

The Freedom Trail

Pyrenees Trek

France | 2,522m



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The **Freedom Trail** also known as the **Chemin de la Liberté** marks one of several **escape routes** used by Frenchmen, Jews and crashed RAF airmen escaping German-occupied France over the **Pyrenees** into Spain. Our challenging 4-day **trek** takes us on a historical journey from France to Spain through the stunning Pyrenees with amazing views every step of the way. With a free day at the end to relax in the beautiful mountain town of Bagnères de Luchon.

This trail begins in **Saint Giron**s, trekking through the forest into the foothills of the Pyrenees. We then begin climbing towards the Cabane Subera high in the peaks of the Ariège before continuing towards the Col de Craberous (2,382m). The crash site and memorial of an old Halifax bomber reminds

us of the wartime significance of the route amid stunning Pyrenean panoramas, clear mountain lakes worthy of a refreshing dip, wild horses, deep gullies and exhilarating ridges. To have made this trek at night, undernourished, ill-equipped and hunted by the Wehrmacht, Austrian Mountain troops and the Milice would have been a remarkable endeavor!

Throughout this historical Pyrenean trek that commemorates the bravery of others, you'll be accompanied by a knowledgeable and experienced guide who will make sure you immerse yourself fully into the experience knowing that the day- to-day logistics are taken care of.



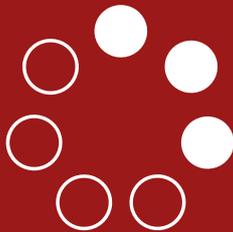
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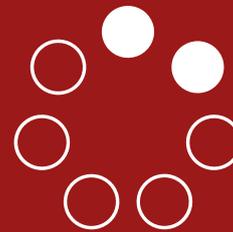
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Physical - P3

This trip is physically tough. Frequent exercise is necessary to prepare properly for this expedition. Regular walking mixed with training at the gym to build up endurance and cardiovascular fitness is key. Expect to be able to do 8 hour days in hilly and often steep terrain, carrying a pack of 6-10kg in weight with the occasional extra long day.



Technical - T2

Consider this a trek, although there may be occasion to use hands for short sections of easy scrambling. No previous climbing or trekking experience is necessary.

Please note that the grading system used is a rough guide only.



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ITINERARY

DAY 1 : Arrive Saint Girons

You will be met at Toulouse Airport and transferred to your auberge in Seix where you will meet your guide who will begin to unravel the poignant history of the journey you are about to embark on.

Tonight you are free to chose where you eat. There are several restaurants in this tiny town and the Auberge serves excellent tapas.

DAY 2 : La Soumere - Seix (766m)

Following a hearty breakfast, we will visit the Chemin de la Liberté museum in the morning in St Girons, and then transfer to the start of our trek.

We will order a picnic lunch from the Auberge to take with you in your rucksack.

Our walk will be approximately 3 to 4 hours, taking lunch at the Louis Barreau memorial on the way. After lunch we contour down and round before making the final ascent to Seix on a forested paths.

Tonight, we return to our cosy Auberge in Seix. Again you are free to choose where you eat this evening.

(B, L)

DAY 3 : Seix-La Cabane de Subera (1,499m)

We start our day with a short transfer then begin walking through old beech forests. Our path takes us steeply up to the Col de la Core (1,395m), a fairly demanding ascent, but the views around us are spectacular as we gain height.

Here, we will enjoy a buffet lunch and collect our kit for tonight. The hardest part of today's trek is behind us as we hike around the mountain, getting a glimpse of the terrain that awaits us, before climbing over a few easy cols up to the Cabane, set in pasture meadows, underneath the rock wall of Le Cirque de Lameza.

Of course, those escaping from France had no such luxuries as huts or tents, but tonight we immerse ourselves in history and take our shelter in either the rustic shepherds hut (cabane) or in tents. This is wild camping, with no facilities, as we spend the night under the stars, with the gentle ringing of goats' bells across the mountain and, if it's been a chilly day, the shepherd's fire to keep us warm.

(Approx. 16km, 6-7hrs, 733m ascent)

(B, L, D)

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ITINERARY

DAY 4 : La Cabane de Subera (1,499m) – Le Refuge des Estagnous (2,245m)

A challenging day lies ahead of us today, as our trek heads into serious mountain terrain. We stop to remember the crew of a British Halifax bomber that crashed into the Pic de Lampau during a training flight in July 1945, killing everyone on board. Remains of the wreckage still litter the ground, untouched out of respect, and there is a simple memorial plaque set into the rock.

