

EXPLORE!

Cycle the Cathar Castles

8 days

France - Trip code CPC



Cycle the Cathar Castles

Enjoy a week of superb cycling in south-west France as we ride from the medieval fortress of Carcassonne, through a land of impressive Cathar castles and pretty villages, to the Mediterranean coast and historic town of Perpignan. The rides are varied and mostly on quiet lanes, taking us into the Pyrenean foothills and along the Vermillion Coast, and along the way we stop for wine tasting or to sample local delicacies. Four of the rides are optional, giving you the chance to blend sightseeing and cycling to suit your interests.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Cathar Castles** - visit impressive medieval Carcassonne, Chateaux de Lastours and Puivert
- ★ **Corbieres hill towns** - enjoy delicious French cuisine, wine tasting and visit thermal springs
- ★ **Mediterranean coast** - cycle along the edge of the sea and swim off the beaches
- ★ **Perpignan** - see the Majorca Palace and learn about the Counts of Roussillon
- ★ **Visit artistic Collioure** - a favourite among masters such as Picasso and Matisse

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

CYCLING GRADE:

Moderate To Challenging

Combining moderate grade rides with some challenging days in the saddle, this grade is ideal for reasonably fit cyclists who want to challenge themselves.

GROUP SIZE:**10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Carcassonne; evening orientation walk

Our trip starts at our accommodation in Carcassonne with an evening walking tour and free time to visit one of the region's most visually spectacular settings, the walled fortress of Carcassonne. Historically this was one of the most important and powerful cities in the south, before the all-consuming Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars saw the town fall to the notorious onslaught of Simon de Montfort's forces. We will see its medieval remains and enjoy the unique heritage of what is surely one of the most perfectly preserved towns of its kind anywhere in France. The city holds a wealth of delights, from the twin towers of the Porte Narbonnaise, spectacular Chateau Comtal in the heart of La Cite, to some of the best medieval stained glass in the Midi at the Basilique St. Nazaire.

No cycling today.

If you wish to drive to the start of the trip please ask us for parking details.



Accommodation: Hotel Espace Cite (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Circular ride along the Canal du Midi to Lastours

Today we have a cycle ride into the hills to visit the village of Lastours. Located here are four towers of the Cathar Castle set on a rocky spur above the village of Lastours, isolated by the deep valleys of the Orbeil and Gresilhou rivers. They were built perched along a rocky escarpment just 400 metres long and 50 metres wide. Cabaret, Surdespine and la Tour Regine castles stand in line, while Quertineux is built on a separate pinnacle close by. Our cycle route passes an excellent view point on the opposite side of the valley to these ancient monuments. The site has been classified 'un monument historique' by the French Ministry of Culture and archaeological digs are still taking place here today. After time spent here to view this wonderful site, we cycle back via Villemoustaussou to Carcassonne. If you prefer there is the option not to join the cycling today and further explore Carcassonne instead.

Our total cycling distance today is 43 kilometres (total 579 metres ascent).



Accommodation: Hotel Espace Cite (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Cycle into Corbieres hills; wine tasting and visit hot springs

This morning we have a linear cycle ride south into the Corbieres hills with a gentle ascent following the River Aude valley. En route we stop at Limoux for a morning wine tasting of the local sparkling vintage, before heading to Couiza and Rennes-les-Bains, where we have the opportunity to enjoy the healing qualities of the hot springs that flow out of the hillside into a pool in the river. From here we cycle to the small village of Sougraigne and our accommodation for the next two nights.

Our total cycling distance today is 58 kilometres (total 827 metres ascent).



Accommodation: Hotel Le Jardin de la Sals (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 4 - Circular ride via Rennes-le-Chateau to Puivert Village

Today we have a longer and more demanding circular cycle route to see Rennes-le-Chateau and Puivert Castle. After a short ride from our accommodation, we stop and explore Rennes-le-Chateau which is steeped in Cathar history. The castle has been made particularly famous in recent years for claims involving Blanche of Castile, the Knights Templar, suggested treasures from the Temple of Solomon and Holy Grail stories. Well-known French authors like Jules Verne and Maurice Leblanc are suspected of leaving clues in their novels about their knowledge of the 'mystery' of Rennes-le-Chateau. After passing through Esperaza, our next cycle stop is the 12th century Chateau de Puivert which had strong links to both Cathars and Troubadours. The present castle was built by the Bruyere family around 1310 and is still in relatively good condition. The Troubadours museum of musical instruments is well worth a visit before our return cycle over the hills and through the valleys back to our accommodation. If you prefer, there is an option to shorten the ride and take a self-guided route to visit the surrounding villages (40 km) or take free time to relax.

Our total cycling distance today is 83 kilometres (total 1489 metres ascent).



