

# Heaven's Gate Challenge

Circular hut to hut trek from France, crossing into Spain and returning.



- ✓ Experienced, qualified and locally-based English tour leader
- ✓ High mountain cols offering amazing views of the surrounding peaks
- ✓ A world of quiet and calm with a stunning mountain backdrop
- ✓ Holiday runs from mid July to mid October
- ✓ Optional ascent of a 3 000m/9 842 ft peak and the fantastic 360° panorama.
- ✓ Accommodation in spectacularly located mountain refuges
- ✓ From £859 pp for 8 days, 7 nights, transfers, accommodation and all meals included
- ✓ Minimum of 4 in a group with the 7<sup>th</sup> person travelling free
- ✓ £100 Cashback to encourage greener travel to France



**£859 per person. 8 days, 7 nights, 5 days walking and 1 'free' day.**

**Maximum altitude – 3 143metres/10 311 feet.**

**Breakfast, packed lunch and cooked 3 course evening meal each included, except on arrival day (dinner only) and leaving day (breakfast only).**

**All vehicle transfers included in price.**

The price quoted is for the basic 5 day **Heaven's Gate Challenge** with an extra night added. This could be either a night in Carcassonne (Ibis Hotel) added before the trek or a night added at one of the high mountain refuges during the trek. Use the holiday planner at the end of this **Trip Dossier** to indicate your preferences and help me to give you the perfect Pyrenees mountain adventure for your group.

As well as being able to choose the number of days in your personal **Heaven's Gate Challenge** holiday, various accommodation options are available. Camping every night, a mixture of camping while on the trail with B + B style accommodation before and after the trek and B + B style accommodation every night.

The suggested itinerary below, and any other that PMA offers, cannot be guaranteed to run exactly as set out. Enforced changes to the programme may arise due to adverse weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances. The distances and height gains each day are accurate but the times given for walking are approximate.

## Day 1. Travel Day: Arrive. Night in Carcassonne

Arrive at the Ibis Hotel in the late afternoon/early evening where you will enjoy a warm welcome from your guide and hotel staff. This extra night in Carcassonne will give you the chance to relax after your journey and visit the beautiful medieval part of Carcassonne – La Cité.

For the accommodation options for the week see the **Accommodation** section below.

For the travel options (the area is well served by train and plane) see the **Travel** section below.

After dinner, the tour leader/guide will brief the group on the coming week and answer any questions.

**Meals provided: Evening meal** (if you have chosen the **Ibis Hotel** accommodation option.)

## Day 2. Artigues to Refuge Pinet.



This morning you can visit Carcassonne and/or a large outdoor kit supermarket for last minute kit purchases. After lunch we make a road transfer to the starting point of the walk. Belongings that are not needed for the trek can be kept safe until your return. A half day walk brings us to the spectacularly located Refuge de Pinet. As in all the mountain refuges, you will sleep in dorm style accommodation which may include men and woman and may be crowded. Someone will definitely snore so please bring ear plugs!

**Distance: 5 km/3 miles.**

**Height gain: +1 037m/ 3 402feet.**

**Approx. 4 hours walking.**

**Meals provided: Breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal.**

## Day 3. Refuge Pinet to Refuge Vall Ferrera.

Today you have the chance to ascend a 3000m peak – the Pic d'Estats (3 143m/10 311ft) From the summit the 360° panorama is breathtaking. The view includes the path down into Spain, past several mountain lakes, to the Refuge Vall Ferrera. There may be some snow patches to cross today early in the season.

**Distance: 14km/8 ½ miles. Height gain: +1 100m/3 608 feet. Approx. 7 hours of walking.**

**Meals provided: Breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal.**

## Day 4. Refuge Vall Ferrera to Graus.

From the Vall Ferrera refuge we ascend through forest and then across magnificent open wild country. We pass the beautiful Baborte lake before the descent to the small village of Tavascan. Then it is on to the accommodation at Graus still an hour away. Many find this the toughest day.

**Distance: 20km/12 ½ miles. Height gain: +1 505m/4 937 feet. Approx. 10 hours of walking.**

**Meals provided: Breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal.**

## Day 5. Graus to Refuge Certescan.

After passing a dammed lake and the tiny hamlet of Noarre, we soon find ourselves back in wild country. Through forest, past lakes and along mountain streams we reach the Refuge Certescan close to the shore of the Certescan Lake. There is the option to climb Pic Certescan (2 240m/7 349ft) which dominates the area. You may prefer to ascend it the following day with a lighter rucksack.

