

Traverse of the Picos de Europa - Private Jack

Trip Code: SPEX

Version: SPE Traverse of the Picos de Europa



WALK & TREK



GUIDED GROUP



CHALLENGING



HIGHLIGHTS

- Follow our unique route specially devised by our expert tour leaders - Sergio and Rosana
- Stunning views from the summit viewpoint of Torre de los Horcados Rojos (2500m)
- Walk the dramatic carved path down the limestone Cares Gorge

- Stay in remote, cosy, mountain refuges and quaint traditional villages

AT A GLANCE

- 6 Days trekking
- Max altitude - 2500 metres
- Join at Santander

ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

- All meals included
- 4 nights Mountain Hut / Refuge
- 3 nights Hotel

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

Introduction

Close to Spain's northern coast, the Picos de Europa is a region of stunning steep-sided valleys, isolated villages and picturesque limestone peaks. Under the expert direction of our knowledgeable local guide, this fantastic walking holiday makes a continuous west to east traverse passing through the separate massifs that comprise this dramatic mountain range. From the pretty country town of Cangas de Onis, we hike by way of the Vegarredonda Refuge to our first objective, Pico Cotalba (2026m). We then descend the 1500 metre-deep Garganta del Cares, following a spectacular cliff-side path that is one of the great Picos walks. Climbing back up into the central massif, we overnight at a refuge beneath the awe-inspiring Naranjo de Bulnes and continue walking across a lunar landscape to the superb viewpoint summit of Torre de los Horcadas Rojos (2500m). A picturesque final day's hike to down into Espinama concludes this gem of a walking holiday. Don't settle for walks on the periphery; mountain lovers will adore the Picos, and by making use of the charming mountain refuges, we're really able to get out there and enjoy the very best of the region and complete a real mountain journey.

Is this holiday for you?

This is real walking mountain journey with significant amounts of ascent and descent on most days. The trails are predominantly good but there are large sections on scree, over bare rock and across boulder fields. We will be walking for between 5 and 8 hours each day, with over 800-1000m of ascent and/or descent each day and up to 2000m on some days! This holiday is suitable for experienced hillwalkers, looking for an excellent week's mountain walking holiday in a quiet region relatively untouched by tourism. Three of the refuges that we use during the holiday are not accessible by vehicle and this means that group members will need to carry minimal personal equipment for the first 5 days of the trek, with access to your main luggage at the hotel in Puente Poncebos after the first 3 days. In reality, since sleeping bags and camping mats are not needed, you should be able to keep the weight of your daysack down to no more than 7 or 8 kgs. The fact that this walking holiday is not vehicle supported does affect the overall difficulty.

Itinerary

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DAY 1

Meet at the group hotel just outside Cangas de Onis. A single timed transfer from Bilbao Airport is provided.

Meet at the group hotel in Soto de Onis, just outside Cangas de Onis. A single timed transfer from Bilbao airport is provided. The transfer will take around 2.5hrs. The small farming town of Cangas de Onis is our gateway to the Picos de Europa.

Meals: **D**



Accommodation
Hotel

DAY 2

Summit Pico Cotalba (2026m) and return to the Vegarredonda Refugio (1460m).

We have breakfast at our hotel and pick up packed lunches, before making the transfer to Lago de Enol (1063m) and the start of the day's walk. We set off on a good trail through fertile meadows, passing shepherds' cabins, until a final short climb leads to Collado Gamonal. Here, we have our first view of the Vegarredonda Refugio (1460m), our overnight accommodation. Used as an explosives store during the Spanish Civil War, it was rebuilt as a mountain refuge in 1987 and occupies a unique position for those wishing to explore the high peaks of the Macizo Occidental (Western Massif of the Picos). Chamois (locally known as rebecos) are a common sight here. Reaching the refuge, we can leave our overnight gear before setting off on an afternoon walk to the Mirador de Ordiales, which offers breathtaking views. From here, we will be able to easily reach the nearby summit of Pico Cotalba (2026m), before returning to the refuge.

Meals: **B L D**



Accommodation
Mountain Hut / Refuge



Ascent
1100M



Descent
700M



Time
6 - 7 hrs walking








Distance
13KM

DAY 3

Trek to the Refugio Marques de Villaciosa (1630m).