From here, we climb the gully leading to the Col de Craberous (2,382m), which may be snow filled early in the season, before a steep descent for 300m and then a succession of lakes and boulder fields to reach the Col de Pouech above the manned Refuge of Estagnous.

As we near the snow-line, the scenery becomes more impressive; craggy peaks and towering cliffs, with patches of snow between rocks. It's hard to imagine how those escaping France would have felt, making this journey in the dark and in fear of betrayal and capture.

The path can be uneven under foot, and rising from the lake there are some boulder-strewn areas where at times we may have to stow one or both walking poles and use our hands for balance over the rockier sections. However, there are plenty of breaks and the scenery balances the effort, with chances to see herds of Merens ponies (the distinctive black mountain pony of the Pyrenees), and Griffon vultures circling overhead, with a possibility to sight the Lammergeier with its vast 9-foot wingspan.

We will end the day at Le Refuge des Estagnous, set in a stunning location at an altitude of 2,245m. During our stay at this dormitory styled accommodation, we will have hot showers, a hearty dinner, and spectacular sunset views.

(Approx. 8-9hrs, 833m ascent)

(B, L, D)

DAY 5 : Refuge des Estagnous (2,245m) – Spanish Border - Vielha

We set off from our hospitable refuge and descend to the lovely Lac Rond (1,929m), stretching out any aching muscles in anticipation of the next challenge!

Lac Long lies only about half an hour away, but is 200m above us, and the path to it is extremely steep. In places there is via ferrata style cableway to assist on the path. Once at Lac Long (2125m) the border at the Col de la Clauère is almost within sight. Our path crosses a deep gully, usually filled with snow, which provides an arduous climb to the top (2,522m), where we gaze into Spain – another stunning view! We traverse across, before descending on vague sheep track paths to reach a lake, swimmable on warmer days (or cooler, if you don't mind the sudden chill!). Afterwards, we continue our descent past some small waterfalls and an abundance of flowers on the sunny side of the mountain. We get into our waiting transport and drive to the delightful Spanish ski resort of Vielha, where it's cobbled streets, tapas bars and museum await. Again, there are a plethora of restaurants and we will leave you to take your pick, whether that's tapas and a beer, or a full 3-course meal!

(Trekking time approx. 6-7 hrs. Transfer to Vielha approx 1 hour)

(B, L)

DAY 6 : Depart Toulouse

We have the morning free to enjoy a leisurely breakfast, and enjoy the magnificent town of Vielha until it's time for our transfer to Toulouse Airport for our flight home.

(B)

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KIT LIST

Bags & Packs

Rucksack

A 60-65L rucksack with a good waist belt. To carry all your kit and a proportion of your week's food allocation along with your crampons, helmet, ice axe etc.

Waterproof rucksack cover

To protect rucksack from rain

Drybags

Nylon rolltop bags that keep fresh clothing and other important items like passports and iPods dry in the event of a total downpour that seeps into your kitbag. Good for quarantining old socks. Please note that many countries are now banning plastic bags. We would always advise buying re-usable nylon rolltop bags for keeping your kit dry (and sustainability).

Sleeping Gear

Sleeping Bag 3 season

You should get a sleeping bag rated to 0C and choose a sleeping bag that functions within the comfort rating of this temperature. A silk sleeping bag liner will enhance this rating on the coldest nights. You only need your sleeping bag for Day 3, when we camp at the Cabane de Subera. You will be carrying your sleeping bag on the afternoon of Day 3 and it will then be picked up from you on Day 4 and you will be reunited with it at the end of the trek. For the other nights on the trip a sleeping bag liner will be sufficient.

Sleeping bag liner

Silk is best for keeping the bag clean and you a little warmer

Sleeping mat

As with your sleeping bag, you only need a sleeping mat for Day 3, when we camp at the Cabane de Subera. You will be carrying your sleeping mat on the afternoon of Day 3 and it will then be picked up from you on Day 4 and you will be reunited with it at the end of the trek.

