

Walk to Freedom across the Pyrenees

Trip Code: WTF

Version: WTF Walk to Freedom across the Pyrenees



WALK & TREK



GUIDED GROUP



CHALLENGING



HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike from France to Spain on this historic trail
- A short and challenging 4 day trekking holiday in the Pyrenees
- Some of the best mountain views in the Pyrenees
- Free day in the French beautiful spa town of Luchon

AT A GLANCE

- 4 days trekking
- Max. altitude - 2522 metres
- Join at Toulouse

ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

- 6 Breakfasts
- 3 Lunches
- 4 Dinners
- 3 nights Hotel
- 1 nights Gite / Hostel
- 2 nights Mountain Hut / Refuge

[VIEW DATES, PRICES & BOOK YOUR HOLIDAY HERE](#)

Introduction

The 'Chemin de la Liberte' was the toughest of several escape routes across the Pyrenees during the Second World War; you can follow in the footsteps of history, from France to Spain, on this wonderful week long trekking holiday. Running from Saint-Girons in the Ariege district of France to near the village of Isil in Spain, the Chemin de la Liberte, or Walk to Freedom, has been an official way-marked walk since 1994 and can be completed as an excellent and challenging 4-day hike. After our first night in a comfortable chateau in Saint-Girons, once the German border forces HQ, our journey begins. Starting out the forested foothills of the Pyrenees we climb to cross the high mountains of the Ariege via the Refuge des Estagnous (2245m) and the Frontier Col (2522m). En route, we will pass safe houses and barns used as hiding places by the escapees and encounter rocky cirques, mountain lakes, boulder-fields and possibly snow-filled gullies, whilst marvelling at some of the finest mountain views in the Pyrenees. Our journey's end is at an excellent tapas bar in Val d'Aran, where we can celebrate the end of our 'walk to freedom'. Finally, we drive back across the border into France and end our adventure with a two night stay and a free day in the charming spa town of Luchon.

Is this holiday for you?

This trekking holiday is a traverse from France into Spain over the Pyrenees. We stay in a mix of chateau, rural gite, mountain refuge and we have one night either wild camping or in a basic shepherd's shelter or cabane. We will also have to carry all the belongings we need for 2.5days including a light sleeping bag, sleeping mat, a small stove, your own pack lunches and a share of 1 nights food provisions. The trek involves walking on a waymarked trail over variety of terrain including forest paths, Alpine meadows and over rocky passes. The trails used for the most part offer good underfoot conditions but there are several off piste sections where we will cross boulders and others where we may encounter patches of winter snow. A few places along the route involve some easy scrambling with some exposure. We average around 7 to 9 hours walking each day with typically approx 700 metres of ascent and / or descent on most days.

Itinerary

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DAY 1

Meet at the group hotel in Saint-Lizier. A single transfer from Toulouse Airport is provided.

The holiday begins with overnight at our accommodation in Saint-Lizier. A single transfer from Toulouse Airport is provided. We arrive in the afternoon and have some time to relax and meet the guide. The guide will give a briefing on the days ahead and distribute a 3-day lunch pack to group members. We have a back up vehicle for the first day and a half so we are able to travel light until we say goodbye to the support staff at the Col de la Core. Our clean clothes are transported to Luchon for the end of the trek.



Accommodation
Hotel

DAY 2

Start at Pont le Chemin de Liberte, and enjoy the long walk through rolling hills to Aunac (766m).

After breakfast we say our farewells and embark on our trek. Our start point is the Pont le Chemin de la Liberte, inaugurated in 1995 after the old iron bridge was demolished for safety reasons. It was at this bridge that the driver sounded his whistle for the escapees to jump from the moving train and hastily collected by the Resistance and hurried into the woods. The escapees would walk this whole route in the night to ensure that they were not seen. Luckily we can enjoy the trek in the daylight with the beautiful backdrop of the mountains. This first day is a long one, but with only modest ascent and descent as we make our way to the first night's accommodation in Aunac (766m). Here we overnight in the gite set high up on the hillside with wonderful views across the Ariège, run by Francois and Claudine who prepare a superb dinner with vegetables from their own garden and locally sourced meat. Both breakfast and dinner are usually taken al fresco when the weather is fine.

