

FRANCE – MIDI-PYRENEES TARN & AVEYRON

7-days / 6-nights **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking holiday from Cordes in the Midi-Pyrénées



In one of the more remote and less known regions, situated in the heart of the south west France, the Tarn is the prettiest of the eight departments in the Midi-Pyrénées. It offers some moderate to challenging long daily walks. Albi, the capital of the Tarn, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in July 2010. North of Albi is a landscape described as “*where Tuscany meets the Cotswolds*” with the many picturesque medieval Bastide villages set against rolling hills, woodlands, vineyards and fields of sunflowers. Maintaining the tradition of using the warm, honey-coloured stone for building accentuates the beautiful architectural features found here.

On this tour you stay on some nights in Chambres d'Hotes, the French equivalent of bed and breakfast rather than hotels. In these you 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. No fewer than four of the villages on this tour (Cordes, Bruniquel, Puycelci and Castelnaud-de-Montmiral) are included on the prestigious list of 143 most beautiful villages in France (*les plus beaux villages*). The countryside between villages is no less spectacular but is remarkably untouristed, making for a wonderful walking holiday.

Cost from: \$1765 per person twin share. Single room supplement and solo traveller supplement on request

Departs: Daily from May to September

Includes: 6 nights' accommodation in Chambres d'Hotes and hotels, with ensuite facilities where available; inn-to-inn luggage transfers (1 bag per person up to 20kg); 6 breakfasts, 1 picnic lunch, 3 dinners; information pack including full route notes and maps (1 set per room); emergency assistance.

Not included: Lunches (unless specified), 3 dinners, drinks, snacks, entrance fees, personal expenses, travel to/from the start and end point of the tour, unscheduled transfers and taxis during the trip, travel insurance, etc

Grading: Moderate to challenging. This walk should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to walking an average 18km to 25km (4 to 7 hours walking) per day with average altitude gains of 300m. Being able to cope with warm weather is also an advantage.

Accommodation and Meals: Accommodation is in Chambre d'Hotes and hotels. Walkers are really part of the family rather than hotel guests in Chambre d'Hotes, with genuine home cooking and ingredients often straight from the garden. Dinner on nights 1, 5 and 6 is not included. One picnic lunch is included in the tour cost. On other days you may be able to order a picnic lunch from the hotels at extra cost or purchase lunch along the route. Breakfast in France is usually 'continental' e.g. coffee and toast/croissant. Please let us know when booking if you have any special dietary restrictions. The hotels described are our usual choices; if not available then alternatives are used (possibly with a supplement) and you will be informed at the time of booking.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details and reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive Cordes

Plan to arrive between 5 and 7pm in Cordes sur Ciel. The village is about a ten-minute taxi ride from Cordes-Vindrac train station which is served by daily regional trains from Toulouse.

Cordes is an amazing medieval town of cobbled streets, 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. Stay in a lovely Chambre d'Hotes combining the charm of a medieval building with modern comfort, built into the old town walls in Haute-Cordes. A broad stone spiral staircase leads up from a cobbled courtyard to the rooms. Dinner is at your own arrangements this evening.

Day 2: Cordes to Vaour

walking @ 23 or 27km

This is a longish day, but before leaving Cordes, you may like to explore the lovely covered market, ancient streets and carved façades 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 near to the pretty hamlet of Roussayrolles, which you could visit for a break. Then climb through a pine wood to arrive at the massive Dolmen de Vaour at an ancient crossroads about 2km from the pretty village of Vaour. The shorter walk is via the road from Peyralade into Vaour. You stay in a Chambre d'Hotes in a renovated farmhouse at the edge of the village. There is a spacious terrace and a garden. Dinner is included this evening.

Day 3: Vaour to Bruniquel

walking @ 22km

Your hosts in Vaour will provide a packed lunch for your walk today. After some woodland and pastoral meanderings past more tiny hamlets your path takes you along a wooded limestone scarp with splendid views across the Aveyron gorge, before descending and then re-ascending to arrive at the little village of Penne, clustered below the ruins of the castle above the River Aveyron. This has associations with both the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of Religion. 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 your walk along the scarp. Re-cross the River Aveyron, climb up and explore lovely old Bruniquel, with its 13th and 16th Century castles. Your Chambre d'Hotes is in a renovated 19th Century building with simple, comfortable rooms. Dinner is included.