We re-trace our approach route of yesterday for a little less than an hour, before turning north to Lago Ercina with its superb, often snow-capped backdrop of Peña de Santa Castilla. We'll pass some beautiful small hamlets, where some shepherds still spend the summer with their livestock. From here, a gently ascending path takes us to an excellent spring at the Vega las Bobias. Climbing more steeply now we have views of the Cuvicente (2014m) chain. Arriving at the collado and passing close by the third deepest cave system in Spain, we are rewarded with one of the most impressive views of the Macizo Central. We cross limestone boulders split by water and ice to our overnight accommodation at the Refugio Marques de Villaciosa/Vega de Ario (1630m), which is perched in splendid isolation in an impressive mountain landscape with splendid views towards the Cares Gorge.

Meals: **B L D**

	Accommodation Mountain Hut / Refuge		Ascent 660M		Descent 700M		Time 7 - 8 hrs walking
	Distance 14KM						

DAY 4

Trek through the Cares Gorge to Puente Poncebos.

The next two days will be the most challenging of the holiday. Today we make a memorably steep descent of nearly 1200 metres taking the Shepherd 's Way and Canal de Culiembro into the Garganta del Cares. The first part of our descend follows an old shepherds' trail, winding through stony lapies formations, until we reach the hamlet and high pastures of Oston. From here, we start a steep but steady and impressive descent through Culiembro gully, surrounded by the impressive walls. The path becomes more defined as we head into woods of oak, walnut and beech, before finally arriving in the bed of the Cares Gorge, at the abandoned hamlet of Culiembro, where we continue our walk, now along the Gorge itself. In places the peaks soar precipitously almost 2000 metres above us and we will be amazed to be able to descend on a path cut through the outrageously difficult terrain. First built in the 1920's as part of a hydro-electric scheme, this path provides one of the most outstanding walks in the Picos de Europa. The gorge links the mountain town of Cain (in the province of Leon) with Puente Poncebos, where we will spend the night.

Meals: **B L D**






	Accommodation Hotel		Ascent 300M		Descent 1500M		Time 6 - 7 hrs walking		Distance 14KM
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DAY 5

Ascend through the Canal del Tejo to the Naranjo de Bulnes.

A day of ascent today as we head up to the base of El Naranjo de Bulnes, probably the most famous piece of rock in the Picos de Europa. Leaving our hotel, we descend to the Cares River and begin our ascent through the Canal del Tejo. This old stone path winds up through a gorge to Bulnes, a medieval village that until recently was only accessible by foot. The recent addition of a funicular railway has, in fact, changed very little here. After filling up with water from the village fountain, we leave on a lovely stone paved lane through a forest of walnut, linden and hazelnut trees to emerge in high pastures dotted with shepherds cabins. After stopping at a small hut with great views over the pasture land and the high peaks, we finally emerge into high mountain terrain and our first sighting of El Urelliu (Naranjo de Bulnes). Our refugio nestles beneath this imposing and dramatic wall of orange limestone.

Meals: **B L D**

	Accommodation Mountain Hut / Refuge		Ascent 2070M		Descent 325M		Time 6 - 7 hrs walking
	Distance 13KM						

DAY 6

Summit Torre de los Horcados Rojos (2500m), via Collado Horcadas Rojos (2344m). Descend to Aliva.

Our journey continues south through a wildly graphic landscape of towers, spires and sheer rock faces that were carved during the ice age and continue to be transformed by rain, ice and snow melt. Meandering gently uphill we will surely be looking over our shoulders in the hope of capturing a few more images of El Naranjo before it goes out of sight. Herds of Rebecco, tiny but nimble deer-like animals, eagles and Egyptian vultures are often sighted in this area. As the terrain steepens we will find ourselves concentrating on a scramble of 300 meters up to Collado Horcadas Rojos (2344m). If the weather is good then we will walk the rest of the day to the peak of Torre de los Horcados Rojos (2506m), an outstanding viewpoint for the whole area and a fine place to linger for a while. Reluctantly, we will begin our descent through granite boulders down to an old miners' track, which winds its way past a pretty turquoise-green lake and through a col into high summer pastures, where our overnight accommodation is situated. The hotel / refugio, Aliva, has an unsurpassed mountain location with fine views of the eastern massif.

Meals: **B L D**

	Accommodation Mountain Hut / Refuge		Ascent 900M		Descent 1250M		Time 8 hrs walking		Distance 12KM
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DAY 7

Climb Valdecoro (1841m). Descend to Espinama.

