



## Hiking the Picos de Europa

September 19 -27, 2020 (9 days)

Northern Spain's stunning Picos de Europa, a rugged mountain massif forming part of the Cantabrian Mountains just 20 miles from the Atlantic coast, provides an incredible hiking experience you'll never forget. With trip leader Cathy Ann Taylor, you'll discover amazing landscapes—valleys surrounded by craggy limestone towers that attract climbers from all over the world, old shepherds' settlements, tiny mountain villages—all the while gaining insights and appreciation into a land filled with history and legends, not to mention wonderful culinary treats like *sidra*, the local fermented apple cider, and the very blue and powerful Cabrales cheese. Most of our hikes start right from our hotel, allowing you to make the most of your time in this incredible place, and bring you across the central heart of the Picos along ancient Roman paths that connect you with the history of a land involved with the birth of Spain as a nation (this is where the Moors were turned back in the early 700s). Join us for this exciting hiking adventure!

## TRIP DETAILS

Moderate to strenuous ▶ 7 days hiking; 8 nights hotels and inns

## ITINERARY

(You will need to leave the U.S. on September 18 in order to arrive in Bilbao on September 19.)

### Day 1, Sept. 19 ▶ Arrive in Bilbao

Meet the group and the trip leaders in the arrivals area of the Bilbao airport at 2:00 pm. Transfer 2.5 hours by minibus to the town of Camaleño, set in the foothills of the eastern massif of the Picos. Our nine-room hotel is cozy and offers great views of the Picos. After a chance to settle in, we'll meet with the guides for a trip orientation and welcome dinner.

D...Hotel El Jisu



Note—we strongly recommend spending a night or two in Bilbao either before or after the trip. With just under a million inhabitants, Bilbao is one of the most important cities in northern Spain and the largest in the Basque Country, yet it has preserved a small-town charm and accessibility. Back in the 1980s, Bilbao was a worn-out industrial place, but today it's a city born anew. It all began in 1997 with the opening of the spectacular Guggenheim Museum designed by architect Frank O. Gehry. The museum put Bilbao on the world map of art and architecture, and the city has since undergone a quick and fantastic transformation into a trendy and style-conscious city with some of the finest examples of modern architecture.

Aside from visiting the exhibits of the Guggenheim Museum, make sure you take a walk along the Nevrón River to enjoy the glittering building from all angles before heading over to the old town that has everything from shops to Basque tapas bars. A taxi to/from the center of Bilbao to the airport costs around €30.

### Day 2, Sept. 20 ▶ Camaleño – Camara Pass – Aliva

Walking right from the hotel (1,379'), we first head up a local road to access an old trail that follows the Peñas Negras river valley, set below the huge walls of El Jisu. Passing through forest and then over tree line, we reach Camara Pass (5,676'). The views are stunning—some of the highest peaks of the Picos face us, including Peña Vieja. At its base is the isolated Hotel Aliva (4,921'), set on an old glacier moraine, and we reach it by crossing the valley of Campo Mayor. Total ascent: 4,154', total descent 797'; 4.7 miles.

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B,L,D...Hotel Aliva

**Day 3, Sept. 21 ▶ Aliva – Las Nieves Pass – Aliva**

Once again walking right from the hotel, we head up an old miners' trail to reach the Las Nieves Pass (6,775') and the eagle's nest of Collado Jermoso hut, considered one of the most beautiful spots of the Picos, with Peña Santa's south wall looming across the Cares Gorge. After enjoying lunch provided by the hut staff, we return to Aliva by a different route, following two easy passes and reveling in the beautiful solitude of the Picos. Total ascent and descent: 3,609'; 13 miles.



**Day 4, Sept. 22 ▶ Aliva – Urriellu – Sotres**

The great central massif faces us as we cross Canalona Pass (8,018') and the incredible Santa Ana Pass with some of the best views of the Picos. From here we descend to the incredible geological karstic depressions of Jou de Los Boches and Jou sin Tierra, a moon-like landscape, and we follow a fairly level path to La Vega de Urriellu and the Urriellu hut. Here we will stop to rest and have a coffee or tea

while we spot climbers from all over the world ascending the west face of Urriellu (8,264'), one of the iconic rock walls of the world (also known as Naranjo de Bulnes). Afterwards, we leave the alpine rocky terrain and descend to the valley, arriving at the meadows and trees of the area around Pandebano (there are some prehistoric remains here). Our destination is Sotres, located just across the depression of the Duje Valley. Total ascent: 2,953', total descent 4,921'; 12 miles. Overnight at Hotel Peña Castil, a small rustic hotel on the town square in Sotres offering great views of the mountains.

