

The French Pyrenees

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Lourdes and then drive to Gèdre
-
- Day 2/7** Walking excursions bordering the Parc National des Pyrénées
-
- Day 8** Return London
-

Departs

June

Focus

Birds, plants, mammals, butterflies and general natural history.

Grading

Day walks only. Grade B.

Dates and Prices

See tour code (FRA20) or brochure

Highlights

- The perfect mountain holiday for the all-round naturalist.
- Birds, butterflies & mountain flowers.
- Daily mountain walks bordering the Pyrenees National Park – fabulous walking country.
- Delicious picnics amid spectacular Pyrenean scenery, Alpine Marmots & Pyrenean Chamois.
- Golden Eagles, Lammergeiers & Griffon Vultures



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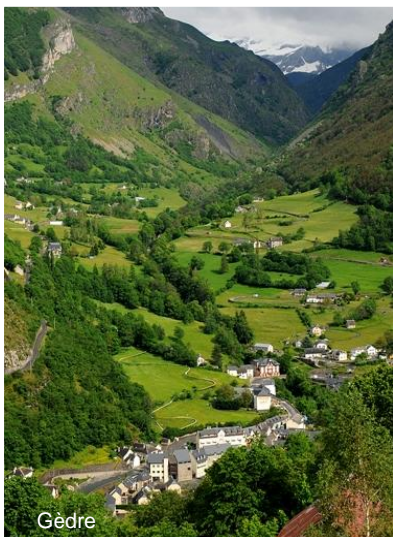
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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction



A comfortable family-run hotel in the quiet village Gèdre, and close to the Parc National des Pyrénées, provides an ideal base from which to explore the trails into the National Park and to enjoy its stunning scenery and the exceptional variety of birds, plants and butterflies of the region. The suggested itinerary offers a rough guide to our activities and there are plenty of other alternatives, depending on the weather or local conditions. Having two vehicles will further extend our options.

Day 1

Fly London to Gèdre

We depart from London Stansted on a Ryanair flight to Lourdes at the foot of the Pyrenees. We transfer to our minibuses for the drive to Gèdre, ascending through deep valleys, on winding roads, during the last 45 minutes or so of the journey. On arrival in Gèdre we will settle in to our hotel, and if time allows we will explore the Héas valley above the hotel after a picnic lunch.

Day 2

Héas Valley and Estaubé Valley

We start by exploring the wide range of habitats along the Héas Valley where plant highlights will include deep-blue *Aquilegias*, our first orchids and the endemic Pyrenean Hyacinth *Brimeura amethystina*. Not far above is the Barrage des Gloriettes where we leave our minibuses and spend the day walking in the Estaubé Valley. This provides us with a good introduction to the natural history of the region. We will watch the amusing antics of Alpine Marmots and should see our first groups of soaring Griffon Vulture and perhaps our first Lammergeier, two of the avian highlights of the Pyrenees. We may see the beautiful Pyrenean Snakeshead *Fritillaria pyrenaica* and on the limestone boulders will be enchanting miniature rock gardens, with such gems as Hairy Rock Jasmine *Androsace villosa* and Pyrenean Saxifrage *Saxifraga longifolia*. The sweetly-scented Garland Flower *Daphne cneorum* is frequent in the rocky pasture and on the acidic slopes, below the dam, there are fine displays of Alpenrose



Rhododendron ferrugineum. Today's walk is up to 10km but, as we return the same way, it can be shortened to suit everyone.

Day 3

Gavarnie

This morning we will drive to Gavarnie, normally bustling with tourists, but at this time of year surprisingly quiet. We take a route, away from the main tourist trail, passing colourful hay meadows, full of the endemic Horned Pansy *Viola cornuta* and alive with insects. Stunning views of the spectacular World Heritage Site of the Cirque de Gavarnie open up before us, as we approach the National Park boundary. The walk is



Ring Ouzel

through mixed forest, followed by pine, as we climb higher. Notable plants include Irish Spurge *Euphorbia hyberna*, One-flowered Wintergreen *Moneses uniflora* and Whorled Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum verticillatum*. Red Squirrel, Firecrest, Citril Finch, Coal Tit and Crested Tit may all be seen in the trees, and, as we approach the Cirque, it is worth searching the cliffs for the elusive Wallcreeper, which has bred here in the past. We will have lunch in the Cirque, in the company of Alpine Chough, and look for special plants, such as the endemic Ashy Crane's-bill *Geranium cinereum*,

on the rocky slopes below La Grande Cascade, the highest waterfall in Europe. We continue on a high path, beneath the cliffs, where we find Long-leaved Butterwort *Pinguicula longifolia*, Pyrenean Yam *Dioscorea pyrenaica* and the curious Thore's Buttercup *Ranunculus thora*. Wheatears, Ring Ouzels and Water Pipits are amongst the birds of the high open slopes and the mountain views are spectacular. A long steep descent to Gavarnie completes our circular walk of around 7km.