Meals: **B L D**



Accommodation
Gite / Hostel



Ascent
1070M



Descent
675M



Time
8 - 9 hours walking



Distance
23KM

DAY 3**Today walk through beech forest and along a section of the GR10 to the cabane at Subera (1499m).**

After breakfast we leave the gite at Aunac and, still walking with day packs we continue on our route over the Pyrenees towards 'freedom' and Spain. We walk through bracken and beech forests today giving us some welcome shade and coolness. Continuing onwards we walk along a section of the famous GR10 to the Col de la Core. Here, we rendezvous with our support driver and our bags for one last time before we commit to the high mountain. Now carrying our full loads we cut south under the Crete de Balame, climbing for another 2.5hrs until we reach the simple cabane Subera (1499m) by the rock wall of the Cirque de Lameza. The Cabane has had a recent make over and, though simple, now has several bunks and a fire place; a nearby stream allows us the opportunity to wash and there are wonderful views back to the north. If the cabane is occupied we will camp nearby.

Meals: **B L D**



Accommodation
Mountain Hut / Refuge



Ascent
1100M



Descent
400M



Time
5 - 6 hours walking



Distance
16KM

DAY 4**A hard day walk today, over the Col de Craberous (2382m) and descent to Refuge d'Estagnous (2245m).**

Leaving the cabane we embark on our hardest day, with some challenging height gain! We pay our respects to the crew of the Halifax bomber, which crashed into Pic de Lampau. Remains of the wreckage still litter the ground and there is a simple memorial plaque set in the rock close by. Leaving this site we continue upwards to reach the Col de Craberous (2382m), the final ascent can still hold some snow early in the summer. We can enjoy some great views here while we stop for a breather before the steep descent for 300m to another small cabane where we can resupply with water. After a succession of lakes we start climbing up again initially through boulders before long granite slabs lead us to the Col de Pouech (2494m) from where we can see the Refuge d'Estagnous (2245m) below us. We have a warm welcome here from the guardians and the promise of a hot shower and cold beer! For those with energy left there is a chance to climb Mt Valier just above the refuge. If the refuge is occupied we will camp nearby.

Meals: **B L D**



Accommodation
Mountain Hut / Refuge



Ascent
1390M



Descent
640M



Time
7 - 8 hours walking



Distance
13KM

DAY 5**Walk and cross into Spain at the Frontier Col (2522m), descend to Arties. Transfer to Luchon.**

An early start on our last day of trekking. Leaving the Refuge we descend to Lac Rond, before climbing again for 200m. A narrow path leads up by the side of a water course and then traverses left to meet the Etang Long. Although a little exposed, this is a short stretch and there are cables in place. After a short break we begin the last push to the Frontier Col at 2522m. No need for our passports here as we cross into Spain and enjoy a long descent to the Noguera Palaresa River stopping for a snack and an optional swim in the Lac de Clauère and Freedom for the escapees during WWII. We follow the river to the end of our trek at the Refuge del Fortet where we meet our pick up vehicles and transfer for the 2hr journey back into France and back to Luchon where we overnight.


Meals: **B D**

	Accommodation Hotel		Ascent 600M		Descent 1300M		Time 7 hours walking		Distance 10KM
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DAY 6**Free day in Luchon.**

A free day in Luchon. We can go for short local walk, or maybe do some cycling either off road or on some of the Tour de France's most famous Cols. There are options to have a soak in the thermal baths, or simply relax in Luchon with its pleasant cafes and restaurants.

Meals: **B**

	Accommodation Hotel
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DAY 7**Departure day. A single transfer to Toulouse Airport is provided.**

The holiday ends after breakfast and a single timed transfer to Toulouse Airport is provided.

Meals: **B**

Holiday Information

What's Included

- Local professional English speaking guide
- Single timed returned transfers from Toulouse Airport
- All transfers within the itinerary
- Meals as detailed in the meal plan

What's not Included

- Travel Insurance
- Visas (if applicable)
- Tips
- Optional activities on free day
- Miscellaneous expenses - drinks and souvenirs etc

Joining Arrangements & Transfers

TRAVEL TO YOUR DESTINATION

In some cases you may choose to take a ferry and/or train to your holiday start and end destination. Please see further information on [Travelling by Train](#).

