

### France: Mountains to the Mediterranean

Tour code: JCS

Revised: October 07

This is a series of walks that link the mountains with the sea. They start in La Preste, the highest village of the Haute Vallespir valley, high on the frontier between France and Spain. Each day you will be walking a little further eastwards, sometimes assisted by a strategic taxi transfer, to get a little nearer to the "Big Blue", as the Mediterranean is called in these parts. The route follows a series of waymarked paths across the mountainsides through the heavily scented maquis and visiting some historic towns on the way to the port and beautiful town of Collioure. On your way you will be able to sample the wines of Roussillon, delicious local honeys, and the Catalan cuisine.



#### Travel Information

**Arrival:** Between 2p.m and 7p.m on first day.

**First hotel:** At La Preste, which is quite remote and about an hour and a half drive from Perpignan. It is reachable by bus (2 hours) from Perpignan or by taxi from the airport. Car parking is available adjacent to the first hotel free of charge but remember this is not a circular route so you will have to travel back to La Preste from Collioure. A taxi to La Preste from Perpignan costs approx AU\$220. A taxi to La Preste from Collioure costs approx AU\$290. Taxis must be booked and paid for in advance and can take up to 8 people.

**Nearest Airport:** By far the most convenient airport is Perpignan. Unfortunately Sherpa are unable to include this flight as part of a package from London as the route is operated only by Ryanair. The holiday is offered on a land only basis to allow the use of this 'low cost' route. We can organise a taxi transfer from Perpignan railway station or airport to La Preste, it costs AU\$220 per transfer for up to 8 people and must be booked via Sherpa and paid for in advance. A normal taxi from the airport will cost more.

If you are not flying from London or Ryanair flights are not available you can fly to Perpignan via Paris. Other possible airports are Montpellier, Toulouse or Marseille from where there are train connections to Perpignan. For up-to-date train times can visit French Railway's website at [www.sncf.com](http://www.sncf.com).

**End of Tour:** After breakfast on day 8 in Collioure. It is only a short train ride from Collioure to Perpignan. You can then take a taxi to the airport. A taxi all the way cost approx 50 Euros. You can take trains from Collioure to Montpellier, Toulouse or Marseille to connect with other return flights.

**Check flight times in advance.**

**Season:** Late April to mid-October, please note that it is very hot in this area in August and it is better to avoid walking at this time unless you know you can walk in the heat and sun.

#### Level of Difficulty

**Fitness:** This walk is best described as moderate but should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to walking.

**Day stages:** All of the day stages are 4-6 hours of actual walking. An overnight change of clothes also has to be carried on two days because one hotel is too far by road to transport baggage.

**Waymarks:** On the whole the trail follows well-established paths presenting no particular difficulties and on a couple of days it follows the GR10. Waymarking is sparse in one or two places and a reasonable ability with map and compass is required.

#### 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 en suite bathrooms have showers rather than baths.

**Breakfast:** in countries such as France & Spain usually consists of 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.

**Single Supplements:** are payable on most of our tours.

1) The single 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.

2) You are not just paying a supplement on the room but the luggage transfer costs you are paying in full. The cost of moving 1 bag or 2 bags etc remains the same. On some of our trips it is possible to reduce the cost of the single supplement if you happen to be a 3<sup>rd</sup> person travelling, or have chosen a date when other clients are booked.

**Language:** Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to experience a different culture: bring a phrase book, try to learn a bit of the local language.

## Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is on a half board basis (evening meal and breakfast) on 5 nights and on a bed and breakfast basis for the other 2 nights all in country inns and hotels (mostly a mix of 2\* and 3\*). Picnic lunches on walking days are not included in the tour cost but these can be ordered from the hotels of provisions can be bought from local shops on most days.

Most frequently used hotels are described below but alternatives of a comparable standard are used on occasion when room availability is limited.

