

FRANCE & SPAIN - SMALL GROUP WALKING HOLIDAYS

Walking in the Basque Pyrenees

Departs: 27TH April – 4th / 5th May, 28th September – 5th / 6th October 2010 *

Cost: AU\$3560 per person (twin share)

* Later end date signifies the Bilbao & Guggenheim extension - Supplement: AU\$425 per person

Our Small Group Guided Walking Holidays include:

- Twin share in comfortable, quality hotels, inns and private homes - single rooms are on request
- All meals and wine with most meals (pre and post meal drinks except if staying at inns/ hotels)
- Fully guided walking with support staff and vehicle
- Luggage transfers
- All local transport for the walks with knowledgeable English speaking walking tour guides.
- A maximum group size of 15.

Over several years we have developed a wonderful selection of small group fully guided tours, mostly walking tours, in the valleys and mountains of southwest France. Food and wine play an important role in each itinerary as do the seasons and seasonal foods and the flowers and wildlife, especially in spring or autumn. These bespoke walking parties are well researched and in ideal settings where you stay in the most charming small quality auberges. Beds and bathrooms are usually spacious and extremely comfortable often with lovely views over the surrounding countryside. The hospitality of all our accommodation providers is a highlight

Our guides for this walk, James and Diana Tamlyn, moved to their 18th-century farmhouse in the Lot region of south west France about 16-years ago, enthused by the romance and beauty of the area. James' love of the flora and fauna, their combined fascination for food, wine and local traditions and personal contacts make these special holiday experiences offering considerably more than you could find as an individual traveller.

For this very special itinerary where wine and good food compliment some very beautiful walking, we have invited Minette Constant MW, a **British Master of Wine** who lives with her family in the Béarn, overlooking the Pyrenees, to help with our interpretation of the splendid wines along the route. Minette will be delighted to introduce you to the wonderful varietals from this corner of France as well as enjoying more general wine conversation, naturally with the help of a good bottle or two!



Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1 After meeting James and Diana and the rest of the group at Biarritz airport you will be driven to the beautiful Domaine de Bétouzet standing in undulating countryside just north of Oloron. This is a very pretty eighteenth century chateau with a swimming pool and with six spacious bedrooms all with bathrooms en suite. Here you will meet Minette and Florence. Florence owns the chateau and is an absolutely fabulous cook. You will eat with her on Day 3. Minette, of course, knows rather a lot about wine and we a general tasting with her tomorrow. Dinner at the Auberge in Laas.

Day 2 We set off in the vehicles for a fifteen-minute drive to a beautiful walk back to Betouzet with a picnic lunch at the chateau. There are lovely views of the Pyrenees as we wander along the lanes. After lunch at Betouzet there is an optional afternoon walk to the medieval village of Sauveterre to see the old witches bridge. Return to Bétouzet by car for a wine tasting with Minette showing the first of a diversity of wines from South-west France. Dinner is in the village of Audaux with James, Diana and Minette.

Walk: 12km

Day 3 We drive for a walk to take us from the Béarn into the Soule country. This is a small region half way between the Bearn and the Basque, which claims to be part of neither! We will enjoy a traditional lunch in a Soule village followed by some brisk walking across undulating countryside to the village of Ainharp. Return by car for a champagne tasting with Minette. And for dinner, having focused on the excellent regional wines on the first two nights, we will now splash out on the grander *appellations*. We will enjoy both red and white Bordeaux wines, which Minette has chosen from her cellar, before finishing with some delicious sweet wine.

Walk: 15km

Day 4 We leave Bétouzet and drive to the beautiful St Etienne de Baigorry. Here we will visit an Irouleguy vineyard. This was wine first made by monks for the pilgrims on their way to Saint Jacques de la Compostelle. Now a great wine, one of the classic reds of the southwest, made with the tannat grape grown on red sandstone terraces. We will eat trout at the riverside village of Banca (some of the best-smoked trout in the world comes from this village) before a walk to the car and uphill drive for a beautiful walk by foot downhill to see the Basque pig farms in the Aldude valley.