Day 4: Bruniquel to Puycelci

walking @ 13km

Your path climbs to take you through the ancient forest of Gresigne, the largest forest in southwest France, which has many varieties of holly, some unique to this region, and the marks of prehistoric man. You emerge from the forest to ascend to the old Bastide town of Puycelci. Your accommodation here is a very comfortable 3-star hotel with plenty of character. Dinner is included this evening.

Day 5: Puycelci to Castelnau de Montmiral

walking @ 21km

Cross the 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, then descend off the ridge crossing the valley and up into the Bastide, which has a very interesting centre with a 17th Century arcaded square. Stay in a small hotel in an historic building in the old arcaded square of Castelnau de Montmiral. Dinner is at your own arrangements this evening.



Day 6: Castelnau de Montmiral to Cordes

walking @ 26 or 22km

Begin with some flatter country through the vineyards of Gaillac to the town of Cahuzac-sur-Vere. As you approach your destination the terrain becomes more undulating. Pass the Chateau de Clayrac to an expansive view of Cordes as you return to complete the circle at your starting point. Stay in the same comfortable Chambre d' Hotes as Night 1 of the tour. Dinner is at your own arrangements.

Day 7: Depart Cordes

Tour ends after breakfast for those not taking the Albi extension. Take a taxi to Cordes-Vindrac station and from there travel onwards to Toulouse by train.

Extension to Albi: We recommend you take a one or two night extension to visit **Albi** (ask for details of costs and inclusions). Albi is one of the gems of the Midi-Pyrénées, and well worth a visit. It is nicknamed 'la ville rouge' for its predominant building material, handmade red brick.

The extension includes a taxi transfer for you and your luggage from your hotel in Cordes to Albi after breakfast. On your way into town you cross one of the fine red-brick bridges over the River Tarn. After checking in to your hotel, explore the town on foot. There are many pleasant riverside walks along the River Tarn and narrow, pedestrianised laneways to wander. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed town centre includes the magnificent, fortress-like red-brick Cathedral de Sainte-Cécile and the former bishops' palace, which houses the world's biggest collection of works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, born in Albi. Both buildings date to the late 13th Century after the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars (considered heretics by the Catholic Church), and were statements of the dominance of the Catholic faith.

Albi is also the birthplace of French explorer Laperouse, who disappeared in the South Pacific in 1788, shortly after making landfall at Botany Bay. Albi is a twin city to La Perouse (Randwick city council) in Sydney.

Albi retains its heritage and historical feel – streets are signposted in ancient Occitan as well as modern French – and it has a lively central plaza near the cathedral which buzzes with energy. There are several traditional bistros where you can try local specialties and wine from the local Gaillac appellation. Gaillac is one of the oldest viticultural areas of France, with wine production established in the 1st Century. Many wines are made from indigenous grapes; the white grape Len de l'El may be a descendent of the wild vines of Gresigne forest.

The hotel we typically use in Albi is a small but comfortable 2-star hotel conveniently situated in a quiet location across the square from the train station and a 15-minute walk from the old town centre and cathedral. Alternatively we can book a 3-star hotel in a central location in the old town. Albi has a train station and is served by several daily trains to Toulouse, with connections to Paris.



Outdoor Travel walking holidays include guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers in many parts of Europe including the **Loire Valley**, **Provence**, **Auvergne**, the **Dordogne** in France, the **Amalfi** or **Cinque Terre** coast in Italy. Pilgrimage walks such as the **Way of St James** from Le Puy in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, the **Via Francigena** in Italy or classic walks such as Wainwright's challenging and rewarding **Coast to Coast** walk in England are also available. Other walks are inspired by literary figures and artists such as **Stevenson's Trail** in the wild Cevennes or **In the Footsteps of Van Gogh** in Provence.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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