□ **Night 1:** La Preste les Bains. Mainland France's most southerly hotel (2\*) in a dramatic position overlooking the river. La Preste is a noted health resort where the hot springs were and may well still be the ultimate cure for colibacillose. Half board

**Night 2:** Mollo (in Spain, 1182m above sea level). Our usual accommodation is a 29-room hotel in a typical Spanish mountain village with views over the Pyrenean foothills and with Catalan and international food. This hotel does not have an official rating but the rooms are some of the best on the trip. Half board

**Night 3:** Prats-de-Mollo. 2\* accommodation. Either a small Logis de France hotel and restaurant with a well-qualified chef in the shadow of the walls of the old fortified village or another hotel of similar size and standard just a 5 minute walk away. Half board

**Night 4:** Amelie-les-Bains. A fairly large 2\* hotel with 63 rooms with private facilities, telephone, TV. The hotel is close to the town center, shops, restaurants and cafes. The lounge has an open fireplace. Half board

**Night 5:** Le Boulou. Tonight we have to leave the mountains. Our hotel (2\*) is on the quiet back streets on the edge of the old town overlooking the Tech valley. It boasts a swimming pool but this is in reality just a small dip pool suitable for young children. It also has a good restaurant with a terrace. Half board

□ **Nights 6 and 7:** In Collioure our 3\* hotel is in a quiet location about 500m from the center of this busy town and about 600m from the sea. The hotel has 22 rooms all with en suite facilities. The two nights are booked on a bed and

breakfast basis as there are numerous good restaurants in the town and along the waterfront

## Outline Itinerary

□ **Day 1:** Arrive La Preste.

□ **Day 2:** From La Preste (1000m) we make our way up the forested slopes of the Haut Vallespir valley on well graded paths, to the Col de Siern (1629m) on the Franco-Spanish frontier, with fine views west to the Pic de Costabonne (2465m). We descend on the Spanish side and follow the Rio Ritort valley down to the village of Mollo (1000m). 4-5 hours walking. Altitude gain 650m; loss 650m.

□ **Day 3:** From Mollo we take a more Easterly route to return to France, following the Torrente de Fabert to recross the frontier at Collado des Prats (1596m), from where we descend a ridge between forested ravines to Prats de Mollo. 5½ - 6 hours walking. Altitude gain 500m; loss 865m.

□ **Day 4:** We start the day with a road transfer to a farm, Pla Boula (900m), high up on the south flank of the Vallespir. A fine ridge walk takes us via Serre de la Garsa (1212m) to Pilon de Belmatx (1280m). At Col des Paracolls (902m) we join the GR10 coast-to-coast Pyrenean long distance trail to start the descent to Amelie-les-Bains (220m). 4½ -5 hours walking. Altitude gain 480m; loss 1160m.

□ **Day 5:** A short road transfer to Chapelle St Paul, followed by a walk via the famous Pont du Diable (Devil's Bridge) over the River Tech and up to the Ermitage St Ferreol. Then a traverse to the tiny village of Vives and the viewpoint of Puig Sangli (209m) and down to Le Boulou. 5 - 6 hours walking. Altitude gain 370m; loss 420m.

□ **Day 6:** Another taxi takes us high via the boarder town of Le Perthus to join the GR10. The route starts with gentle ascent on paths and tracks before a steeper climb brings sweeping views to the west. Forest paths reach the boarder ridge at 1130m with views to the coast and the summit of Puig Neulos, which is reached by an open ridge walk. The views are magnificent to the mountains and the Mediterranean. Descend to the ancient walled village of Laroques-des-Alberes for refreshment and a taxi transfer to Collioure. 5½ - 6 hours walking. Altitude gain 800m; loss 1150m.

□ **Day 7:** Collioure to Banyuls. Walk up from Collioure (sea level) to Tour Madeloc (656m), then descend to Col des Gascons and follow the GR10 long distance trail among vines to down Banyuls. 5½ - 6 hours walking. Look around Banyuls, take a swim or try some of the local wines. Take a train back to Collioure for your last night.

□ **Day 8:** Depart Collioure

Extra nights can be booked to extend the holiday. If you want to build in a rest day or two then extra nights are recommended at Prats- de-Molo or Amelie-les-Bains. A full day in Collioure is also worth while.