B,L,D... Hotel Peña Castil

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**Day 5, Sept. 23 ▶ Sotres – La Caballar – Arenas de Cabrales**

A short gentle uphill trail brings us into La Caballar, and we enjoy the awesome views over the high towers we crossed yesterday. We then descend, passing old shepherds' settlements that were once connected by an ancient Roman road. This medieval path will take us on a long descent to Arenas de Cabrales, the capital of Cabrales county. Our hotel is set in the center of town, close to the Cares River, and like our other accommodations, is a great base for exploring the Picos. After checking into our hotel, we can enjoy some of the local specialties like *sidra* (fermented apple cider) and the world-famous Cabrales cheese (very blue and stronger than Stilton or Roquefort). Total ascent 1,578', total descent 4,573'; 10.2 miles.



**Day 6, Sept. 24 ▶ Arenas de Cabrales – Cain – Cordiñanes**

From the nearby town of Poncebos (919'), we begin our hike on one of the most popular trails in Spain—the Cares Gorge, which cuts between the two massifs of the Picos de Europa. The Cares Gorge hike is a favorite around here, and with good reason—with an immense crevice more than 3,300 feet deep and over seven miles long, a perched trail cuts through a slab of cliff rock. We'll explore this fascinating terrain on a gentle well-marked trail that was originally drilled by hand and dynamite. After three hours, the rock walls open as we reach the village of Cain (1,575'), set on the only flat area of the valley. After an early lunch we keep following the Cares valley up to Cordiñanes (2,671'). Our hotel is simple but clean and comfortable and serves great food. Total ascent: 2,297', total descent 492'; 11 miles.  
B.L.D...Hotel El Tombo

**Day 7, Sept. 25 ▶ Cordiñanes – El Frade – Vegabaño – Soto de Sajambre – Ribadesella**

After breakfast, we head south to the oak and beech forests of Valdeón, then ascend to the meadows of Vega de Llos to the high pass of El Frade (5,840'), descending again into the forest. Traveling through the Vegabaño shepherds' area and Soto de Sajambre (3,035') will complete our hiking journey across the Picos de Europa. From here we transfer about 1.5 hours to Ribadesella, set on the Bay of Biscay and one of the most beautiful seaside villages of this region. Set on the seafront, our hotel offers a swimming pool, hot tub, and spa with sauna—an ideal spot to relax after our exhilarating hiking days. Total ascent: 3,281', total descent 2,625'; 10.5 miles.  
B,L,D...Gran Hotel del Sella

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**Day 8, Sept. 26 ▶ Ribadesella – Tito Bustillo Caves – Santillana del Mar**

Besides a beautiful beach resort village in the foothills of the Picos, Ribadesella is world famous for its World Heritage-listed prehistoric caves of Tito Bustillo, one of the very best examples of European Paleolithic art, discovered in the 1960s. The cave art depicts representations of animals, including paintings of horses thought to be done between 15,000-10,000 BC. After our morning visit, we transfer along the coast to Andrin, where we'll hike a coastal path featuring limestone outcroppings, cliffs, beaches, old Roman mills, and stone bridges that ends in Santiuste—a great easy walk to end our trip by the ocean. A short transfer brings us to Santillana del Mar, a medieval jewel of a town with cobbled streets and pedestrian-only walkways. Our hotel, a charming parador featuring traditional local architecture, is set in the very center of town, allowing us to easily explore this very special place. In the evening, we gather for a festive Farewell Dinner. 9 miles. B,L,D...Parador Santillana del Mar

**Day 9, Sept. 27 ▶ Santillana del Mar – Bilbao**

After an early breakfast, transfer about 1.5 hours to the Bilbao airport. Please don't schedule your homeward-bound flight earlier than 1:00 pm.

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## LAND COST

\$5895 per person (7-9 members)

\$5595 per person (10-12 members)

\$5295 per person (13-14 members)

\$850 single supplement (4 maximum)

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

\*Should you choose to pay with credit card there will be a service charge of 3%, the fee we incur from the bank.