Headwear

Warm headgear

This can be a warm hat, beanie, balaclava, anything to reduce the heat loss from your head

Wide brimmed hat

Keeps the sun off exposed areas like ears and the nape of the neck

Buff/Scarf

Essential for protection from the sun and dust

Sunglasses

Worth spending money on good UV filters. Julbo is our preferred supplier

Sunblock

Essential for protection from the sun

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KIT LIST

Lip salve

Sun cream will not work on your lips and they are very susceptible to burn without proper protection

Upper Body

Base layer

This is the layer closest to the skin and its principal function is to draw (wick) moisture and sweat away from the skin. You can also get thermal base layers for use at higher altitudes that provide an additional insulative layer while still drawing sweat during times of high exertion

Mid layer x 2

These are typically lightweight microfleece or similar technology that provide varying degrees of warmth and insulation without being overly bulky or heavy to pack. Ideally to have a windstopper function

Gilet (optional)

Optional - A great low volume additional layer to keep your core warm, whether down, primaloft or fleece

Waterproof jacket (Outer layer)

A good Goretex Hardshell jacket provides effective defence against wind and rain as your outermost layer

T-shirts / Trekking tops x 2

A couple of t-shirts or loose fitting (non-cotton) trekking tops / shirts to wear whilst walking

Gloves x 2

Consider a light polartec pair for potential bad weather and evenings and a thicker pair if the weather were to turn

Lower Body

Waterproof overtrousers

Like the jacket, an essential piece of kit to stay dry and should also be Goretex

Trekking trousers

These tend to be polyester so they dry quickly after a shower and weigh little in your pack. Consider perhaps a pair with detachable lower legs as an alternative to shorts

Shorts

An alternative to trekking trousers if you prefer walking in shorts. Note that the trails often become overgrown and prickly plants can scratch your exposed legs (consider gaiters)

Underwear

How many pairs you take is entirely up to you

Feet

3-4 season walking boots

Well worn in 3-4 season waterproof boots with mid to high ankle support

Trekking socks

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KIT LIST

Spare laces

Just in case

Gaiters (Optional)

To protect the tops of your footwear from harsh conditions and to provide some added insulation

Trekking poles

These tend to be a personal preference but help with your stability and can dampen the pressure on the knees coming down hill

Hydration

Water bottle/Camelback

1L capacity either in a water bottle or Camelback

Water purification

Although generally all water is boiled some prefer to double up and add purification tabs as well. Always good to have in your bag

Evening Wear

Evening clothes

A dry set for evenings in the auberge or camp, if it's been a wet day, plus something casual for the evenings in town.

Comfortable trainers / flip flops / crocks

For the camp life and evenings

Toiletries

Wash kit

Keep it simple on the mountain. Essentials are toothbrush, toothpaste and deodorant. Moisturiser is advisable, everything else is a luxury!

Travel towel

Travel towels from the likes of Lifesystems are perfect

Wet wipes

Preferably biodegradable, these are great for washing when modern shower facilities become a thing of the past

Alcohol gel

A must have for good camp hygiene

Insect repellent

For early stages and once back down

Toilet paper

Provided on the mountain but a spare in your daysack may be useful if you need to hide behind a rock between camps

Nappy sacks or dog poo bags

Only needed to bag your toilet paper if you are caught short in between refuges and for keeping your rubbish tidy

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KIT LIST

Medications

Personal first aid kit

The 360 med kits are designed to be used in emergencies and akin to an A&E rather than a pharmacy on Expeditions so please come prepared with useful meds for yourself such as painkillers (Ibuprofen if you can take it and a Paracetamol) plus blister plasters, plasters, antiseptic, rehydration sachets and any muscle rubs you wish to use.

Personal medication

Keep this in your daysack

Documentation

Dental check up

We recommend you have a dental check-up before your trip. New fillings can be an issue at altitude if there is an air pocket left in the gap

Travel insurance

Copy of own travel insurance details. And relevant contact numbers. We have a partnership with True Traveller and would recommend that you contact them when looking for travel insurance for your trip with 360. However, it is vital that you ensure that the insurance cover they offer is suitable for you, taking your personal circumstances (items to be insured, cancellation cover, medical history) into account. Many other insurance providers are available and we do recommend that you shop around to get the best cover for you on the expedition you are undertaking. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the appropriate insurance for your intended trip. To include medical evacuation and coverage up to the maximum altitude of this trip.

Passport

Don't forget this! Your passport should have at least 6 months validity. With your passport expiry date at least six months after the final day of travel.

EHIC (formerly E111)

If you are eligible and it is available, it is worth having a UK Global Health Insurance Card or GHIC (which replaces what was the European Health Insurance Card / EHIC). If you don't already have one, details to apply for one are here. Do check with your insurance whether your medical costs would be paid, in the unlikely event that you need medical treatment whilst you are away, if you are not covered by a GHIC.

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FAQ'S

Food and Water

Where do we get drinking water from?

Each morning you will fill your water bottles/bladder from the gîte / refuge. We pass streams in various places that you can top up from if you should run out, so take purification to add to it in the form of silver chloride or chlorine.

What is the food like on the trek?

