto Montserrat, "The Serrated Mountain", along with the Benedictine monastery and church at its heart. This is the most famous site in Catalonia for pilgrims, tourists, photographers, and mountain climbers especially due to the "Black Madonna" housed in the church, but also due to the unique conglomerate of rock formations, sculpted by eons of wind and water. Overnight in hotel in the Montseny Region.



4

La Selva – Costa Brava

Our day will begin heading towards the region of Catalonia known as La Selva. It is located between the Puigsacalm mountain range and the Costa Brava. The coastal towns of the region have become a popular destination for tourism and adventure travel, and we will get to visit one ourselves.

Costa Brava literally means "The Wild Coast". This is where the Pyrenees mountain range ends in a series of cliffs which fall into the Mediterranean, creating a series of small coves, bays, lagoons, and an overall dramatic scenery. Two nights in the Costa Brava / Girona region.



5

Girona

This day will be dedicated to Girona and its surroundings. The largest city in northern Catalonia, it is a treasure trove of museums, galleries, and Gothic churches, strung around a web of cobbled lanes and medieval walls. Reflections of Modernista mansions shimmer in the Riu Onyar, which separates the walkable historic centre on its eastern bank from the gleaming commercial centre to the west.



6

Collsacabra – Rupit

We will set out northwards and arrive at the Collsacabra. This region is the very heart of Catalonia and is characterised by steep cliffs, forests, isolated farms, and ancient villages. We will visit the stone village of Rupit. Going back hundreds of years, we will wander along the picturesque winding streets. We will carry on, driving off-road through the forests of Collsacabra towards the Pantà de Sau, a lake surrounded by tall mountains. It gives one the feeling of being at one with nature. If time permits, we will get to visit an ancient cliff-side castle for a memorable visit, before continuing towards our hotel in the La Garrotxa Region for one night.



7

La Garrotxa – Cerdanya Valley

An optional start of an exciting hot-air balloon flight over the region (weather dependent). Later in the day we will advance in a north-westerly direction towards the Cadi Moixero region beyond which range lie the Cerdanya region and the high Pyrenees. We will then carry on driving along the ranges from which Andorra can be seen till we reach one of the highest vantage points in the Pyrenees where we can view both the valleys spread out before us and the mountains all around. Towards the evening hours we will reach our hotel in the Cerdanya region for one night.



8 *Rennes-le-Château - Carcassonne*

Today we cross the French border and enter "Cathar Country". The Cathars who were the followers of Catharism, a religious cult, operating in Europe between the 11th and 13th centuries. We will visit Rennes-le-Château - a small village at the top of the mountain and is a source of touristic attraction due to the number of legends and stories surrounding it - mainly conspiracy theories about unclaimed lost treasures. A visit here is a truly a unique experience and the views from the top are breath-taking.

We will finish the day in the famous town of Carcassonne, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is one of the best examples in Europe of a medieval fortified town, with its massive walls protecting the fort, the surrounding buildings, and the wonderful Gothic cathedral.



9 *Carcassonne*

Rest day in Carcassonne.



10 *Montsegur - Niaux Caves*

we will continue to Montsegur Fort which is one of the most impressive fortresses in the region and has witnessed one of the most violent periods in this area's history. It is also the inspiration for many mystery cases and conspiracies. In the afternoon hours we will arrive at Niaux Cave - one of the last caves with prehistoric art that is still open to the public. The cave's main hall has some of the most impressive art, depicting the animals of the period. Our visit allows us a glimpse into the daily lives and rituals of the Paleolithic man, even though it is theorized that it was never used for living as much as it was for religious or cultural ceremonies. Late in the day we will cross back into Spain and arrive at hour hotel for the night.



11 *Berguda - Pedraforca*

Our day will be centered around Bergudà. The region is well known for the Pedraforca Mountain (traditionally considered a meeting place for witches' covens), for its pastoral and mountain scenery, and for its many Romanesque churches. Another often-visited site is the Mountain of Queralt, which is blessed with many hiking trails and offers views of much of Bergudà and the surrounding regions.



12 *Pic Negre - Andorra*

Entering Andorra through the old smugglers' route, we will climb up Pic Negre - a high mountain pass at an elevation of 2,643 meters above sea level, on the Andorran-Spanish border. It's one of the highest mountain roads of the country and might be totally impassable in winter. The climb is notoriously difficult with a high degree of steepness.



