

C252-ST Saint James way

Via Podiensis from Espalion to Cahors



Via Podiensis is one of the four main pilgrimage routes to the Spanish sanctuary of Santiago de Compostela from Le Puy en Velay, a Marian sanctuary since the fifth century. Since the Middle-Ages, millions of pilgrims have left from Le Puy to journey to the Spanish Galicia, at the extremity of the Iberian Peninsula, to venerate the relics of Saint James, one of Christ's apostles. This pilgrimage is today registered on the World Heritage list of UNESCO.

Walking along the heights of the Lot Valley, you will arrive in the lovely city of Conques, a treasure of Romanesque art nestled in a small, scallop-shell-shaped valley. You will cross through the Decazeville Basin, formerly a large coal field, and arrive in Figeac and Cajarc. From there you will head across the Causse of Limogne, a

large area of sparse vegetation and stunted trees, to Cahors, an old town tucked into a curve of the Lot River.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival at ESPALION. This little city, located in a beautiful spot in the heart of the Lot Valley, is an important stop on the pilgrimage route of Santiago de Compostela. Weary pilgrims arrived in this city after a labored hike across the Aubrac River and the fearful heights of its plateaus. Here, they felt immediately embraced in the mildness of the Midi. Espalion holds an important cultural heritage that you will enjoy while strolling through its narrow streets. Admire the Pont-Vieux (Old Bridge) and the old palace reflecting in the sparkling waters of the Lot - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel – Dinner in a restaurant.*

Day 2 - ESPALION - ESTAING (13 km – 3,30 hours' walk). This stage is short, allowing you to discover Espalion before crossing through the Lot Valley to Saint Pierre de Bussuejols. Look around the 16th century rose-sandstone church, then continue on to Estaing. You will enter Estaing by a Gothic bridge, and will enjoy visiting the city, built around a strange château topped by a keep and many times altered throughout the centuries - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 3 - ESTAING – ESPEYRAC (24 km – 6,30 hours' walk). You will cross back over the river to exit Estaing and climb above the gorges of the Lot, crossing through dark forests and tiny, isolated villages. You will reach the village of Golin hac whose church, built on the remains of an ancient priory, welcomes pilgrims on their journey. Your trek will continue across the countryside, through several small hamlets and villages of Rouergue. You will finally arrive in Espeyrac, an old city once dependant on the Conques Abbey. During the Middle Ages, the city held two châteaux, but today there remains only one building and a turret – *Transfer by taxi to Entraygues sur Truyère – Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*





Day 4 - ESPEYRAC – CONQUES (15 km – 4.00-hour walk). *Back to Espeyrac by taxi.* This is a short phase, passing through the charming village of Senergues before descending towards Conques for the discovery of this pearl of Romanesque art, lying quietly against a lush green backdrop. The abbey church houses more than 250 sculpted domes as well as, on the western facade, a gorgeous tympanum illustrating the Last Judgement. All around the serpentine basin lie the remains of the roman cloister that once stood there. Conques' treasury holds numerous pieces of priceless statuary, including La Majesté de Sainte Foy, a 10th century golden statue inlaid with jewels offered by pilgrims. The medieval village has preserved its old streets lined with wooden houses, its roman fountains, the city doors and a few remains of fortified walls.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel

Day 5 - CONQUES – LIVINHAC LE HAUT (24 km – 6.30

hours' walk). After a final stroll through Conques, admiring once again the tympanum of the abbey church, you will pick up again your hike. You will follow Charlemagne Street through La Porte du Barry (Barry's Gate) and will cross the medieval bridge dating to the 14th century and named "pont romain" ("romain" being an adaptation of the word "roumieu", meaning "pilgrim") on the Dourdou River. You will walk uphill to the Saint Roch Chapel, once a place of pilgrimage, and will make your way along the plateau. You will pass through Noailhac and Saint Roch Chapel, Laubarède to reach Decazeville, a city founded in the 19th century and named for Duke Decazes, who initiated the mining industry in this area. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a guesthouse*

