

# Walking holidays in Europe



## Walking holiday in the Picos de Europa



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7 NIGHTS / 8 DAYS

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Five self-guided walking itineraries
- Fuente De cablecar
- Under the Peaks trail
- Puertos de Aliva trail
- Horcados Rojos trail
- Cares Trail



*Picos de Europa scenery*

This seven-night, self-guided walking holiday invites hikers to explore a little-known region of northern Spain, the Picos de Europa. This mountain range is part of the Cantabrian mountains of northern Spain, straddling the regions of Asturias, Cantabria and Castile and Leon. There are three massifs with the highest summit of Macizo Central reaching 2648m. Encompassing all three massifs is the National Park of the Picos de Europa. This is a landscape of dramatic limestone mountains, beautiful alpine meadows and charming rural villages of terracotta-roofed houses, arcaded and adorned with heavy timbered balconies. There are mountain lakes, sheer rock faces and river gorges. Explore the very heart of the Picos de Europa National Park using your hire car and the Fuente De cable car. This summertime walking holiday for individuals includes itineraries which discover the region via a variety of well-marked trails. Return to the Parador de Fuente De each evening for a hearty meal of regional specialities in the Parador's restaurant.

### HOTEL INCLUDED

**Parador de Fuente De, Picos de Europa** 3 star

### PRICES

**From £1,285 per person including air and car-hire**

Sample prices are per person based on two people sharing a double or twin room for 7 nights.

### WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Accommodation in a standard double or twin room at the Parador de Fuente De on half board
- Scheduled flights with British Airways London to Bilbao, economy
- Hire of a Group B car for the duration of your stay
- Route notes for self-guided walking itineraries in the Picos de Europa
- Concierge service and Expressions Holidays regional helpful hints

### THE JOURNEY AND HOW YOU GET THERE

There are flights with British Airways from London Gatwick to Bilbao twice a day. Collect a hire car at Bilbao airport and drive from here to your hotel, which is a drive of about 230km / 2 hours 45 minutes. It is possible to undertake this holiday as a self-drive from the UK, using the overnight Brittany Ferries service to Santander or Bilbao.

### DATES

Although this holiday can be arranged throughout the year, we recommend travelling between June and early October for the best trekking conditions.

### HOLIDAY CODE

FHSN04

## DAY ONE Arrive in Fuente De

Start your holiday by flying with British Airways from London Gatwick to Bilbao airport in northern Spain. We recommend taking a morning flight which lands in Bilbao around lunchtime. Pick up your hire car from the airport and take the scenic drive eastwards to the Picos de Europa national park. The road from Bilbao follows the northern coast, with sparkling sea to the north and gentle hills rising to the south. This area of Spain is lush and green with fertile meadow, dense forest and charming towns. You may like to take a slight detour to stop off and look around the UNESCO protected town of Santillana del Mar, renowned for its medieval town centre. You leave the main road at Unquera and weave your way down the border between Asturias and Cantabria, heading up into the mountains. Take another turn at the village of Potes and follow this road eventually rounding a final corner to see Fuente De in a wide green bowl with the incredible backdrop of the Picos de Europa massif soaring above. Check into the Parador de Fuente De and enjoy a tasty dinner at the hotel's restaurant before settling down for the evening.

## DAY TWO Bajo los Picos trail

We recommend starting your trip with an easy hike to stretch out your legs and dip your toe into the delights of the Picos de Europa. The "Bajo los Picos" trail translates as Under the Peaks and gives you an introduction to the region and scenery over a 5-mile loop. The walk starts in the small village of Mogroviejo, located about 20 minutes' away by car from the Parador de Fuente De. Mogroviejo is recognised as one of Spain's most beautiful villages and is a registered Site of Cultural Interest and is worth looking around before starting the walk. The route is circular and can be travelled in either direction although we recommend taking the loop anti-clockwise for the best views. The walk takes you along a quiet road to nearby Redo and then through the woods to the village of Tanarrio. There is then a sharp ascent which is rewarded with fantastic views of the Picos de Europa massif. The route flattens out from here and takes you through beautiful pastures, forests of Pyrenean oak and beech and charming villages to arrive back to Mogroviejo.