The food in the refuge and gites is plentiful and of very good quality, often using locally sourced ingredients. Breakfasts consist of pastries, fresh bread and jams and you can expect a three course meal in the evenings. On our wild camping night we'll be eating expedition food, but we can still take into account dietary preferences!

Can allergies be catered for?

Absolutely, please inform the office of any allergies or intolerances and we will ensure that these are taken into account on the trek.

Accommodation

What are the gîtes and refuges like?

Each have dorm style accommodation but each person will have their own bed (bunk). It is worth remembering that these places are not designed for luxury but rather a safe place to rest whilst in the mountains. They are clean and comfortable and are a great place for socialising with like-minded trekkers.

Can you get a hot shower there?

Hot showers are available at the refuge. There may be a small supplement for hot water. Of course, at your hotel and gite accommodation, there are bathroom and shower facilities. There are no showers available on the night at the shepherds hut.

What is the camping night like?

For many, it's a chance to experience something totally new,

This is wild camping, with no facilities, so we'll find sheltered spots for toileting and it will be a night around the fire and under the stars. We have tents or there is the opportunity to sleep inside the shepherd's hut – it's a unique experience, though very basic, with simple mattresses on platforms.

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FAQ'S

The Trek

How tough is this trek?

Just because we're in Europe and reasonably close to home, it doesn't mean that you're undertaking a gentle walk in the hills! This is a challenging trek with significant altitude gain and some long days, including a fixed rope on a steeper section. Worth thinking about when you consider that the escapees of the war had none of this assistance, and often did all the walking in the dark to avoid capture!

Health and Safety

What happens if there is an issue on the trek with a client – a fall or an illness?

360 Expeditions have conducted detailed risk assessments and put the necessary plans in place to cope with any accidents or illness whilst out on the trek. Our expedition leaders are highly qualified and experienced mountain leaders who hold expedition first aid qualifications and are used to working in remote environments. Their training, allows them to deal with situations quickly and safely. Should someone find themselves requiring further medical attention, the leader will organise for that individual to be taken from the trail and transferred to the nearest hospital. The leader and the 360 office team will also be on hand to offer guidance and support for insurance claims and contacting next-of-kin.

Is there any risk of altitude sickness?

There is no risk of altitude sickness on this trek.

Kit

What sleeping bag do I need?

The idea is to be as comfortable and warm as possible for the night and henceforth to ensure plenty of sleep for the arduous days ahead. A 3 season sleeping bag with comfort rating of 0C will do the trick just fine.

You only need a sleeping bag and mat for Day 3, when we camp at the Cabane de Subera. You'll be carrying these from lunchtime on Day 3 but they will be picked up on the morning of Day 4 and you'll be reunited with them at the end of the trek.

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FAQ'S

What boots do we need?

Because of the huge variety of terrain encountered walking in these mountains it is very important to wear the right footwear. Boots should be sturdy, waterproof, insulated against cold temperatures and offer adequate ankle support. In addition it is highly recommended that your boots are well worn in to prevent the formation of blisters. A wide range of suitable boots are on the market and further advice as to which brand names are available can be found online or at your local outdoor store. The leather / Goretex combinations are endless and each with their merits. Our best advice is to try them on – if you think they're comfortable, and will be for several hours a day, buy them. It is not necessary to buy technical boots with crampon clips as crampons are not used for climbing this trek.

Do we need crampons and ice-axes?

You will not need crampons and ice axes for this trip.

How much weight will I be carrying in my rucksack?

You will only have to carry your own kit for most of the trip but on one day you will need to carry some camping equipment and extra food supplies. For this reason you should pack as lightly as possible and only bring the essentials. You can expect your pack to weigh around 10kg when fully loaded so ensure you train with this in mind and get used to carrying a rucksack for long periods of time.

Do I need a down jacket?

Though many trekkers bring one, a down jacket is not essential, a good thick fleece or jumper layers will suffice for the evenings. You will need good waterproofs though, in case of a downpour!

The Weather

What is the weather like?

During the day temperatures can be warm and can even reach to the mid 20 C. In the evening higher up, it could drop to below freezing and have a distinct chill in the air.

As you will be trekking in a mountain environment, the weather can rapidly change for the worse so you need to be prepared for all conditions. Even in good weather it is not uncommon to have short heavy downpours or heavy snowstorms.

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FAQ'S

Travel

Flights aren't included what time should I arrive and depart to Toulouse?

We haven't included flights as this gives you options from the UK. There are many flights that come to Toulouse daily from many different airports.