This morning we begin our descent into the valley, but not before we have explored the most southern part of the Central massif, culminating in the ascent of Pico Valdecoro (1841m) which has fantastic views. Our route down to the valley gradually changes from high mountain scenery to meander through meadows and forest, a delightful contrast to the terrain of the past two days. We arrive back in time for a dip in the small hotel pool and there will be time to explore the village before our last night celebratory dinner.

Meals: **B L D**

	Accommodation Hotel		Ascent 380M		Descent 1150M		Time 5 hrs walking		Distance 10KM
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DAY 8

Departure day. A single timed transfer to Bilbao Airport is provided.

The holiday ends after breakfast. A single timed transfer to Bilbao Airport will be provided.

Meals: **B**

Holiday Information

What's Included

- A professional and qualified tour leader
- Single timed group airport transfers
- All accommodation as described
- All meals
- All land transport required by the itinerary
- All baggage transfers required by the itinerary

Joining Arrangements & Transfers

The group will meet at the group hotel in Soto de Cangas.

A single-timed transfer from Bilbao Airport to the group hotel is provided on Day 1 of the Land Only itinerary. This transfer is timed to meet the arrival of flights from Gatwick with Vueling and will leave the airport in the early afternoon.

On the last day of the itinerary, there will be a single transfer back to Bilbao Airport timed for the check-in of flights leaving at 1000 at the earliest.

Anyone may join the group transfers by prior arrangement. Travelling as a group or on public transport saves energy. If your flight schedules do not fit with these airport transfers, you will need to make your own way to the group hotel/back to the airport. A one-way taxi from Santander airport to Soto de Cangas will take around 1.5hrs and cost about €150. A taxi from Bilbao Airport will take around 2.5hrs and will cost around €250.

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

Meal Plan

All meals are included in the holiday price. A packed lunch will be provided for each day and you will need to allow space in your daypack for 2 picnic lunches.

Food & Water

Breakfasts are usually coffee, tea, cereals, bread or toast and jam with fruit or yogurt. Dinner tends to be served late at the refuges and usually involves soup and a hearty main meal such as bean stew, with or without sausage. Packed lunches are also provided, although you may choose to add to these with chocolate bars etc.. (which can be bought at the refuges).

Accommodation

For our nights in Cangas de Onis, Puente Poncebos and Espinama we will stay in small, comfortable, family-run hotels.

On the other 4 nights we will stay in comfortable mountain refuges, which offer restaurant facilities and dormitory style sleeping arrangements. Toilet and washing facilities are shared at these refuges and in some cases may be outside the main building. Sleeping bags are not required as bedding is supplied. However, you may choose to carry a cotton or silk sheet sleeping bag.

You do not have access to your baggage on days 2, 3, 5 and 6. You will have to carry your overnight things with you during these days as well as your lunches and a set of dry clothes.

Due to the size of the properties we use it is not possible to pre book single rooms, however if you wish to have a single room it may be possible to request and pay for this locally depending on availability.

Group Leader & Support Staff

The group will be led by a professional and qualified tour leader.

Spending Money

We estimate that €100-€150 should be sufficient to cover miscellaneous expenses, including bar bills and snack items, showers at refuges, chocolate bars etc. This will also allow you to pay reasonable tips to the local guide and driver. Money can be withdrawn from ATMs in Bilbao Airport. If you prefer to bring all your travel money with you, we recommend that you carry this in the form of euros cash. Card payments are not accepted at refuges. If you are intending to buy expensive souvenirs, you should budget accordingly (credit cards can be useful in this respect).

Baggage Allowance

Since you will be carrying your personal equipment for several days during the holiday, you should make every effort to keep the weight of your gear to a minimum. We recommend that you have a trial walk with your packed rucksack. With careful planning and considering that you will not have to carry a sleeping bag or a camping mattress, it should be possible to keep the weight of your sack down to about 8 kgs / 18lbs. Your main luggage will be transferred to all overnight stops that are accessible by road. You will have access to this bag on the evening of Day 1, Day 4 and Day 7.

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 the 'Dates and Prices' table. Other than in exceptional circumstances, we will not cancel a trip once it has achieved this guaranteed to run status 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.

For other nationalities, please refer to your own Government website for the latest information.

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 for each country visited before travel.