Day 4

Ossoue Valley

We spend a full day walking in the Ossoue Valley which is perhaps one of the best areas for both birds and plants. Griffon Vulture, Lammergeier, Golden Eagle and other birds of prey all breed here on the high limestone cliffs, while along the valley we may see Ring Ouzel, Northern Wheatear, Dipper, Rock Bunting, Rock Thrush and Red-backed Shrike. Flowers will include *Ramonda myconi*, on shaded rocks, drifts of Marsh Orchids in the wet valley bottom and the delicate Rush-leaved Daffodil *Narcissus assoanus*. Butterflies can be abundant in sheltered spots, lizards bask on sunny rocks and Alpine Marmots are common and easily observed. At the head of the valley, we walk around the barrage, where alpine flowers enliven the turf, below a panorama of high ridges. Up to 5kms.



Upper Ossoue valley

Day 5

Lac de Gaube

Today we will drive west to Pont d'Espagne, a very different area of granites and extensive forests of Pine and Silver Fir. A chair lift gives us easy access to the large and beautiful Lac de Gaube, where we can expect a different range of plants. We will spend the afternoon walking along the lake and in the lower Marcadau Valley, looking for Crested Tit, Citril Finch and Dipper and keeping an eye open for the large but elusive Black Woodpecker. Up to 6km.

Day 6

Cirque de Troumouse

The Cirque de Troumouse is a peaceful place in comparison with the popular Cirque de Gavarnie, yet it is just as beautiful, and being fairly undisturbed, it is a haven for wildlife. Marmots and Pyrenean Chamois may be seen here and Alpine Accentor and White-winged Snowfinch can usually be located, after a little effort. An interesting array of alpine plants should also be on display, both in the bogs beneath the Cirque and in the boulders at the foot of its high cliffs. After the snow melts, the ground is carpeted with white Pyrenean Buttercup *Ranunculus pyrenaicus*, Entire-leaved Primrose *Primula integrifolia* is abundant on wet banks and the tubby blue trumpets of Alpine Gentian *Gentiana alpina* stud the turf. The cold streams are home to the Pyrenean Brook Newt, which we hope to find with some patient searching. Up to 4km.



Daphne cneorum

Day 7

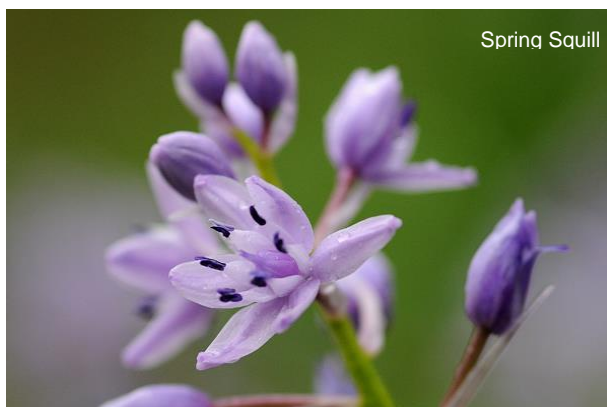
Col de Tentes

Above Gavarnie, we drive past the ski resort to the Col de Tentes, from where it is a short walk to the Port de Boucharo, at 2,270 metres on the Spanish border, another site where we hope to see Snowfinch and Alpine Accentor. Alpine plants along the way include the yellow *Vitaliana primuliflora*, Alpine Toadflax *Linaria alpina*, Alpine Moon Daisy *Leucanthemopsis alpina* and the attractive Pyrenean Thistle *Carduus carlinoides*. After a picnic lunch we descend into the Vallée des Pouey Aspé, where a good path leads us all the way into Gavarnie. The views from the trail into the Cirque are outstanding and this exhilarating walk makes a fitting finale to our week in the Pyrenees. 8km.

Day 8

Fly London

Depending on flight times, we may have time for a final morning walk before we must reluctantly leave the mountains and drive back to the airport for our return flight to London.



Trek grading

On this holiday we will be based at one hotel, throughout. We will explore the mountains of this spectacular region, and enjoy their natural history, by means of day walks of between four and ten kilometres in length. Our pace will be gentle, and we will frequently be merely pottering, as we take a closer look at the plants, butterflies and birds. We will probably have the support of two minibuses, to allow maximum flexibility and provide options to each day's programme.

Weather

We have chosen mid-June as being the prime time for flowering plants, butterflies and birds in this region of the Pyrenees. However, as we will be high in the mountains throughout this holiday you must expect the variable weather associated with all mountain ranges, and particularly the western Pyrenees. Whilst we hope for clear, sunny and warm days, we should be prepared for wet, cloudy and cooler conditions; the changes can be dramatic, so bring a good range of clothing!

Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Lunch in the Cirque de Troumouse



Our hotel in Gedre