In the evening we arrive at Sare for our next three nights in the lovely Hotel Arraya situated to the side of the central square of this pretty Basque village. *Walk: 10km*



Day 5 We leave the Arraya and the central square of Sare to walk towards the village of Ainhoa. A little up and down in the small hills between the two villages in this almost crater like bowl before arriving in the classic Basque village dotted with red and white painted houses and with wonderful charm. Lunch in Ainhoa before a voluntary walk up hill to the tiny chapel for outstanding views over to the Atlantic and the foothills as a whole, known locally as the Pyrenankles. Dinner at the Hotel Arraya outside in the square. *Walk: 15km*

Day 6 Again up in the morning for another lovely French breakfast of dark black coffee and freshly baked croissants before we set off into the mountains for Spain! This is not too difficult a walk as there is a lovely way through the mountains towards Bera. We will picnic on the way with some delicious Spanish wines and fantastic Basque ham (this is the ham that comes from the free roaming pigs that feed on chestnuts which lends it the delicious characteristic sweet flavour). You then return to Sare by car for a fabulous Basque dinner! *Walk: 18km*

Day 7 The last full day for those who do not want to visit the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. We drive to Hendaye and catch the pedestrian ferry across the bay to Hondarribia (Fuenterrabia). This is a very beautiful

port of almost Moresque beauty with balconies and brightly coloured facades and extraordinary boxed windows three storeys high. We will lunch here and enjoy wandering around the old port before continuing for our last night in San Sebastian.

This is a very special city, a sort of nineteenth century Brighton with a perfect bay and a small island in the middle of the bay's pincer edges. It is known as the gastronomic city of Europe having more starred Michelin restaurants per square metre of city than any other! We finish the day with a fabulous fish dinner on the bay. Last night is at the beautifully positioned Hotel Niza overlooking the bay.

Day 8 The tour ends after a Spanish breakfast for those leaving San Sebastian today. If there are enough clients departing, we will drive you to St Jean de Luz for lunch. Otherwise, you will need to take a taxi (cost of 90 Euros) for the trip back to Biarritz.

Those continuing on to the Guggenheim Museum are driven to Bilbao. The Guggenheim Museum was designed by Frank Gehry was specifically built to house exhibitions of monumental works and is I think one of the most beautiful buildings in Europe. Frank Gehry designed it around the idea of boat lines and fish and it has a wonderfully curvilinear and scaly quality to it with a tremendous sense of light.



The fact that Jeff Koons' 15m puppy guards the museum like Cerberus is an added bonus of floral contrasting with the space-age metallic. Well worth the detour!!

We leave after a relaxed breakfast for Bilbao and visit the Museum in the morning. We will have lunch at the famous Café Iruna in Bilbao before driving back to San Sebastian for the most delicious tapas, eating fabulously well but in limitation (!) and drinking *zooritos* and *txacoli* (small Spanish beers or chilled Basque white wine). Then a light dinner before a last dinner overlooking the bay.

Day 9 We leave in the morning by car to return to France for lunch on the main square of Saint Jean de Luz. This is another beautiful French port of historic interest as it was the port where Louis XIV chose to marry Marie-Therese. Much of the old port retains its late seventeenth century beauty having been rebuilt at this time following the disastrous fire set by the Spanish in 1558. We have a small light lunch before continuing for Biarritz airport.

Please note: that the itinerary is subject to change according to weather and local conditions – distances shown approximate.

Other similar discerning Small Group Guided Walking Holidays are offered in the Lot or Dordogne Valleys in France, in Umbria in Italy and in Suffolk in Southern England. Cooking and painting holidays are offered early and late in the season and shorter walks or tours focusing on truffles are also available on selected dates.

Contact OUTDOOR TRAVEL for more details, brochures and reservations

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