**Distance: 13km/8 miles. Height gain: +1 500m/4 921 feet. Approx. 6 hours of walking.**

**Meals provided: Breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal.**



Pic Certescan



Eco-friendly waste disposal at the Certescan Refuge



## Day 6. Optional Extra Night at Refuge Certescan.

This day can be your own with time to yourself to relax on the lake shore, explore the surrounding area at your own pace, marmot watch or perhaps a swim in the lake. For the more energetic you can go peak bagging with the guide.

**Meals provided: Breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal.**

## Day 7. Refuge Certescan to Artigue.



**Fresh air and wide open spaces.**

There is more wild country to cover from the Refuge Certescan past two beautiful lakes up to a col/saddle de l'Artigue – the high point today. There is time to enjoy the mountain backdrop before a long, steep descent, at first over giant boulders, to our starting point. There will be a vehicle transfer to Carcassonne. You can stop in a café on the way to celebrate your completion of the Heaven's Gate Challenge and chat about the memories you have of your Pyrenees mountain adventure.

**Distance: 13km/8 miles. Height gain: +400m/1 312feet. Approx. 5 hours walking.**

**Meals provided: Breakfast, packed lunch and evening meal.**

## Day 8. Travel Day/ Depart.

Transfer to train station or airport. For more information see the **Transfers** section below.

**Meals provided: Breakfast**

## Responsible Tourism

**Pyrenees Mountain Adventure** is committed to responsible tourism. It strives to choose the minimum impact option whenever possible, in every area of the business, always! During the week, walking is the perfect way to explore and enjoy the natural environment while minimising your impact, there is a choice of eco friendly accommodation and vehicle transfers are minimised. **PMA** is a member of 1% for the Planet.

Train travel is a more environmentally friendly alternative to air travel and Perpignan is well served by high speed trains from Paris. Why not let the train take the strain? To encourage the use of more environmentally friendly transport, **Pyrenees Mountain Adventure** offers a **Greener Travel Cash Back** of £100. This will be paid (subject to proof being provided) that travel to the Eastern Pyrenees, from the UK, was completed in a manner that created CO2 emissions per person, equal or less than half of that created by travelling by plane.

Train and coach travel would qualify as would car travel given certain conditions (size of car and number of passengers in the car). Calculate the CO2 emissions of your chosen method of travel at [Transport Direct](#).

## Accommodation

During the trek you will be staying in spectacularly located mountain refuges (or camping near them if you choose the coming option). There will be a warden who provides breakfast, packed lunch and a 3 course dinner. It is likely that you will sleep in a dormitory with other trekkers. Before and/or after the trek you will be based at the Ibis Hotel in Carcassonne. Ibis Hotels is part of the Accor Hotel Group who have a commitment to sustainability through their Planet 21 Programme. Accor was voted Eco Hotel Group of the Year at the 2013 AA Hospitality Awards.

## Insurance

To take part in this holiday you will need to be insured for trekking in the mountains. This type of insurance is available from [Snowcard](#), [The BMC](#) and [Green Travel Insurance](#).

## Maps

For the French section : IGN 1:25 000 21480 OT Vicdessos

For the Spanish section : Rando editions 1:50 000 Pyrenees 22 Pica d'Estats - Aneto

## Kit List

This can be found on the [Pyrenees Mountain Adventure](http://www.pyreneesmountainadventure.com) website.

## Weather

[http://www.foreca.com/Spain/Alt\\_Aneu?lang=en&units=us&tf=12h](http://www.foreca.com/Spain/Alt_Aneu?lang=en&units=us&tf=12h)

## Books

To find out more about this beautiful region and the tremendous amount it has to offer, the following books can be consulted. Parts of several useful books, including the relevant sections for this holiday, are available on **Google Books** for free (see green links).

[The Pyrenees: The High Pyrenees from the Cirque de Lescun to the Carlit Massif](#). Kev Reynolds. Cicerone Press, 2004

[The Rough Guide to the Pyrenees](#). by Marc Dubin. Rough Guides, 2004

[Walks and Climbs in the Pyrenees](#). Kev Reynolds. Cicerone Press Limited, 2008

[Trekking In The Pyrenees: France & Spain Trekking Guide](#). D. Streatfeild-James. Trailblazer Publications, 2005

[Backpacks, Boots and Baguettes: A Walk in the Pyrenees](#). S. Calder, M. Webb. Virgin Books Limited, 2005

## Trains



London (St Pancras) to Paris and then Paris to Carcassonne. Catch the sleeper train from Paris (10.52 p.m.) and wake up the next morning in Carcassonne (7.59 a.m.) It is worth spending the extra money on a 'bed'/couchette rather than making the journey in a reclining seat. Couchettes in women only compartments are available. Allow sufficient time to transfer between Gare du Nord and Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris. The luggage allowance is more generous compared to airlines.