Accommodation: Hotel Le Jardin de la Sals (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 5 - Cycle Pyrenean foothills to Perpignan

Leaving Sougraigne this morning, we cycle south-east on a journey to find where the mountains meet the sea. Riding through small villages we pass the foot of Pic de Bugarach, the highest summit in the Corbieres hills with a peak at 1230 metres. It is known as the 'upside down mountain' because the top layers of rock are older than the lower layers due to uplift of the Pyrenees. Continuing our cycle we then pass the two imposing castles of Peyrepertuse and Queribus. Peyrepertuse is a ruined fortress and has been associated with the Counts of Narbonne and Barcelona. The name Peyrepertuse derives from an ancient language called Occitan and means Pierced Rock. Peyrepertuse and its neighbour, Queribus are known as two of the 'five sons of Carcassonne' castles which were fortified by the French in 1242 to protect the border from Spain. From here we have around 45 kilometres of gentle cycle descent before we reach the historical town of Perpignan on the Mediterranean coast and our accommodation for the next three nights.

Our total cycling distance today is 96 kilometres (total 1108 metres ascent).



Accommodation: Appart'City Hotel, Perpignan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Ride round the Etang de Canet ou de St-Nazaire

After breakfast we set off on our bikes, heading east following a cycle path along the side of the River Tet. Passing through small towns and villages, we arrive at the coast near Canet-en-Roussillon. There is the chance to stop at one of the beaches of Canet Plage or La Marena for a relaxing swim en route. We continue to cycle round the lake in the Nature Reserve and follow the cycle paths back to our accommodation in Perpignan. Alternatively you can opt out of cycling today and spend the day exploring Perpignan. Founded in the 10th century the town has a rich past and was once the ancient capital of the Counts of Roussillon. Particularly worth visiting are the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and the 13th century Palace of the Kings of Majorca. It is also possible for you to take the train (pay locally) from Perpignan to visit the old Roman town of Narbonne.

Our total cycling distance today is 46 kilometres (total 197 metres ascent).



Accommodation: Appart'City Hotel, Perpignan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Cycle to Collioure; swim at the beaches

Our cycle ride today takes us south east towards the famous artistic town of Collioure. Pedalling through small towns we arrive at

the coast between St-Cyprien and Argelès-sur-Mer and along this stretch of coast, we pass a number of good beaches where we can stop for a swim, before we arrive into the town. Here we finish riding and spend the afternoon exploring the quaint streets, famous for attracting artists such as Matisse, Derain, Picasso and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. At the end of a relaxing day, take the short train journey back to Perpignan.

Our total cycling distance today is 34 kilometres (total 277 metres ascent).



Accommodation: Appart'City Hotel, Perpignan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Trip finishes in Perpignan

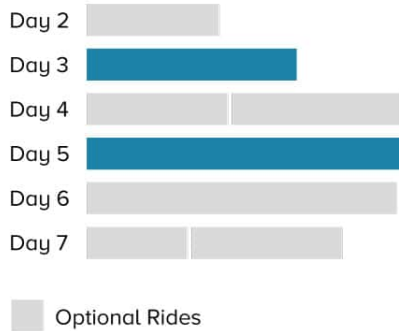
Our trip finishes after breakfast in Perpignan.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Cycling information

DAILY DISTANCE



General cycling information

On this trip we cycle 394 km over 6 days (an average of 65 km per day). The terrain is fairly hilly with the biggest ascents on days 4 and 5 and finishing with flatter rides for the last 2 days. We cycle on a mixture of tarmac roads and dedicated cycle paths. Maps are provided to cycle individually or in groups while the tour leader drives the support vehicle, except on circular routes when the tour leader will cycle with the group. We have graded the route as moderate to challenging. GPX files are available for this holiday.

Bike included

21 gear RTE 520 hybrid bikes with front suspension.

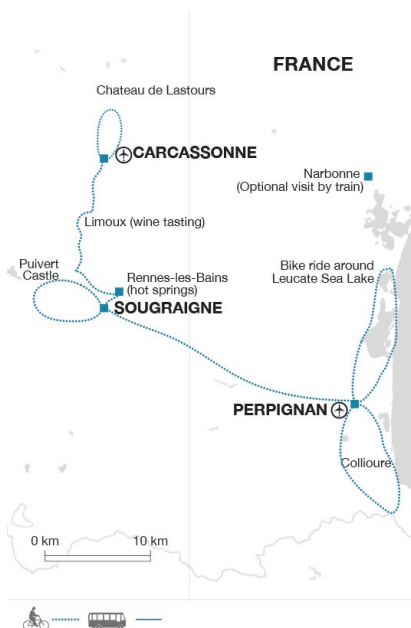
Electric bikes (e-bikes) are available for an additional cost for the duration of the holiday. Please contact us for more details or to request your e-bike.

