



SPAIN: THE PICOS DE EUROPA



This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.



High in the Picos de Europa. Photo Geraldine Westrupp

- **Classic mountain walking, 5-8 hours daily**
- **Good build up with day walks from traditional family hotel**
- **A final mountain traverse with overnights in a mountain hut and a mountain hotel.**
- **Trip designed by regular High Places leader Geraldine Westrupp**
- **Low cost flights available**

The Cordillera Cantabrica/ Picos de Europa

Our Spanish mountain walking holiday takes us to the high, rugged Cordillera Cantabrica and the National Park of the Picos de Europa.

In the north of the Iberian peninsular, the Cantabrian mountain range forms a natural barrier separating the parched central plateau from the northern coastal strip known as 'green Spain'. To the north of the central section of the Cantabrian mountain chain, just 15 km from the sea, lies the Picos de Europa, a limestone range approximately 40 km in length. The Picos de Europa is clearly defined and divided into three independent massifs known as The Western Massif (El Cornión), The Central Massif (Los Urrieles), and The Eastern Massif (Andara).

The scenery in the Picos de Europa is spectacular. Immense ridges and dramatic gorges, lush green valleys and beautiful forests, crystal clear streams and jagged peaks, soaring dramatically to 2600m dominate the horizon. Added to this there is a wonderful variety of flora and fauna, one of Europe's last remaining habitats for both wolves and bears. Vultures soar in the skies and mountain pastures are filled with a wealth of wild flowers and butterflies. The region is also rich in culture, a traditional style of farming and small settlements of attractive old stone buildings.

The trip

The trip has been designed by one of our most experienced and longest serving leader/guides, Geraldine Westrupp, who now lives in northern Spain. It features six classic mountain walking days including:

- The Cares Gorge.
- Two overnight stays in mountain refugios, one at the base of the Picos de Europa's most celebrated peak, El Naranjo de Bulnes (2519m).
- An exciting traverse that takes in the summit of Torre de los Horcados Rojos (2506m) offering an unrivalled panorama of the area.

We will walk between 5-8 hours each day and on occasions the terrain will be exposed with some easy scrambling. There may be small patches of snow to negotiate depending on the severity of the preceding winter.

Clothing and equipment

Clothing needs to be suitable for a range of weather, so a fleece and waterproofs are needed as well as a good sun hat, sunglasses, shorts, sun-cream and two litre water bottles.

Transport will support the walk and kit bags will be delivered to the hotels – with the exception of the two refugios.

The weather

The area is close to Northern Spain's 'Costa Verde' and can experience rainy Atlantic weather with temperatures rather cooler than further South. It can be ideal walking weather, with fine clear blue days and temperatures in the low to mid twenties. Frontal weather systems from the Azores often bring spectacular valley inversions.



Near Collada de Camara. Photo Geraldine Westrupp

Accommodation

Traditional friendly, family run hotels 4 nights, mountain refugio 2 nights, mountain chalet with 5-6 bedded en suite rooms of a good standard 1 night. Only the refugio nights without kit bags.

Meals

All meals, breakfast, packed lunch and dinner are included except for the final day lunch in Potes. Wine will be included at all dinners except the mountain refugio where it will be on sale at around €12 -€15 a bottle.

Maps

Picos de Europa: Macizos Central y Oriental (Los Urrieles y Andarra) Adrados Ediciones, (1:25,000). One of two detailed hiking maps of the Picos, covering the central and eastern part of the mountains, between the River Cares and Potes. On the reverse of the map there is a panorama drawing of the area and an index of mountain peaks.



El Naranjo. Photo Geraldine Westrupp

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. (B L D) refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

This trip joins in Santander.

- DAY 1 Transfer from Santander to our friendly family run hotel in Espinama, a small village in the very heart of the Picos de Europa (D)
- Day 2 The day begins with a ten minute road journey to Fuente De situated at 1078m. Our route takes us through a seemingly in-penetrable amphitheatre of impressive limestone cliffs through the narrows of Tornos de Liordes. This is our major ascent for the day, be on the lookout for both Griffon and Egyptian vultures that soar in the thermals of these rocky heights. Having gained the 'collado' (1958m) we will be looking down at the high fertile pastures of the Vega de Liordes. Now our trail takes a high, undulating traverse through a multitude of high peaks and towers to the spectacularly positioned Refugio Hermosa. 7 hours walking, 1000m of ascent. (B,L,D)
- Day 3 This morning we descend steeply into the Vega Asotín where perhaps we will see the large herds of Rebeco that favour this fertile area. Ahead is an amazing view of the western massif of the Picos de Europa, in particular Peña Santa de Castilla, or Torre Santa as it was once known, which is the highest summit in the western massif, completely dominating the neighbouring peaks. Descending through attractive forest we wend our way on an exciting path that takes us into the small village of Cordiñanes where we will visit the tiny bar and maybe sample some local 'sidre' before meandering the last 6 kilometers down to our hotel in the village of Cain. 7 hours walking, 1600m descent. (B,L,D)
- DAY 4 **The Cares Gorge:** (Garganta del Cares - literally the 'throat' of the Río Cares) cuts improbably through the heart of the mountains on a dizzying path which has been carved into the rock walls that soar up to almost 2000m above the Río Cares. The path was constructed in the 1940's in order to maintain a hydroelectric canal.