Day 6 - LIVINHAC LE HAUT - FIGEAC (26 km – 7 hour walk). Livinhac-le-Haut is a lovely situated in a curve of the Lot River. You will start out for Montredon, built on a rounded hillock and overlooked by Saint Michel's church. You will soon reach the hamlet of Guiranle and Sainte Marie Chapel. The path jogs windily through the countryside so to avoid the roads. You will cross through La Cyprière, Saint Félix and by the Romanesque Sainte Radegonde Church and arrive in the village of Saint Jean Mirabel, whose church possesses a 13th century tympanum. Finally, you will begin your descent into the Le Célé Valley to arrive in Figeac, a city that still holds numerous testimonies of its rich medieval past - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel – dinner not included*

Day 7 - FAYCELLES - CARJAC (23 km –6.00 hours' walk). *Transfer by taxi from Figeac to Faycelles.* This village will reward the traveller who takes time to stroll through its streets and admire the gorgeous view of the Lot Valley. After having absorbed the beauty of Faycelles, you will head to Beduer, whose castle still holds a 13th century keep. Beyond this village, the landscape changes and becomes arid : you are now on the Causse de Carjac, a large area sparsely covered with grass and stunted oak forests. The path, lined by low stone walls, will take you to Le Puy Clavel and Gréalou where you will admire the small Romanesque church, Notre Dame de l'Assomption. Dolmens spot the route, making for a fascinating journey. You will reach the Lot Valley and descend to Carjac, located along large limestone cliffs carved out by several grottos.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel

Day 8 - LIMOGNE EN QUERCY –LALBENQUE (25 km – 7 hours' walk). The crossing of the Causse de Limogne was once a stretch that terrified pilgrims. This vast, chalky sprawl provided little water and many occasions for accidents. The pilgrims avoided spending much time in this area, and strode with determination to Cahors! Fortunately, this strenuous hike will not be required of you. You will have plenty of time to enjoy the amazing landscapes, the overwhelming sheep flocks, the dolmens, the wash houses, and the remarkable shepherds' huts made from a stone called caselles or gariottes. The day will begin with a taxi escort from Carjac to Limogne, a little village whose economy relies on the sale of local country products and is much frequented during the periods of the truffle-market. You will walk to Varaire and its strange washing house, a small lake, typical of this area. You will continue to the south of the village and will join with the ancient roman route. This route will lead you to Lalbenque and its famous truffle-market, the most well-known of its kind in the southwest of France. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a guesthouse in Lalbenque or Escamps (a neighbouring village)*



Day 9 –LALBENQUE - CAHORS (24 km – 6.30-hour walk). You will take the Cami Ferrat, another name of the roman route that once linked Caylus to Cahors, and make your way through the Causse to the Lot Valley. As you descend to Cahors, you will have beautiful views of the city, nestling in a loop of the Lot River, and will admire the gorgeous Pont Valentré (Valentré Bridge). *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 10 - CAHORS - Tour ends after breakfast.

Best season

From April to middle of October but be careful this trail is more and more popular and we recommend to reserve earlier to get (the best) rooms. Best time is May, June and September

What's included?

- 9 nights' accommodation in 2 and 3-star hotels or guesthouses with breakfasts
- 7 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfers as written in the description of the itinerary
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) or topoguide (with translation) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Emergency assistance.

Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks – Entrance fees – Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls, are not included

Getting there and away

Nearest Airport: Domestic airport at Rodez you can reach from Paris Orly or Lyon St Exupery airports. Taxi from Rodez airport to Espalion.

By car: Get off A75 motorway (Clermont – Millau – Montpellier) at La Canourgue and go along the Lot River to Espalion (D988 and D6 roads). Shared taxis from Cahors to come back to Espalion (contact us for reservation)

Where to park: free unattended car park in Espalion .

By train: go to Rodez by train and take a bus or taxi to reach Espalion (no bus on Sundays). On return from Cahors, scheduled links between Cahors and Paris or Toulouse

Walk difficulty

Grade 3 – walks of between 5 and 8 hours a day with ascents up to 700 m. Some hiking experience is advisable. A reasonable level of fitness and some stamina are required for these walks. You may cover long distances in remote countryside and the terrain will be rough underfoot. In mountainous areas you will encounter some sustained ascents and descents