## DAY THREE Puertos de Aliva trail

Today's route takes you up and into the mountains, using the cable-car which is located right next to the hotel. These glass-sided cabins whisk you up and away out of the village, with jaw-dropping vistas all around. The journey takes a little under 4 minutes to climb 2,500ft to the upper station where you



*Picos de Europa scenery*

will find a restaurant, shop, viewing platform and information display about the construction of the cable-car. Spend some time exploring here and taking in the incredible views before following signs along the Puertos de Aliva trail which guides you back down the mountainside. The total route is about 8.7 miles and is mostly downhill although there is about 300m of ascent to begin with. The trail takes you through a mountain pass below the stunning Peña Olvidada (Forgotten Peak) and then down through the green Aliva valley. You pass a royal hunting hut and can stop at the Hotel Refugio de Aliva for a drink and a snack. The route descends through alpine meadows and shady woodland to arrive back in Fuente De.

## DAY FOUR At leisure

We include two rest days within this walking holiday, although of course you can choose to swap the days around as you please. We recommend using your hire car to explore more of the local area, learning about the culture and history of the people who live here. You might like to use today to visit the nearby town of Potes which you passed through on the way here from Bilbao. This is an attractive small town of golden stone with a beautiful medieval centre made up of twisting narrow alleys. Visitors to the town can pay a small entrance fee to go up the 13th century Torre del Infantado which gives beautiful views. The Liebana Valley in which the town lies produces grapes, cherries and walnuts as well as Orujo – a local spirit. Visit on Mondays to try this and other local products at the weekly market. Stop in at the tourist information office

in Potes for recommendations on local cheese makers who offer tours and tastings as well as opportunities to buy produce. About 6km south of Potes you will find the Romanesque church of Santa Maria de Levena.

## DAY FIVE Walk from Fuente De to the Collado de Horcados Rojos

The third walk of your trip is shorter than the previous one but takes you further into the high mountain environment above Fuente De. Start by taking the cable car from Fuente De and follow the trail to the red-tinged massif of Horcados Rojos. This route takes you through a lunar landscape of glacial lakes, towering peaks and interesting limestone formations. Vegetation is sparse along most of this route with the toughest of plants adapting to this challenging environment. Hikers are likely to see a variety of fauna including alpine birds hovering overhead and cheeky mountain goats – quite at home amongst the trekkers and liable to try and pinch a sandwich when you're not looking. Along the way you will see the peaks of Peña Olvidada (Forgotten Peak) and Peña Vieja (Old Peak) as well as the limestone tower known as Aguja Bustamente. The trail brings you to a mountain refuge and mountain pass which gives incredible view of the Horcados Rojos Peak and Naranjo de Bulnes. This is a perfect place to stop for lunch before retracing your steps to the cable-car station and heading back into the valley.

## DAY SIX At leisure in Fuente De

We recommend spending your sixth day at leisure to relax and build up energy for the last walk of the trip. Today you might like to use

your hire car to drive south into the province of León and visit the town of Riaño, about 90 minutes' drive away. Set above a sparkling blue reservoir, the town was moved and rebuilt after the original setting was flooded to make way for a hydroelectric reservoir and dam. Despite the sad history, this is an incredibly beautiful setting with many of the original buildings having been moved brick by brick. One such building is the 16th century church of Santa Águeda which was originally located in the flooded town of Pedrosa del Rey. The main square has two recently built 'hórreos', traditional granaries built on stilts, as examples of those found in the region. Have lunch in the town and then stretch your legs with a short walk by the reservoir where you can usually see lots of wildlife as well as local flora. The setting is stunning with the sparkling blue water reflecting the limestone mountains behind but do take time to think about the drowned villages beneath the surface.

