

C254-ST Saint James way

Via Podiensis from Lectoure to Aire sur l'Adour



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.

This tour takes place mainly in the Gers department, the heart of Gasconne. You are in the country of bien-vivre, land of Armagnac and foie gras. Gasconne has a rich history,

famous for the Cadets de Gasconne who were immortalized by Alexandre Dumas and his hero d'Artagnan. The region is crisscrossed by the pilgrimage routes which run from Arles and Le Puy, joining together in the Pyrenees Mountains. Chapels, abbeys, churches, and other vestiges – such as the Bridge of Artigues and the Abbatial of La Romieu – stand as a symbol of the faith that urged the pilgrims to Compostela.

Itinerary

Day 1 : Arrival at LECTOURE. Lectoure sits perched upon a promontory overhanging the Gers Valley. Its long history is evident to modern day man in the many structures that speak of its past. The city was once the Gallic oppidum, an ancient Cybelus worship centre, the headquarters of a diocese, but it was destroyed by the Visigoths during the 10th century. Once rebuilt, it again suffered much damage during the Middle Ages and the wars of the religions. Strolling through the city, you will discover Saint Gervais Cathedral, built during the 14th century, the archaeological museum, which holds a nice collection of “taurobolic“ alters (the most important in the world), and many other monuments and vestiges, all of which remind us of the rich past of the city - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 2 - LECTOURE - LA ROMIEU (19 km – 5-hour walk). You will leave Lectoure by way of the 13th century Diane's Fountain, and will cross the Gers. You will walk across green slopes to the hamlet of Espasot and then to the village of Marsolan, which has a lovely 16th century church and square bell-tower. You will continue your hike to the hamlet of Cauboue, where you will turn off towards La Romieu, taking a quick detour by the Romanesque-style Tressens Chapel. Another church of interest is that of La Romieu, sitting in contrast to the open country of Gers. The city was once encircled by fortified walls and moats, of which few remains have been preserved. You will see the main square of the city, decorated by archways and beautiful old homes, as well as the cloister and the eastern tower of the abbey church, the only remnants of the structure built during the 14th century by The Cardinal of Aux, cousin to Pope Clément V. The Cardinal tower is all that remains of his palace. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a guesthouse*

Day 3 - LA ROMIEU - CONDOM (16 km – 4-hour walk). You will pick up the path of Saint James exactly where you left it yesterday and will continue on to the hamlet of Montravail. A little further on, you will cross the Abrin Chapel and a few other ancient structures, remains of the 12th century community of knights called the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem. Having passed by Aurens and its Romanesque church you will reach Castelnau sur l'Auvignon. Castelnau was severely damaged during the last war and only one of the towers has been preserved on the château, located near the 14th century church. You will cross the Auvignon Valley and walk up to the hamlet of Le Bardieu and the Romanesque chapel Sainte Germaine, situated on the opposite hillside. You will pass near Le Château Busca before reaching Condom, an old city which was once the headquarters of an important Benedictine abbey. We recommend visiting Saint Pierre Cathedral, an imposing Gothic monument of the 16th century, with a square bell-tower and a lovely cloister. You might also stroll through the old streets of this medieval city and discover the private hotels and the Armagnac Museum - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 4 - CONDOM - MONTREAL (20 km – 5.30-hour walk). After crossing La Baïse, a river that flows through Condom and helped the city develop an independent economy with the transportation of Armagnac to Bordeaux, you will plunge into the beautifully sloping landscape of vineyards to find the quaint fortified village of Larresingle. As people have been doing for 700 years, you will cross over the Osse River on the Artigues Bridge, a one of a kind Romanesque bridge of uneven arches! You will skirt around the hamlet of Routgès and in front of a chapel, and will cross the hamlet of Pagès before joining the Château Lassalle Baqué and, finally, Montréal. This little village is situated on a picturesque spot overlooking the Auloue Valley. Almost entirely destroyed during the wars of the religions, it still holds a lovely fortified Gothic church and a nice public square surrounded by old homes. *Lodging and breakfast in a charming guesthouse.*

Day 5 - MONTREAL - EAUZE (18 km – 5-hour walk). Just after Montreal, you will leave temporarily St James way to discover a Gallo-Roman villa, a sumptuous 4th century residence, with a gorgeous pool decorated in multicoloured mosaics of marble! Once again on the pilgrimage route, you will continue through the countryside to the hamlet of Lamothe, where you will catch an ancient railway that will lead you to Eauze, a charming little village famous for its Armagnac liquor. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 6 - EAUZE - NOGARO (20 km – 5.30 hour walk). You will pass through the Place d'Armagnac, surrounded by arcaded homes, including that of Jeanne d'Albret. The square takes on life and animation during the market days. This stage brings you through the department of Gers, walking through valleys and over vineyard-covered slopes, through corn fields and forests. You will reach the village of Manciet, once home to a hospital for pilgrims. You will next arrive in Nogaro, a village built along the length of the main road - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 7 – NOGARO - AIRE SUR L'ADOUR (28 km – 7.30 hour walk). You will walk through Nogaro village and visit the Sainte Austinde Church and the ruins of the cloister. You will cross Bas Armagnac, is one of the three plantation areas in the Armagnac area where grapes for the distillation of the Armagnac eau-de-vie can be cultivated. Trough this hilly countryside you will reach Arblade le Bas and descend into the lush valley of l'Adour, passing by Barcelonne du Gers. You will then arrive in Aire sur l'Adour. The lower city holds the Saint Jean Baptiste Cathedral, the ancient rectory (today the town-hall), and a beautiful octagonal grain market. You will walk up to the Sainte Quitterie Church to see its lovely Gothic portal and, in the crypt, the gorgeous 4th century Sainte Quitterie sarcophagus of white marble. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 8 - AIRE SUR L'ADOUR. End of tour after breakfast.

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?

- 7 nights' accommodation in 2 and 3-star hotels or charming guesthouses
- 7 breakfasts – 6 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- 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

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

Getting there and away

By car: Go to Agen on A62 motorway (Bordeaux – Toulouse) and continue to Lectoure along N21 road.

Shared taxis from Aire sur l'Adour to Lectoure for return trip (contact us for reservation)

Where to park: free unattended car park in Lectoure.

By train: To reach Lectoure, you have to go to Agen by train and take a bus to Lectoure (several daily links). On return, scheduled bus between Aire sur l' Adour and Mont de Marsan railway station