If flying from the UK there are low cost airlines available to the start and from the end of your holiday.

To benefit from full financial protection, ease your holiday planning, and avoid dealing with airlines, we can book scheduled flights from the UK as part of a flight inclusive package. Scheduled flights are usually more expensive than low cost alternatives, however potentially less stressful if your flight is cancelled or delayed. If you book flights through KE Adventure Travel we will [offset the carbon of your flight](#).

A single timed group transfer from Toulouse Airport to the group accommodation is provided. It takes around 1 hour 30 minutes to drive from Toulouse to Saint-Lizier.

The return transfer leaves late afternoon, to meet flight departing from Toulouse in the late evening. This return transfer takes around 2 and half hours.

Anyone may use these transfers but it is your responsibility to check the timings of this flight prior to departure as schedules can change.

If your flight schedules do not permit you to take advantage of these transfers you will need to make your own transfer arrangements.

Hotel contact details and an emergency number will be provided with your booking confirmation.

Meal Plan

All breakfasts, a 3-day expedition lunch pack and 4 dinners are included in the holiday price. You will need to pay for 1 dinner on day 1 in St Girons and 1 night in Luchon. The only lunches not included are at the Tapas restaurant in Arties on day 5 and in Luchon on day 6. These non-included meals give you the opportunity for flexibility and choice on those days.

Food & Water

Many places on this holiday have drinkable water from the tap to fill your personal water bottles. Please check with the leader at the various locations. Please take purification tablets or a filter bottle (such as a [Water-To-Go bottle](#)) for days when drinking water out of the tap is not available. We do not encourage the purchasing of single use plastic bottles.

Whilst trekking we will have to carry our own share of food provisions with us for 1 dinner, 1 breakfast, 3 lunches and any snacks. Your guide will distribute these provisions amongst the group on the evening on day 1 in St Girons. We will have dinner provided by the wardens at the huts/refuges on day 2 and day 4. Breakfast once in the mountains will simply consist of bread, coffee, tea, hot chocolate and some jam. Lunch will be bread, cheese and meats. Dinner on day 3 will be co-ordinated by the guide and will be mainly dehydrated food (pasta etc..). Dinners in the Refuge and at La Feniere will be wholesome mountain food and usually 3 courses. You may wish to bring along some additional snacks of your own (granola bars, chocolate bars or sweeties) for your trekking days and to supplement breakfast in the mountains.

Special Diets

Whilst we can cater for vegetarians, albeit sometimes with a more limited choice, we cannot always provide special diets. Due to the nature of some of the trips that we operate and the countries in which we operate them, it can be very hard (and sometimes impossible) to cater for a wide range of dietary choices and you may have to supplement your diet with food/snacks from home. If you have specific dietary requirements please do speak to our sales team and they will be able to advise you whether or not we will be able to offer your specific choice. Please note that we are unable to provide separate menus and cannot accept liability for any problems arising from special dietary requirements or intolerances.

Accommodation

During this trip the group will spend 1 night in Saint-Lizier. Whilst on trek you spend 1 night at a rural gite in a non-segregated dormitory with shared facilities, 1 night in a mountain refuge (with showers) (or camping close by depending on availability) and 1 night either in a simple cabane (no bathroom facilities) or wild camping close by. At the end of the trek you have 2 nights at a comfortable Alpine style lodge. The 200 year old stone building is actually a converted barn with a great open fire place and dining area with mountain views. No single supplement is available during this trip. Additional nights in St Giron and Luchon are available please contact the office for prices. Accommodation in St Girons, Luchon and while camping is based on twin sharing. If you are travelling by yourself you will be paired up with another single client of the same sex.

Group Leader & Support Staff

The group will be lead by a local, English speaking qualified mountain leader.

Altitude

This holiday involves going to moderately high altitude. During the course of your trip you will reach altitudes in excess of 2500 metres. Most people will have no difficulty with this level of altitude but before coming on the holiday, we recommend you read the advice on [trekking at high altitude](#). You can also talk to one of our trekking experts if you have any concerns about altitude.

