

# ALONG THE PYRENEES

## TALES OF HOLINESS & HERESY JUNE 9<sup>TH</sup> - 18<sup>TH</sup> 2016

Stretching from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Bay of Biscay, the mountains of the Pyrenees form a distinct natural border between France and Spain that has had a profound impact on the history of both nations. Many of the people who live here, however, consider themselves neither French nor Spanish.

Towards the Atlantic they are Basques, descendants of the ancient tribe of Vascones, who had inhabited the region for centuries by the time the Romans named them, while at the Mediterranean end is the autonomous community of Catalonia. They each have their own culture, their own language and strong aspirations towards self-government. The region has also been a focus of religious activity, lying as it does on the Camino of St. James, the ancient pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela.

Into this cultural melting pot, we'll throw a mixture of incredible mountain scenery, and then garnish the whole thing with some of the most fascinating legends and stories that Europe can muster. From the origins of the mountains as a burial mound for princess Pirene, thrown up by Hercules, to the strange carvings and inscriptions in the church of Father Sauniere at Rennes le Chateau, that featured so prominently in the *Da Vinci Code*, these mountains are alive with stories.



CHATEAU DE FOIX



CARCASSONNE

Join us this spring on a wonderful journey to a fascinating part of Europe that is too often neglected by modern tourists.

### THE COST OF THIS ITINERARY, PER PERSON, DOUBLE OCCUPANCY IS:

LAND ONLY (NO AIRFARE INCLUDED):	<b>\$3960</b>
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT:	<b>\$ 850</b>

*Airfares are available from many U.S. cities. Please call for details.*

### THE FOLLOWING SERVICES ARE INCLUDED:

<b>HOTELS:</b>	8 nights accommodation in first-class hotels, all hotel taxes and service charges included
<b>COACHING:</b>	All ground transportation as detailed in the itinerary
<b>MEALS:</b>	Buffet breakfast daily, 5 dinners
<b>GUIDES:</b>	DISCOVER EUROPE tour director throughout
<b>EXPENSES:</b>	Porterage of one large suitcase per person
<b>ENTRANCES:</b>	Entrance fees to all sites included in the itinerary

*Please note that travel insurance is not included on this tour. Insurance information will be mailed to each registration on receipt of deposit.*



**THURSDAY, JUNE 9<sup>TH</sup>** Evening departure from your chosen US gateway city.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 10<sup>TH</sup>** Your arrival in Toulouse will be met by Discover Europe’s representative and you will be escorted to your city-center hotel. The rest of the day is free to unpack, relax and begin exploring the neighborhood. This evening the group will gather for a welcome dinner party at the hotel. **(D)**

**Overnight: Toulouse**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 11<sup>TH</sup>** Heading north from Toulouse, our first stop today will be Albi, a classic red brick-and-tile Languedoc town where Cathars, 12<sup>th</sup> - century Catholic heretics, were infamously burned at the stake. In Albi we’ll visit the Musee Toulouse-

Lautrec and one of the most startlingly original cathedrals of

the Middle Ages. From our mid-afternoon return to Toulouse, time is your own for shopping or sightseeing—perhaps pay a visit to St Sernin, one of the most influential Romanesque abbeys in Europe—in this vibrant, Mediterranean-influenced city. In the evening you may sample a restaurant of your choice. **(B)**

**Overnight: Toulouse**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 12<sup>TH</sup>** This morning we’ll visit the premier fortified city in Europe, Carcassonne, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This spectacular medieval stronghold, replete with towers and turreted walls, first became a fortress under the Celts in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. From here it is a short drive to our hotel, the wonderful Abbaye Chateau de Camon. We’ll check into our hotel with time to relax before dinner. **(B, D)**

**Overnight: Camon**

**MONDAY, JUNE 13<sup>TH</sup>** A full day excursion today to explore the region of the Cathars, a Christian sect that was brutally repressed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Our first stop will be to visit Rennes-le-Château, its church is filled with veiled symbols and secret codes familiar to readers of the *Da Vinci Code*. Our visit this afternoon is to Montsegur, the most famous of all the Cathar castles. It was here in 1244, after a year long seige, 225 Cathars were lead down from the castle and walked willingly onto a communal pyre! The evening is free. **(B)**

**Overnight: Camon**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 14<sup>TH</sup>** Driving along the French side of the Pyrenees this morning, our first stop will be at the Grotte de Niaux, a huge cave complex from the Magdalenian period, 11,000 BC, where we will see original cave paintings of bison, stags, horses and ibex. After lunch we’ll continue through the foothills of the mountains to the small town of Tarbes. Dinner at our hotel. **(B, D)**

**Overnight: Tarbes**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15<sup>TH</sup>** This morning, we’ll drive to the town of Cauterets, where there will be time to relax and enjoy the mountain air, stroll through the streets, or savor a coffee at a local café. This afternoon we will drive up higher into the mountains to visit the magnificent Cirque de Garvarnie, Victor Hugo called it “nature’s Colosseum” - a natural amphitheatre scoured out by a glacier. We will also see the Grande Cascade, at 432m the tallest waterfall in Europe. The journey up to the Cirque will either be on foot for the hardy or by mule for the tardy! Free evening. **(B)**

**Overnight: Tarbes**



MONTSEGUR CASTLE

**THURSDAY, JUNE 16<sup>TH</sup>** We cross over the border with Spain this morning, into the province of Aragón and a descent through the Ordesa National Park with the chance of seeing Egyptian vultures, Golden eagles and Pyrenean chamois. We’ll stop for lunch along the way, perhaps in the town of Pamplona, famous for its annual bull run. Dinner is included this evening at our country hotel just outside Bilbao. **(B, D)**

**Overnight: Bilbao**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 17<sup>TH</sup>** Our morning begins with a visit to the spectacular Guggenheim Museum. We continue along the coast to the resort town of San Sebastián. Destroyed by fire in 1813, the town was largely rebuilt in the Belle Epoch style and has become a playground for the rich and famous with sweeping sand beaches and a reputation for the best Basque cuisine. We’ll have time for lunch and to explore

**Overnight: Bilbao**

the town before we return to our hotel for a farewell dinner. **(B, D)**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 18<sup>TH</sup>** Morning transfers to Bilbao Airport for your returning flights to the U.S. Alternatively you may like to stay on and join our tour continuing along the Way of St. James, following the Camino along the north coast of Spain to Santiago de Compostela. **(B)**

Key to included meals: **B** - breakfast, **D** - dinner



TOULOUSE-LAUTREC MUSEUM