**DAY SEVEN Cares Trail or Pembroes to Peña Oviedo circular walk**

We provide two options for your last walking day in the Picos de Europa. For those with energy for a full day out, the iconic Cares Trail is an absolute must. This is one of Spain's most popular hikes and takes walkers on an amazing route through the heart of the Cares Gorge, also known as Diving Gorge, along narrow paths hewn into the cliffs, through caves and over bridges. The route is 12km each way and you return via the same path, making a 24km round trip which should take 6-8 hours. Add this to the 90-minute drive to the start point and this is a long, but incredibly worthwhile day out. The route starts in the village of Poncebos and follows a path built in the 1940s to maintain the canal. The trail takes you past abandoned buildings and red-roofed shepherd huts to enter the gorge. The path weaves its way along the rockface, sometimes only a metre across, with steep drops plummeting to the sparkling river below. The vistas are incredible and plenty of wildlife can be seen here including mountain goats, dippers and griffon cultures, however it is not a walk for those with a fear of heights. The gorge narrows dramatically before emerging into the village of Cain where you can stop for a drink and lunch before returning the same way. For those who do not want such a long day, we offer a second option based from the village of Pembroes – near Fuente De. Our suggested 8.4-mile loop takes you from Pembroes to the nearby village of Llaves and then up the mountainside to reach the summit of Peña Oviedo. There are wonderful views from here across the vast grasslands of grazing cattle and the eastern massif of



*Picos de Europa scenery*

the Picos de Europa. On a clear day you can see the Liébana valleys, Peña Sara, Peña Prieta and the peak of El Coriscou in the background. The route then continues across the hilltop to then wind back down the hillside between tall oaks and beech trees, eventually arriving back at Pembroes church where you left your car. Head back to the hotel and enjoy a final regional dinner before turning in for the night.

**DAY EIGHT Travel back to the UK**

Enjoy your last breakfast at the hotel before retracing your steps back to Bilbao airport for your flight home. If you have a flight in the late afternoon or evening, you may have time to visit the iconic Guggenheim Museum before departing. Designed by Canadian architect Frank Gehry, the Guggenheim is perhaps known more for its incredible building than the modern artwork housed inside. A couple of hours is enough to give you an overview of the best parts before returning your hire car to the airport and flying home.

## HOTELS

In this walking holiday we include a seven night stay in Fuente De. Other options nearby may be available on request, and additional nights can be added here or in other destinations.

*Expressions*

### PARADOR DE FUENTE DE

#### 3 star

Amid the scenic alpine landscapes of the Liébana Valley in Cantabria, Parador de Fuente Dé occupies a contemporary mountain lodge dwarfed by the oversized scenery. A comfortable three star hotel in a dramatic setting, it promises to immerse guests in the impressive natural environment of the Picos de Europa National Park and facilitate an array of active and adventure pursuits. The famed cableway to the Aliva viewpoint departs from the surrounding lawns, giving you direct access to stunning panoramas nearby. An angular arrangement in the foothills, the hotel's contemporary - though not modern - architecture is at odds with the natural setting. Meanwhile, interiors offer all the warmth of an alpine lodge, so that guests can feel totally at home, while broad windows allow picturesque views to remain within sight. There is ample room for relaxation at the end of a demanding day's wanderings, with fireside warmth supplied to lounges complete with deep armchairs. In the warmer months, you can take a snack or beverage on an external terrace overlooking the lawns. A children's playground is available here for the younger members of the family to play. Guestrooms continue the contemporary alpine lodge theme, with wooden floorboards underfoot and dramatic views from your own personal balcony. Upon an evening, hearty meals are served up at Restaurant Alfonso XIII, where you can sample Cantabrian favourites that exploit mountain ingredients in home cooked dishes. Meanwhile, the bar service is the perfect antidote to the end-of-the-day fatigue, allowing you to warm your bones.



Parador de Fuente De

#### Facts in brief

##### Official star rating 3

**Location** The hotel is located in the foothills of the Picos de Europa National Park

**Annual opening** All year except from 23 to 31 December

**Closest airport** Bilbao

**Distance from airport** About 3 hours' drive

#### Hotel facilities and services

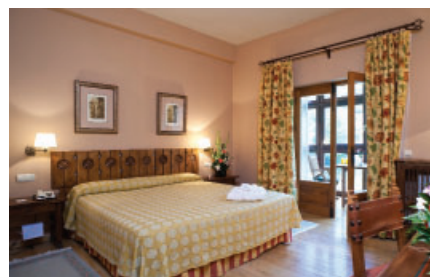
Restaurant, Bar, Lounge, Children's Playground, Games Room, Free WiFi, Gift Shop, Luggage Room, Lift, Parking.



Parador de Fuente De



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## OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, transport fares and hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

## BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

## FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



Expressions Holidays  
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## HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

**01392 441250**

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process. A deposit is required to confirm the arrangements and this can be paid by debit or credit card over the phone. The level of the deposit will be confirmed at the point of booking.