Spending Money

We estimate that €200 will be sufficient to cover all personal expenses including the not included meals and some beverages. This should also allow you to pay tips to the local staff. We recommend that you carry your travel money in the form of Euros since there will be not be any opportunities to change it once you arrive in St Giron, although ATM's are available in St Giron and Luchon. If you are intending to buy considerable quantities of soft drinks or beer, or expensive souvenirs you should budget accordingly.

Guidance on Tipping

Tipping is the accepted way of saying 'thank you' to you trekking leader and local team. Tipping is entirely voluntary and should be dependent on good service. We advise you to tip as a group.

Baggage Allowance

For this holiday you should take one main piece of luggage and one backpack. Whilst trekking you must pack everything, including your sleeping bag, camping mat, mess tin, mug, spoon and a small stove (which are all provided for you) as well as your lunches and the 1 night dinner rations, into your backpack. You must ensure that your pack is as light as possible and we recommend a 55-65 litre backpack for this purpose. Your main baggage will be left with the support vehicle and will be transferred to Luchon at the end of the trek. For international flights please check your baggage allowance with your airline.

Group Size & Holiday Status

For each holiday there is a minimum number of participants required to enable it to go ahead. Once the minimum number is reached, the trip status will change from 'Available' to 'Guaranteed to run'. You can check the trip status for each departure in 'Dates and Prices' table. Other than in exceptional circumstances, we will not cancel a trip once it has achieved this guaranteed to run status and so you are free to proceed with your international flight booking and other travel arrangements.

General Information

Passport & Visas

Europe

Your passport must meet 2 requirements. It must be:

- less than 10 years old on the day you enter (check the 'date of issue')
- valid for at least 3 months after the day you plan to leave (check the 'expiry date')

For the latest details on visiting countries within the EU or the European Economic Area (EEA), please check the UK Government website

The information that we provide is for UK passport holders. A passport with 6 months remaining validity at the end of your stay is generally required, and you should have at least 2 blank pages for each country that you visit.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct travel documents and visas for your holiday. Please ensure that you check for the latest advice before travel. For the most up to date information on entry requirements, please visit the [UK Government website](#).

Health & Vaccinations

If you have a severe allergy please inform the KE office before you travel. We will do all we can to help, but we cannot guarantee an allergy free environment on KE trips. You will need to carry your own treatment for the allergy with you, as 'adrenaline auto-injectors' are not carried as standard by KE leaders and staff. You should inform your leader on arrival of your allergy, and let them know where you keep your adrenaline pen.

Vaccinations

You should contact your doctor or travel clinic to check whether you require any specific vaccinations.

GHIC / Medical cover

UK residents should carry a free Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). This entitles you to state provided medical treatment when you're visiting an EU country or Switzerland. This is not a substitute for medical travel insurance which is vital when travelling overseas.

Currency

The currency for part or all of this holiday is the Euro.

Preparing for your Holiday

It makes a lot of sense to spend some time before coming on an this holiday getting some additional exercise. The fitter you are the more enjoyable you will find the experience. While regular hiking is the best preparation, any regular exercise (running, cycling, swimming etc.) is good for developing cardiovascular fitness. Before setting off we recommend that you make time to fit in several full-day walks in hilly country with a large pack to ensure you have the necessary stamina to walk for long days with a heavy backpack.

Climate

In summer, the climate is hot and sunny in the valleys and pleasantly cool at the high cols. The months of July and August usually provide the most reliable weather conditions. The temperatures that we can expect to encounter during the day will be quite varied, ranging from 10-25°C from the lower valleys to the higher cols. It should be noted that mountainous areas generate their own weather systems and stormy weather cannot be ruled out at any time of year.

Travel Aware

As a reputable tour operator, KE supports the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's '[Travel Aware](https://www.travelaware.gov.uk)' campaign to enable British citizens to prepare for their journeys overseas. The 'Travel Aware' website provides a single, authoritative source of advice for all kinds of travellers and we recommend that prior to travel, all KE clients visit the official UK Government website at travelaware.campaign.gov.uk and read the FCDO Travel Advice for their chosen destination. North Americans can also check out the U.S. Department of State website: www.travel.state.gov for essential travel advice and tips.