13

Andorra – Os de Civís

Today we will visit Os de Civís - a Catalan village in the central Pyrenees mountains, located to the west of Andorra. It is very close to the Spain-Andorra border, and is unique in being the only Spanish village that can be reached by vehicle only through Andorra. It has several medieval buildings including a Romanesque church.

14

Port de Cabus – Aigüestortes

After a farewell view over Andorra, we will go off-road along the ancient smugglers' routes between Spain and Andorra used nowadays not only by tourists but also the occasional smuggler. We will arrive at view points enabling us to see the valleys far away and the mountains all around.

The itinerary for the next five days when we stay in Sort may change due to weather conditions. We may swap one day's itinerary for another as it makes sense according to local conditions.

We will make our way along ranges and through picturesque villages to the Aigüestortes National Park, one of the most beautiful and famous reserves in Spain. Once there we will transfer to the park's vehicles which will take us up to the Amitges Bridge at a height of 2400 meters. The downwards journey will be on foot (those who prefer to use the taxis can do so) to Lake Maurici. After a short rest we will rejoin our own vehicles and drive along a breath-taking route outside the reserve and then drive along the watershed line with spectacular scenery in all directions. For the next 5 nights we will use Sort as our home base to explore the region.

15

Pallars Sobirà

Today will be dedicated to the Pallars Sobirà region. Located in the heart of the Pyrenes, and stretches from south to north, starting at the gorge of Collegats to the village of Alós d'Isil, and following the course of the river Noguera Pallaresa, Pallars Sobirà is the fourth biggest comarca in Catalonia in terms of surface area, and has one of the lowest densities of population in the country. Most of the region is a protected natural reserve.

16

Periferico – Boumort

El Periferico is a beautiful route passing on the outskirts of the famous Aiguastortes National Park. This off-road trail climbs along a magnificent route offering breath taking views all around. The Boumort is a National Reserve covering 13,097 hectares located among different mountain ranges of the Catalan western Pre-Pyrenees. Visiting this area allows for a unique chance of enjoying its wonderful plant and animal biodiversity.



17

Pallars Jussà – Montrebei

Pallars Jussà was established as a comarca (county) in 1936, out of the old county of Pallars. The name means "Lower Pallars"; to the northeast and into the mountains is Pallars Sobirà. We will visit Montrebei Gorge, the largest gorge in Catalonia and is an important wildlife sanctuary, in which many wild (some indigenous) birds and animals can be witnessed. There is no road for vehicles, neither are there any railroad tracks, nor power lines. The canyon's walls can reach up to 500 meters in places where its width does not exceed 20 meters. We will take a walk into the canyon returning the same way to our 4x4s.



18

Sort - Rest Day

Rest day in Sort. Optional activities include a cheese tasting or rafting. This exciting and refreshing activity – professional rafting – will take place on the Noguera Pallaresa River the beauty of which is breath-taking. The experience is not only the rafting itself but the surroundings as well – the wild nature, the vegetation, and the mighty cliffs. Wet suits, helmets and safety equipment will keep you warm and safe and the experienced professional team will ensure your safe arrival at the finish.



19

Val d'Aran

Today we will drive through the Aran Valley which used to be completely isolated from the rest of Spain for hundreds of years and causing it to develop a culture and even a language of its own. We will set out for the hidden corners in the valley, climb up along the old mining road and visit the Church of the deserted village of Montgari, a place that used to shelter refugees escaping through the Pyrenees during WWII. Climbing up to a high vantage point overlooking the Pyrenees, we will go along a route crossing the ranges, enjoying spectacular views, green forests, verdant meadows with bell-carrying cows grazing and the odd isolated farm. We will spend two nights in this area.



20

Miners Trail – Saut deth Pish

A steep climb along an old miners' road will bring us to a high, almost desolate mountain plateau. A short hike from there and we will be at the little-known small glacier lake of Liat. The Mines of Liat are a series of mines that were in use from around 1740 up until 1965. Today, abandoned buildings, galleries, trenches and prospects are found spread across in Rasos de Liat, a grassy and rocky mountainous area at an altitude of 2300 meter above sea level. The trail could be a bit tricky but should pose no problems for our 4x4 vehicles. We will then visit Saut deth Pish – one of the most popular natural spots in Aran Valley. This beautiful waterfall is located in a gorgeous, easily accessible valley.