Bike information

Your included bike is a 21 gear RTE 520 hybrid and will be the correct frame size for your height. These are unisex step-through frames, but women's step through frames are available, but are limited in number and size and may vary in bike type - please request at time of booking. A 15-litre pannier and water bottle holder are included as well as the facility to fit your own pedals or saddle if you wish to bring them. A support vehicle carries the luggage from point to point and is driven by the Explore Leader. Maps are provided to cycle individually or as a group. We provide spare parts and take care of the day to day maintenance. All you need to bring is your own helmet. Electric bikes (available for an additional cost) will be the similar RTE 700 unisex step-through frame bikes with front and rear suspension fitted with a 250watt Geonaute 8FUN motor. You will be required to pay a refundable cash 250 Euro deposit upon collection of the e-bike in country. Please contact us for more details or to request your e-bike.

Cycling grade

ModerateToChallenging



Why book this trip

Unlike many other operators, we include the hire of your bike in the overall cost of the holiday: you don't need to bring your own or pay extra to hire one locally. We also provide a support vehicle, spare parts and take care of day to day bike maintenance. All you need bring is your own helmet.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7
Dinner: 2



Transport

Bicycle
Taxi



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader / Driver



Accommodation

7 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

France

Climate

Across France, from April - August, weather conditions are generally warm and pleasant with moderate rainfall; Autumn temperatures are a bit lower and the winter months (though colder) remain mild. The summer months on the Mediterranean Coast in the south tend to be warmer than the rest of France and have less rainfall, and also more mild winters; freezing conditions are nearly unheard of. The mountainous areas of the Alps, Juros and Pyrenees can be quite different. During summer the morning and evening temperatures are considerably cooler and it becomes much colder in winter with heavy snowfall. Western France, along the English Channel, there can be very strong winds and frequent rain during the winter months Nov - Apr. Wine harvesting takes place in late August/early September.

Time difference to GMT

+1

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Catholic

Language

French

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Carcassonne Fortress € 8.50

Puivert Castle € 5

Puivert Troubadours Museum of Medieval Musical Instruments € 4

Peyrepertuse Castle € 9
Queribus Castle € 6.50
Perpignan Palace of the Kings of Majorca € 5
Perpignan Art Museum € 5
Lastours Castle € 6
Lastours viewpoint only € 2
Narbonne by train €13 each way

Clothing

Pack essentially for hot weather. During the day you can expect to live in T-shirts and shorts, but you may wish to bring smart casual wear for the evenings. Bring a warm fleece for cool evenings and raingear for occasional rain. May, June and September may be slightly cooler. Please note that French health regulations require that men wear 'proper' (Lycra) swimming trunks in pools and not shorts.

Footwear

If you are not bringing cycle shoes then try to bring stiff-soled shoes as these are better for cycling - transmitting your energy into the pedals more efficiently. This becomes more relevant and recommended the more demanding the grade and distances to cover. SPD cycle shoes are not well suited to trips that combine sightseeing with cycling. Comfortable shoes, trainers, sandals or flip flops are useful when not on the bike.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

We recommend you bring a daypack and one main piece of luggage (total allowance: 44lb/20kg) which will be transported between hotels while you cycle. Check the bike details section to see if a pannier or handlebar bag is provided on the bike. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage - don't overload yourself.

Equipment

On all Explore cycle holidays we strongly recommend you bring along and wear your cycle helmet. In case of an accident resulting in personal injury, certain insurance policies are invalidated in cases where a helmet was not being worn. Cycle glasses to protect against dust, pollen and the sun, padded cycle gloves and a water bottle or water delivery system (e.g. camelback or platypus) are also useful. You may choose to bring your own gel seat cover for added comfort. If a handle bar bag or pannier is not provided (check bike details) then you may like to bring a small rucksack to wear while cycling. Other items to consider bringing are a sunhat and sun cream, torch, earplugs and insect repellent. Please carry some or all of your cycling equipment e.g. helmet as part of your hand luggage. A swim towel for hot springs, pools and the beach would be useful.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

Country Information

France

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£11

Dinner price

£16.00 - 18.00

Beer price

£4

Water price

£1.3

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Euro

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Pounds Sterling and US Dollars can only be changed in larger airports with a Bureau de Change. Please change currency into Euros prior to arriving in France.

Where To Exchange

Bureau de Change can only be found in major cities and large airports. Many French banks no longer exchange Foreign currency.

ATM Availability

In cities and most major towns

Credit Card Acceptance

In major restaurants (make sure you have informed your credit card company that you are travelling abroad as some companies will reject payments)

Travellers Cheques

Travellers Cheques are no longer commonly accepted and can only be changed in larger airports with a Bureau de Change.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bicycle, Taxi

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Standard - Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

France: Visas are not required by UK, EU, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

France

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory. Tetanus recommended. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
