

## SHERPA : FRANCE - TARN & AVEYRON

7-days / 6-nights self-guided or escorted walking holidays (Revised: JAB November 09)

This tour is a little different from our other hotel treks in that for a couple of nights the accommodation used is Chambres d'Hotes, the French equivalent of bed and breakfast. You really can enjoy a sense of being part of the family rather than a hotel guest. The route itself winds between the bastides or fortified towns that sprung up during the Wars of Religion. They are situated in spectacular settings on rocky promontories and are rich in history. The intervening countryside is no less spectacular, and this has become not only one of our most popular walks, but also one of the most popular tours in France. No fewer than 4 of the villages on this tour (Cordes, Bruniquel, Puycelci and Castelnau-de-Montmiral) are included on the unofficial but prestigious list of 143 most beautiful villages in France.



**Self-guided departures:** Daily from May to September

**Escorted departures:** 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010

**Arrival:** Between 5pm and 7pm on first day at first hotel.

**First hotel:** At Cordes sur Ciel, 3 Km from Cordes - Vindrac station. Cordes - Vindrac is about 1-1½ hours by train from Toulouse.

**End of Tour:** Tour ends at Cordes after breakfast on day 7. Taxi to station and train to Toulouse (@ 65-minutes).

**Season:** From May to September

### GENERAL INFORMATION:

**Baths:** it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

**Breakfast:** in countries such as France is usually coffee and toast/croissant, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

**Hotel Single Room Supplements:** these are payable on most of our tours. The single room supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

**Language:** Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different, bring a phrase book, try to learn a bit of French!

**Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations**

**Luggage:** When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

**Fitness:** This walk should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to walking. Being able to cope with warm weather is also an advantage.

**Day stages:** In the region of 15km to 25km per day with average altitude gains of 300m. 4 to 6-hours walking per day.

**Waymarks:** The trail is well waymarked, with yellow and red on the PR trails and white and red of the GR trails.

**Accommodation & Meals:** Accommodation is in 2 Chambre d'Hotes and 4 nights in hotels in Cordes, Puycelci and Castelnau de Montmiral. 1 picnic lunch is included in the tour cost. Travellers are really part of the family rather than hotel guests on 2 nights in this tour, with genuine home cooking and the ingredients often straight from the garden. Dinner on nights 1, 5 & 6 is not included.

**Night 1:** This lovely 2-star hotel combines the charm of a mediaeval building with modern comfort. The hotel is close to the old covered market place at the top of the old town (Haute-Cordes). All the rooms have en suite facilities, TV and telephone. Bed and breakfast only is included.

**Night 2:** A former farmhouse in a remote location with 3 rooms for guests. The family also runs the nearby stables. Mme Aharchahou speaks good English. Bathroom facilities are shared. Evening meal, breakfast, and packed lunch are included.

**Night 3:** M. et Mme. Lacombe are renowned as very entertaining hosts. The accommodation is in one of several houses. Washing facilities are rather cramped and there are no en suite facilities. Evening meal and breakfast are included.

**Night 4:** Located inside the walls of the Bastide town of Puycelci, this 3-star hotel has been welcoming guests since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. All rooms have ensuite facilities. Evening meal and breakfast are included.

**Night 5:** A small hotel in an historic building in the old arcaded square of Castelnau de Montmiral. Bed and breakfast is included. Dinner is available in a nearby restaurant (not included in tour price). Occasionally night 5 may be spent at another Chambre d'Hotes.

**Night 6:** On your return to Cordes, you will stay in the same comfortable 2-star hotel as on the first night of the tour. Bed and breakfast only is included.

**Night 7:** *[Only for those taking the 1-night Albi extension] A small well-managed 2-star hotel conveniently situated in a quiet location just across the square from the train station and an easy 15-minutes walk from the old town centre and cathedral. Alternatively we can arrange accommodation in a 3-star hotel in the old town itself, but for the 3-star option there would be an extra charge.*

### **Suggested itinerary:**

**Day 1:** Arrival at first hotel in **Cordes**, an amazing medieval town of cobbled streets, which is perched on a hilltop high above the surrounding countryside. It is a bastide town, founded in what was then (and still is) a remote rural district in the 13th century; lacking a name, it took its name from the great Spanish city of Cordova.

**Day 2: Cordes to Roussayrolles.** 15km (4.5-hours). Before leaving Cordes, there is time to explore the lovely covered market, ancient streets and carved facades of the old buildings. Then wind your way down through the Porte des Ormeaux to Les Cabannes and across fields and an ancient stone bridge, skirting a little vineyard. Scattered farms and shady woodland lead you to Roussayrolles. You turn right at the old stone cross to arrive at your destination at Les Clauzels, an isolated farmhouse overlooking a great expanse of forest on the south side of the Aveyron valley.

**Day 3: Roussayrolles to Penne.** 20km (5-hours). Bidding farewell to your friendly hosts, return to the old stone cross and pick up the GR signs. Passing abandoned water mills, climb through a pinewood to arrive at the massive Dolmen de Vaour at an ancient crossroads. On a little hill above the village of Vaour are the ruins of the Commanderie and stables of the Knights Templars who had a base here during the crusades. Your path

takes you along a wooded limestone scarp with splendid views across the Aveyron gorge. Arrive at the little village of Penne, clustered below the ruins of the castle.

**Day 4:** Penne to Puycelci. 20km (5-hours). Wander through the village and up to the castle, perched on its queer jutting promontory, as though it has grown from the rock, and admire the view. Then descend to the Aveyron Bridge and continue yesterday's walk along the scarp. Having re-crossed the River Aveyron, climb up and explore lovely old Bruniquel, with its 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century castles. Your path then climbs to take you through the ancient forest of Gresigne, which has many varieties of holly, some unique to this region, and the marks of prehistoric man. You emerge at the old Bastide town of Puycelci.

**Day 5: Puycelci to Castelnau de Montmiral.** 20km (6-hours). Cross the green valley of the River Vere and climb through the village of Laval to follow the edge of a wood. Follow the GR signs through vineyards, climb through a wood to the ruins of Lagarde. Head along a ridge with views of Castelnau de Montmiral as you approach it.

**Day 6: Castelnau de Montmiral to Cordes.** 24km (6-hours) or 20km (5 hours). An easier day in the flatter country initially through the vineyards of Gaillac to the little town of Cahuzac-sur-Vere. The finish is hillier, past the Chateau de Clayrac to a stunning view of Cordes as you approach it and a satisfying finish as you return to complete the circle at your starting point.

### **Day 7: Depart Cordes**

Tour ends after breakfast

### **Albi optional extension:**

**Day 7:** If you are taking the Albi extension, a taxi will collect you and your luggage from your hotel in Cordes and drive you to Albi. On your way into the town you will cross one of the fine redbrick bridges over the River Tarn. After checking in to your hotel you can explore the town on foot, including the magnificent and fortress-like mediaeval red-brick cathedral and the former bishops' palace which now houses the world's biggest collection of works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec who was born in Albi. There are pleasant riverside walks along the Tarn.



**Other walking holidays** – guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers & meals are available in many parts of Europe through **Outdoor Travel** including the Way of St James from Le Puy to Santiago, the route of Pilgrims along the River Yonne to Veزالay in Burgundy and St Cuthbert's Way from Scotland into England. We also offer literary walking routes or trails in the footsteps of famous painters in many areas of Europe.

### **Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations**

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