Health & Vaccinations

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

Getting some additional exercise before coming on an active holiday makes a lot of sense. The fitter you are, after all, the more enjoyable you will find the experience.

You should be aerobically fit and comfortable with walking 7 to 8 hours for consecutive days. Hill walking, with a good amount of ascent and descent, is the best training. Running, cycling and swimming are also good for developing cardiovascular fitness and stamina.

Climate

This region is known for its changeable weather associated with its mountains and its coastal location. Although most of the region's precipitation occurs between November and February, it can rain at any time of the year. From July to September the weather is generally very good, with clear and sunny days predominating. We can expect daytime valley temperatures of between 20°C and 27°C in July and September, dropping to around 15°C overnight. Temperatures will be rather cooler than this at altitude, with daytime temperatures of between 15°C and 20°C above 1500 metres. At night the temperature could fall as low as 5°C. Conditions will generally be comfortable for trekking in shorts and short sleeved shirts (should you wish). As with any mountain area there is the risk of some poor weather, with rain and even fog.

Books

- Walks and Climbs in Picos de Europa. Cicerone.
- Northern Spain - Picos de Europa. Sunflower Books.

Maps

Picos de Europa 1:25,000. Adrados (2 sheets)

The Picos on two detailed maps, each available either on paper or in a waterproof and tear-resistant edition. Contour interval is 10m (50m for cliff faces), and bold shading and graphic relief, provide an excellent representation of the terrain. Overlay shows hiking routes, mountain huts and refuges. The map legend is in Spanish and English. Further information on the reverse is in Spanish only.

Equipment Information

SPE Equipment List

Please try to keep the weight of your baggage to a minimum. See the 'baggage allowance' section for further details.

You SHOULD bring the following items:

- Hiking boots
- Walking socks (2 or 3 pairs)
- Trekking trousers
- Lightweight waterproof overtrousers
- Underwear
- Shorts
- Thermal baselayer shirts
- Casual shirts and/or T-shirts
- Fleece jacket or warm jumper
- Lightweight waterproof jacket
- Sunglasses
- Sun cream (including for lips)
- Antibacterial hand wash
- Water bottles 1 Litre (x2) (we encourage re-filling water bottles rather than single use plastic)
- Water purification tablets
- Backpack c.40 litres
- Headtorch and spare batteries
- Washbag and toiletries
- Warm hat

- Gloves
- Sunhat
- Dry bags(s) for daypack/luggage contents (to ensure they keep dry)
- Sheet sleeping bag (for use in the huts)

- Basic First Aid Kit including: headache tablets, treatment for upset stomach (e.g. Imodium or Pepto Bismol), antiseptic cream, plasters (Band aids) and blister treatment.

The following items are optional:

- Spare laces
- Ear plugs (especially if you are not the one snoring!)
- Trainers/sandals for use in refuges (crops are provided in most)
- Swimwear

- Small towel / travel towel (towels are not provided at the refuges)

- Camera

- Penknife (remember to pack all sharp objects in hold baggage)

- Trekking poles

- Insect repellent

- Travel clothes
- Reusable cloth bag for shopping (to avoid plastic bags)

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 a 12.5% discount with Cotswold Outdoor, Snow+Rock and Runners Need. The discount code can be downloaded from your MyKE account and you can use this code at the checkout, either in store or online.

Flight Inclusive Information

The FLIGHT INCLUSIVE dates and prices are based on UK flights from London Heathrow to Bilbao with British Airways. Outbound flights will usually depart from the UK in the morning, arriving mid-morning. Return flights will depart Bilbao usually in the morning of the last day of the itinerary, arriving in the UK later the same morning. Regional departures and/or alternative carriers are available on request.

To avoid paying more for your flight, we recommend that you book as early as possible, especially during peak times as there are only a limited number of seats available at the advertised price. If we are unable to secure seats at the price shown, or you have requested regional departures, we will contact you with an alternative quote. We are also able to quote for premium, business and first class seats. Please be aware that you may be asked to pay for your flights in advance of your final holiday balance. Remember if you book a package including flights with KE you will benefit from full financial protection.

Why Choose KE

SPE Why KE

Brendan Daly a journalist writing for the Irish Independent, recently joined us on this Traverse through the Picos: Take a look at his article.

Please Note This document was downloaded on 18/05/2025 and the trip is subject to change