21

Benasque – Aragon

Today we will leave Catalonia and enter Aragon. Twisting mountain passes will bring us to one of the most beautiful and least known of the Pyrenees valleys – the Benasque valley at the foot of the tallest mountain in the Pyrenees – the Aneto. After a hike among the glorious landscapes of the valley we will return to our vehicles and drive along a narrow, winding mountain road which will bring us to the valley of the Cinca River at the foot of the Ordesa Reserve. On our way we will pass through the small villages that lie between Catalunya and Aragon. We will spend the night in the area of the ancient town of Ainsa.



22

Route des Cols - Lourdes

Crossing into France again, the Route des Cols is a road crossing the Pyrenees from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean through 34 remarkable mountain passes, scattered over all 6 French departments of the Pyrenees. Thus, from pass to pass, valley after valley, the road allows us to discover by a mountain route many panoramic landscapes of the Pyrenees.



After lunch we will arrive in Cirque de Gavarnie – an enormous and incredibly beautiful Glacial Cirque located in the centre of the Pyrenees, in south-western France, right by the Spanish border. The cirque, by which it is impossible not to be awe-struck, was created by ages-long glacial retreats, carving it into a 900 meter-wide, 1500 meter-high natural amphitheatre. Rushing down the cirque wall is the Gran Cascade – the tallest waterfall in Europe.



In the evening hours we will visit Lourdes – In 1858, a young village girl named Bernadette experienced visions of the Virgin Mary. Later, she was declared a saint by the Pope, and Lourdes, which up until then had been a small and peaceful market town at the foot of the Pyrenees, became a site of pilgrimage, especially for those seeking healing and medical care. Overnight in local hotel.



23

Pont d'Espagne – Lac de Gaube

Pont d'Espagne is a famous stone bridge spanning the Gave de Marcadau at the point where it meets the Gave de Gaube, near one of its sources in the French Pyrenees, and is a protected area. Many impressive and sonorous waterfalls can be found here, and Gaube Lake itself can be reached by a cable car. In the past this zone acted as a passageway and meeting point between French and Spanish merchants. We will then cross back into Spain for two nights in the Torla Region.

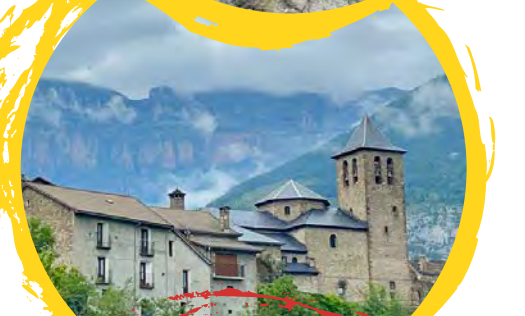


24

Añiselo – Ordesa National Park

We will devote most of this day to touring the Ordesa Park, one of the most important of the Pyrenees reserves. The reserve has glacial cirques and some of the most beautiful waterfalls in Europe. Due to the sharp topography, a wide variety of plants and animals flourish here, among them birds of prey such as vultures and even eagles, mountain goats and very occasionally bears.

The day will include a hike amidst the amazing natural scenery of the Aniselo Canyon which descends from the Monte Perdido (lost mountain). We will drive between rock walls reaching a height of hundreds of meters and along crystal clear pools and dense vegetation. Later we will drive along the west side of the reserve in the Ordesa Valley itself and exit through the ancient village of Torla towards the amazing Soasu Glacier. After a hike we will return for a second night in our hotel.



25

Mallos de Riglos

Mallos de Riglos are a set of conglomerate rock formations, located in Aragon. Rising to some 300 metres high (at 1000 metres above sea level), they form part of the foothills of the Pyrenees. The Mallos were formed when eroded material washed down from the slopes of the Pyrenees and became cemented together by limestone. Over time, this mixture became compacted into a large mass of conglomerate rock. Eventually, erosion wore away the softer, more porous parts of the conglomerate. The more resistant rock remained and became the formations which can be seen today. Because of their relatively vertical sides, the Mallos de Riglos are a popular destination for climbers. Overnight in local hotel.