It's important that we check flight schedules before confirming a pickup time with you, as we want to make sure you can actually make it to Toulouse on time. We will confirm what time you should aim to arrive in Toulouse as we draw closer to your departure date.

We will also check flight schedules before deciding what time we do an airport drop off.

Once you know the above, please find flights that work for these timings, or plan to have the night before and/or night after in Toulouse.

Insurance

Do I need special travel insurance for the trek?

You must carry individual travel insurance to take part in the expedition. We cannot take you on the mountain without proof of insurance.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the appropriate insurance for your intended trip to include, at a minimum, medical evacuation and coverage up to the maximum altitude of this trip.

Your insurance details are requested on the booking form, however this can be arranged at a later date. 360 Expeditions will be requesting your insurance details 8 weeks before your departure.

Training

Any tips on how a trekker can maximise their chances of success?

The 360 training programs have been devised to be expedition specific. Use these as a guide but also feel free to contact us for individual advice on how to best incorporate the best suitable fitness program with your own lifestyle.

Several excellent training plans can also be found online to prepare you for this ascent. Check the thorough advice offered by [UpHill Athlete](#).

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FAQ'S

Electronics

Will I be able to get WiFi along the way?

You will be able to get WiFi at the guest house / hotel at the start and finish.

The gite/refuges generally don't have WiFi due to their remoteness.

Is there mobile reception?

Mobile phones work in most places on this trek but there are a couple of areas where you may struggle to get reception.

Can I charge my phone/iPod during the trek?

The gîte/refuge do have electricity so you will be able to plug things in to charge, but depending on how busy the gite/refuge is, you might find yourself competing for a socket with other guests.

We use [PowerTraveller](#) for our power packs and solar charges and would highly recommend them!

What plug sockets do you have?

France and Spain use the continental two pin with earth prong, adapters are readily available from many outlets before you leave the UK.

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TRAINING PROGRAM

To begin 6 months prior to the expedition where possible.

1. CVS: Cardiovascular exercise which is low impact such as swimming, cycling, cross trainer, rowing.

2. Weekend walk should be done over undulating terrain. Only a light rucksack needs to be carried.

3. For specific exercises it is worth doing static squats and heel raises on a regular basis to improve leg muscles prior to the trip. Static squats are especially useful to help protect the knees. Please remember that it is still important to have a well balanced workout using a variety of muscle groups.

4. It is worth winding down and resting in the week leading up to the trip, doing several light walks to keep things going.

5. When walking going at a pace of a brisk walk with a light sweat and enough to feel breathless is recommended

6. During the program, rather than step up suddenly each month (example, going for 3 one hour walks each week during the weekdays in April to 3 one and half hour walks suddenly in May) it is better to build up gradually each week so there isn't a large transition (example, going for 3 one hour walks during week 1 in April, going for 3 one hour and ten minute walks during week 2 in April, going for 3 one hour and fifteen minute walks during week 3 in April, going for 3 one hour and twenty minute walks during week 4 in April)

6. It is important you seek medical advice prior to starting any training program, especially if you are not used to regular physical exertion

All the best with your training!

MONTH 1

OPT 1

2 x 30 mins weekday walk
1 x 1 hour weekend walk
1 x 10 mins CVS

OPT 2

1 x 30 mins weekday walk
2 x 1 hour weekend walk
1 x 10 mins CVS

MONTH 2

OPT 1

2 x 45 mins weekday walk
1 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

OPT 2

1 x 45 mins weekday walk
2 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

MONTH 3

OPT 1

2 x 45 mins weekday walk
1 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

OPT 2

1 x 45 mins weekday walk
2 x 2 hours weekend walk
2 x 10 mins CVS

MONTH 4

OPT 1

3 x 1 hour weekday walk
1 x 4 hours weekend walk
3 x 15 mins CVS

OPT 2

2 x 1 hour weekday walk
2 x 4 hours weekend walk
3 x 15 mins CVS

MONTH 5

OPT 1

3 x 1.5 hours weekday walk
1 x 5 hours weekend walk
3 x 20 - 25 mins CVS

OPT 2

2 x 1.5 hours weekday walk
2 x 5 hours weekend walk
3 x 20 - 25 mins CVS

MONTH 6

OPT 1

3 x 2 hours weekday walk
1 x 6 hours weekend walk
3 x 30 mins CVS

OPT 2

2 x 3 hours weekday walk
2 x 6 hours weekend walk
3 x 30 mins CVS

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“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty & well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out & loudly proclaiming ‘Wow! What a Ride!’ “

Dream it. Plan it. Live it.