It passes through tunnels, under overhanging cliffs, over bridges and at times along sections where the imposing side walls of the gorge almost touch.

The sheltered depths of the gorge enjoy a mild climate, which encourages an essentially Mediterranean flora to flourish, including, wild jasmine, strawberries and fig. Griffon vultures soaring on the thermals are also a common sight. These luxuriously vegetated cliffs are also home to herds of wild goat. The walking is never difficult and the trail is often quite wide although being high above the river in places it can feel wonderfully exposed.



The remote lunar landscape behind El Naranjo
Photo Geraldine Westrupp

From our highest point of the day it is only a 45 minute stroll down to our guesthouse. In the afternoon we take a short walk to the Mirador (viewpoint) del Naranjo where we hope to have our first view of the most famous mountain in the Picos, and our destination tomorrow, Picu Urriellu. Ten minutes walk away is a natural swimming pool, which is beautifully placed under an old Roman bridge spanning the Río Cares. This is also the start of our walk tomorrow. 4 hrs walking and ascent of 250m. (B,L,D)

DAY 5 Two night traverse of the Central Massif – first day. Ascent to base of Naranjo de Bulnes: A tremendous day during which we pass through the whole range of Picos de Europa landscapes. Our walk starts with an ascent to Bulnes, a pretty and timeless village that still has no road connection. After filling our water bottles in the local fuente, we leave the village on an ancient pathway that meanders gently upwards through beech forests to arrive in lovely flower meadows scattered with shepherd's settlements. Stopping to buy some famous blue veined Cabrales cheese, our path now climbs more steeply, and the landscape opens up to reveal a multitude of jagged limestone peaks. Our beautifully positioned Refugio is situated beneath the mighty rock walls of the Naranjo de Bulnes and enjoys panoramic views. 8-9 hrs walking and an ascent of 1800m. Refugio. (B,L,D)

DAY 6 Two night traverse – second day. Ascent of Torre de los Horcados Rojos (2506m): Our journey continues south through a wildly graphic landscape of towers, spires and sheer rock faces that were carved during the ice age and continue to be transformed by rain ice and snow melt. Meandering gently uphill we will surely be looking over our shoulders in the hope of capturing a few more images of El Naranjo before traversing around the abyss of 'Hou Sin Tierre' (the hole without a bottom). Throughout the Picos there are many of these massive holes, typical features of a karstic limestone area. Herds of Rebecca, tiny but nimble deer-like animals, eagles and Egyptian vultures are often sighted in this area. As the terrain steepens we will find ourselves concentrating on a cable-assisted scramble of 300 meters up to Collado Horcados Rojos (2344m). If the weather is good then we will climb Torre de los Horcados Rojos (2506m), an outstanding viewpoint for the whole area and a fine place to linger for a while. Reluctantly, we will begin our descent through granite boulders down to an old miners' track that makes its way past two pretty turquoise-green lakes and through a col into high summer pastures, where our overnight accommodation is situated. The hotel/refugio, Aliva, has an unsurpassed mountain location with fine views of the eastern massif. 6 hrs walking. (B,L,D)



Colla Bonita Photo Geraldine Westrupp

DAY 7 To Espinama. This morning we begin our descent down into the valley, but not before we have explored the most southern part of the Central massif, culminating in the ascent of Pico Valdecoro (1841m) Our route down to the valley meanders through meadows and forest, a delightful contrast to the high mountain terrain of the past two days. We arrive back in time for a dip in the small hotel pool and there will be time to explore the village before our last night celebratory dinner. 5-6 hrs walking (B,L,D)

DAY 8 After six strenuous days walking, we can allow ourselves the luxury of a lazy start, including a delicious breakfast. After packing we leave the hotel and drive down to Potes, the largest and most historic town in the area. The streets have many old bridges as well as buildings and monuments steeped in history. Potes is an ideal place for picking up souvenirs, the shops being full of traditional artisan products. Narrow cobbled streets in the old part of the town are well worth exploring as are the tiny bars where old men in clogs meet to watch the world go by and drink 'sidra'. Following an 'al fresco' lunch beside the river in one of the town's most popular restaurants, we drive on to Santander airport and depart. (B)



High in the Central Massif. Photo Geraldine Westrupp

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