26

Roncval Valley - Pamplona

The Basque Country is an autonomous community within Spain, which is divided into three parts bounded by two parallel mountain ranges. The Basque people's historical roots remain a mystery to this day. Unusual isolation of the Basque people has contributed to the situation where the local Basque language, Euskera, is wildly different from its surrounding languages and is one of the only tongues that have no known linguistic relatives. Roncal Valley is located in the eastern part of the Basque Pyrenees. A drive through this region takes the visitor through green hills and farmhouses with tall roofs, in which animals are kept on the ground floor, while the family resides on the upper floors. This allows the residents to take advantage of the animal's body heat, rising from downstairs. The Basque and Aragonese architectural styles are very different, a fact which can be clearly noticed visiting this area. We will arrive in Pamplona for our overnight stay.



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27

Bardanes Reales

We will take a morning visit into Pamplona, the capital of Navarra and one of northern Spain's most popular destinations. The city's name comes from its ancient history, derived from the Roman general's name who founded it in BC 75, the Great Pompeius. It is most famous for the "running of the bulls".

Next is a 4x4 route through Bardenas Reales, which is a semi-desert natural region, or badlands, in southeast Navarre. The soils are made up of clay, chalk and sandstone and have been eroded by water and wind creating surprising shapes, canyons, plateaus, tabular structures and isolated hills, called cabezos. Bardenas lacks urban areas, vegetation is scarce and the many streams that cross the territory have a markedly seasonal flow, staying dry most of the year. We will spend the night in the Huesca Region.



28

Sierra de Guara -

The Sierra de Guara is a mountain massif in central Aragon, with its highest point reaching 2077 meters above sea level. Much of the massif itself is now included in the Natural Park of Sierra y Cañones de Guara. Several rivers such as the Alcanadre and the Vero run through these mountains, creating countless beautiful channels, gorges, and canyons. This region is only sparsely populated and holds several abandoned villages.

We will visit the town of Alquézar in the region of Huesca in Aragon, with a population of about 300 inhabitants, located within the Sierra de Guara Park. The town's history developed around its fortress and Santa Maria's church.



29

Vulture Watching - Barcelona

One of the highlights of our tour will be Vulture Watching - A wonderful, unique experience - joining a professional ornithologist at a vulture feeding station while he feeds them. The spot will be flocked by a wake of Griffon and Bearded Vultures. The vantage point is located about 20 meters from the vultures, and later, the feeder can be joined, and the birds can be witnessed from just a few meters away. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience in which wild nature can be felt at its best.

We then return our cars before having a farewell dinner in Barcelona.



30

Depart

Transfer to airport for departure flights.



Prices, Dates...

Carcassonne, France

Dates...

30 Days

28 May to 26 June, 2024

27 May - 25 June, 2025

Accommodation Based

Prices...

EUR10,695* per person - First 5 cars to book receive EUR900 discount approx. AUD1,500 discount per person - price will be EUR9,795 per person. 2024 adventure only.

- Prices are based on 2 people per 4x4 on a double/twin share basis
- Single supplement: EUR1,480* per person
- 3rd and 4th passengers: we can provide pricing if you have more than 2 people per 4x4

*The prices above are based on the 2024 tour dates. 2025 pricing TBA. Prices assume a minimum of 3 vehicles and a maximum of 7 vehicles (plus support vehicles). Prices are subject to exchange rate fluctuations – please see booking form for all terms and conditions.

Please do not book flights nor pay for travel insurance until you have been advised that we have received deposits from the minimum number of participants for this adventure.

Inclusions...

Arrival and departure transfers, fuel and road tolls, vehicle hire (Toyota Landcruiser, Mitsubishi Montero or similar), paper map, vehicle insurance (standard), two-way radio in vehicle, all hotels, meals as per itinerary (29 nights at half board - full breakfast and dinner), coffee and picnic equipment, guide vehicle, local English/Spanish speaking tour guide, activities as listed in itinerary, entry fees as per itinerary. First aid kit is in the guide car, as is all recovery equipment.

Exclusions...

Airfares return to Barcelona, alcoholic drinks, meals other than stated in the itinerary (lunches: picnic lunches approx. EUR6 per person per day, lunch at a restaurant would cost between EUR10-18 per person per day. An average of EUR15 per day or total EUR420 per person), local tips, travel insurance, vehicle excess, activities over and above those detailed in the suggested itinerary, visas (if required), immunisations (if required) and any personal expenses. Note that accommodation or vehicle upgrades are not possible on this trip. Car excess and car rental terms and conditions will be supplied separately.

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Other Information

Accommodation...