Websites to help plan your rail journey :

[SNCF French Railway network](#)

[Eurostar](#)

[The Man In Seat 61](#)

[Rail Europe](#)

Photo is of a typical 6 berth couchette compartment on a French overnight train.

## Flights

The best airport to fly into is Carcassonne. It is served by **Ryanair** with flights from Stansted, Glasgow, Liverpool, East Midlands and Dublin.

Toulouse is another airport to consider, directly served by **British Airways** and **Easy Jet**.

## Transfers

A free return transfer is included in the price of your holiday between Carcassonne or Toulouse and the start of the trek.

**Photo Credits:** All images are by Paul Williams/Pyrenees Mountain Adventure except the photo of the typical 6 berth couchette compartment from [The Man in Seat 61](#)

## Your own personalised Heaven's Gate Challenge.

Use the Holiday Planner on the next page to help you put together your perfect **Heaven's Gate** mountain adventure.

The Pyrenees Mountain Adventure team look forward to seeing you in the Pyrenees soon.

## Holiday Planner

Use this page to help put together your perfect **Heaven's Gate Challenge**.

For the arrival and departure day: indicate whether you are arriving by train or plane. Also indicate whether you will be travelling into or out of Carcassonne or Toulouse.

Indicate if you want to add an extra night at one of the mountain refuges and whether you want to spend a night in Carcassonne.

Indicate what type of accommodation you require. Tick the boxes to indicate your preference.

Day	Activity	Accommodation
<b>Travel day :Arrival</b>	Flying to :    Carcassonne <input type="checkbox"/> Toulouse <input type="checkbox"/> Train to :    Carcassonne <input type="checkbox"/> Toulouse <input type="checkbox"/>	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Ibis Hotel <input type="checkbox"/> Own choice <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Optional Night in Carcassonne</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Will give you the chance to relax after travel from UK. You will also have the time to visit La Cité – the medieval part of Carcassonne. There will also be time to buy last minute kit purchases. You may prefer to choose your own accommodation in Carcassonne.	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Ibis Hotel <input type="checkbox"/> Own choice <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Heaven's Gate Challenge Day 1</b>	<b>Compulsory.</b> Travel from Carcassonne to start of walk near Vicdessos. ½ day walk to Refuge Pinet	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Refuge <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Heaven's Gate Challenge Day 2</b>	<b>Compulsory.</b> Day Walk	Camping. <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Refuge <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Heaven's Gate Challenge Day 3</b>	<b>Compulsory.</b> Day Walk	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Refuge <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Heaven's Gate Challenge Day 4</b>	<b>Compulsory.</b> Day Walk	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Refuge <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Optional Heaven's Gate Challenge Extra Day</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Optional.</b> Extra night spent at Certescan Refuge.	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain Refuge <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Heaven's Gate Challenge Day 5</b>	<b>Compulsory.</b> Complete the end of the walk and then transfer to Carcassonne.	Camping <input type="checkbox"/> Ibis Hotel <input type="checkbox"/> Own choice <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Travel day :Departure</b>	Flying from :    Carcassonne <input type="checkbox"/> Toulouse <input type="checkbox"/> Train from :    Carcassonne <input type="checkbox"/> Toulouse <input type="checkbox"/>	

Once you have decided on your own personal **Heaven's Gate Challenge** and filled in the Holiday Planner, print it, scan it and then email it to me please. I can then carry on with putting together your holiday.

I will send you an itinerary and price based on what you have filled in on this form for you to OK. Once you are happy with the itinerary and price, then you can book the holiday. Please don't book your travel arrangements until your booking is confirmed with the Pyrenees Mountain Adventure team. To confirm a booking you will need to send a deposit of 50% of the cost of the holiday. Details can be found on the **Booking** section of the website. You will also find the **Terms and Conditions** in this section of the website.

The **Pyrenees Mountain Adventure** team look forward to seeing you on the **Heaven's Gate Challenge** soon.