KE treat the safety and security of all clients as the most important aspect of any trip we organise. We would not run any trip that we did not consider reasonably safe. Should the FCDO advise against travel for any reason, we will contact everyone booked to travel to discuss the situation. We receive regular updates direct from the FCDO and are in constant touch with our contacts on the ground. If you have any questions about government travel advice, please call our office.

Single Use Plastic

KE do not encourage the use of single use plastic items. We are ensuring that our agents all over the world are working together to reduce the problem and educate those around them. We are leading by example in our KE office by reducing our plastic use.

Books

- The Cruel Crossing - Edward Stourton
- The Freedom Trail - Scott Goodall.
- Nancy Wake - Russell Braddon.
- Love and War in the Pyrenees - Rosemary Bailey.

Maps

IGN 1:25,000, Sheet 2047 OT St Giron and sheet 2048 OT Aulus-les-Bains

Detailed topographic survey of France at 1:25,000, published in two formats, TOP25 and Series Bleue, with GPS compatible UTM grid now provided in all latest editions.

Travel Insurance

It is an essential condition of joining a holiday with KE Adventure Travel that you have a valid travel insurance policy to cover the cost of medical treatment and to protect the value of your holiday in the event of cancellation. When taking out insurance please ensure the policy you choose covers you for the activities and altitude included in your itinerary.

For appropriate insurance cover we recommend Campbell Irvine Direct. Please go to our [Travel Insurance](#) page for further information and to get a quote.

Equipment Information

Equipment List

The following checklist should help you with your packing. As a general rule, you should keep the weight of your rucksack to a minimum.

You must bring the following items:

- Rucksack - 55-65 litres
- Waterproof bags (dry bags) for inside your rucksack

- Hiking/Walking boots
- Sleeping bag liner
- Camping mat
- Socks - walking socks are best (2/3 pairs)
- Trekking Trousers (not cotton)
- Waterproof Over trousers
- Underwear
- Thermal Base Layer
- T-shirt or casual shirt
- Fleece jacket or warm jumper
- Waterproof jacket (with hood)
- Sunhat
- Warm hat
- Sunglasses
- Earplugs (particularly if you are not the one snoring!)
- Thin gloves
- Head torch and spare batteries
- Sun protection (including total bloc for lips, nose etc.)
- Lip salve - with sunscreen

- Water bottle x 2 litre (we encourage re-filling water bottles rather than single use plastic)
- Water purification tablets
- Trekking poles x 2
- Pen-knife (note: always pack sharp objects in hold baggage)
- Knife (as above), fork/spork, plastic mug, metal mess tin,
- Small Wash kit and Pack Towel
- Dry bags(s) for daypack/kitbag contents (to ensure they keep dry)
- Basic First Aid Kit including: antiseptic cream, throat lozenges, diarrhoea treatment (Imodium), painkillers, plasters and blister treatment, Insect repellent, and re-hydration salts (Dioralite)

The following items are optional:

- Small padlock (to lock your bag)
- Travel Clothes
- Travel Shoes
- Shorts
- Repair kit – (eg. needle, thread, duct tape)
- Camera
- Gaiters
- Hill snacks
- Sleeping bag liner (for use at the cabane & gite)
- Reusable cloth bag for shopping (to avoid plastic bags)

Notes

As you will be carrying your pack for 3 nights along with some of your food supplies, it is essential that you pack light!

Cotswold Outdoor



Many of the Equipment items listed above are available from [Cotswold Outdoor](#) - our '**Official Recommended Outdoor Retailer**'. When you book a holiday with KE you will receive 12.5% discount voucher from Cotswold Outdoor and other retailers.

[-> Find out more](#)

Land Only Information

We sell this holiday on a Land Only basis and recommend that you book your flights to Toulouse Airport.

Why Choose KE

Why KE

Hiking through history! During WWII around 800 allied airmen and Jewish refugees took the 'Walk to Freedom' from Nazi occupied Europe. Follow in their footsteps of their journey, from France to Spain, across the spectacular Pyrenees.

Please Note This document was downloaded on 04/05/2024 and the trip is subject to change