This is not a 5-star holiday. It is an adventure. We will be staying in comfortable hotels, with ensuite bathrooms and usually very charming. In some areas the choice of hotels is limited, and we will take the best that is available. We could be staying in old mills converted to a hotel, what was previously monastery, as well as small family run hotels.

If you'd like arrive a day or two early to acclimatise and get over a long flight or stay longer, we can arrange additional nights in the same hotel. Prices to be advised closer to the date.

Driving Ability & Conditions...

The skills required are a driver's licence and a good dollop of common sense. 4x4 or dirt/gravel road experience would be recommended. Your local guide will give driving instructions and will guide you through the more challenging passages. What one day might be "mild" 4x4 driving the next day could be more challenging mainly due to rainfall. There could be mud, water crossings and perhaps even snow. Please discuss your level of 4x4 experience with us prior to booking.

Vehicles...

The vehicle will be a 4x4 – Toyota Land Cruiser, Mitsubishi Montero or similar. The rental supply conditions in Europe often changes and 4x4 rental is very difficult to source. The cars will not all be of similar age or makes. What is available will be on a "first come, first served" basis.

Route

Many parts of the route are planned with extensive travel off road on rarely used tracks, trails and mountain roads. To get from one area that we visit to the next we drive on tarmac, also on main roads. Due to weather conditions routes may need to change during the tour.



Convoy Size...

The minimum number of 4x4s in our convoy is 5, unless a small group surcharge is added, and the maximum is 7. This excludes support vehicles. Most vehicles tend to have just two guests, however, up to four can be accommodated. The convoy does travel together for most of the journey, so you need to be willing to be flexible to fit in with the determined start time each day, stops for breaks etc. We try to allow breaks for photos, toilet stops, sightseeing, activities, wildlife viewing, lunch, morning and afternoon tea.

Guide & Support Team...

On this adventure you will be guided by local guides who speak English, Spanish, Catalan and French. The decision of the local guide is final on all matters likely to affect the safety or well-being of any person participating in the trip. Due to the length of the tour the guides may swap in and out for a period of time. This does not affect the logistics of the tour. There is no Self Drive Adventures escort on the tour, only the local guides.

Amenities & Toilet Breaks...

All accommodation has private bathroom facilities. We will stop for toilet breaks and many of these will be a "bush toilet" stop where there may be cover of trees or bushes for privacy.

Activity Level...

We do recommend a good level of fitness to endure some of the rough tracks and long days of driving. This trip is not otherwise physically demanding as any walking required is usually a short distance and there are longer distances optional for fitter participants. Trekking poles are useful as there can be uneven terrain and stairs. There are many days where we do have hikes or activities outside of the 4x4s.

Food & Drinks...

See the itinerary inclusions for meals that are included. In general, the food is excellent in quality and variety. Breakfast will be included in the accommodation each morning. Lunch will sometimes be in restaurants or a "picnic lunch" on the road. Dinners will be in hotel and other restaurants in the towns we visit. Most dinners "house wine" and water is included, however, beer, spirits and soft drinks are not.

Weather...

This is late spring in Europe. Temperatures will range from 5—30 degrees C during the day depending on the location. It will rain sometimes, so be sure to take a waterproof jacket and good shoes with you. High in the Pyrenees there will still be snow in places. It may block our way on some routes if there has been a late snowfall.



Flights...

Before booking flights and other arrangements it is your responsibility to confirm with us that we have the minimum number of cars required for this adventure to depart.

Risks & Health...

By participating you acknowledge that the nature of the trip is adventurous, and participation involves a degree of personal risk. You should discuss the risks with your doctor before agreeing to join this trip. There is a high risk of putting on weight during this adventure.



FAN MAIL

Glorious Trip



Wonderful trip, we were well advised and informed by Self Drive Adventures. Their research into their adventures is very thorough. They have a knack for knowing what people are looking for when deciding on this style of holiday adventure. The guides are amazing, very knowledgeable and nothing is to much trouble. Interesting and beautiful scenery. If you are thinking about it, go for it. You won't be sorry.

Robyn Shackell,

Absolutely glorious trip. I had no idea that Spain, in particular, was so beautiful. Impeccably put together by SDA with really fabulous local guides. Some standout hotels & excellent local fare added to the overall experience.

Jenny Cammell

We loved the trip. A totally different way to see the Pyrenees including National Parks, walks and remote castles, all important to Spain's identity. I would recommend this trip.

Sue & Ken Duffy

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