Note—Prices listed are subject to change. We are occasionally faced with unavoidable cost increases due to fuel increases, costs of services or currency fluctuations that we cannot absorb. We will, however, do everything we can to keep prices the same as published.

## LAND COST INCLUDES...

- o Expert leadership
- o Accommodations in hotels and inns (based on double occupancy)
- o Meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- o Wine at dinner
- o Airport transfers
- o Ground transportation and local group transfers by minibus
- o Sightseeing as noted in the itinerary
- o Entrance fees and permits

## LAND COST DOES NOT INCLUDE...

International airfare; meals not noted in itinerary; individual transfers for early arrivals or late departures; trip insurance (we urge you purchase the optional trip insurance offered by Cattara, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to leader, guides and local staff; excess baggage charges; airport taxes (if any); cost of medical immunizations; and items of a personal nature (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

## TRIP PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation .....25% of land cost  
120 days prior to departure .....25% of land cost  
90 days prior to departure.....Balance

## CANCELLATION FEE SCHEDULE

From time of reservation  
until 90 days prior to departure .....25% of land cost  
89-60 days prior to departure.....50% of land cost  
59 days or fewer prior to departure.....100% of land cost

## EXPERT LEADERSHIP

Expert leadership is the key to every successful trip. Cattara attracts knowledgeable and gifted leaders who are passionate about guiding trips and truly enjoy sharing the experience with others. They understand the cultures and traditions they work in and are a fountain of information. In addition to making sure everything runs smoothly and safely, Cattara guides enhance your experience by being educators, companions, and the best of friends.

## TRIP LEADERS



**Cathy Ann Taylor**, a high altitude trekking & cultural guide for the last 30 years will be leading his trip. Cathy Ann has trekked all over Nepal, Tibet, India and Bhutan, with well over 200 trips in the Himalayas (she still considers the Himalayas her “second home”)! She has also hiked extensively in the European Alps (Tour du Mont Blanc—five times, The Haute Route, Gran Paradiso, and the Dolomites—two times), the Georgian Caucasus—four times, South America (15 trips in Peru, 1 in Patagonia), and Uganda & Rwanda—three times. A devout hiker and mountain biker, she leaves no trail undiscovered, and her passion for the mountains, caring nature, and boundless energy are renowned. Her experience, knowledge, positive attitude (she can find the good in anything!), and her wonderful rapport with the local staff will enhance your experience. With the help of caring and like-minded individuals she has been able to manage the sponsorship of nineteen remote village children, all of whom are in boarding school in Nepal or in universities in India, Nepal, and the United States. She consistently gets rave reviews from members of her groups and has quite a following. Cathy Ann is active in the Breast Cancer Prevention Partners and has participated in sixteen expeditions, including Mount McKinley, Mount Cho Oyu, Mount Fuji, Mount Shasta, and Mount Rainier, which helped increase awareness of breast cancer (she alone has raised over \$775,000 for the cause!). Cat’s special trekking program, Sacred Treks, benefits Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (formerly the Breast Cancer Fund). Past trips include Bhutan, Mont Blanc, Peru, Everest, Ladakh, Mustang, Georgian Caucasus, Sikkim, Dolomites, Cordillera Blanca, and Annapurna Sanctuary treks, and the program has raised over \$775,000. Cathy Ann has also been active in the American Himalayan Foundation and has helped raised \$20,000 for their STOP Girl Trafficking project. She has also reached the summit of Ama Dablam (22,500’) in Nepal and Argentina’s Aconcagua (22,834’), the highest peak in South America. Cathy Ann received an honorable mention in *Hooked on the Outdoors* magazine’s Outdoor Person of the Year Awards, and also received a letter of recognition for her fundraising and environmental work from Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi.



### **Fernando Calvo**

Being a mountain guide in the Picos de Europa has been a passion for Fernando Calvo since he discovered these mountains at the age of 14. Along the way he received a nursing degree, and for the last 22 years, he has guided not only in the beautiful realm of the Picos, but also in Patagonia, Turkey, New Zealand, and the European Alps. But the Picos are his “home” mountains, where he climbs, skis, and enjoys rock climbing the yearlong; snow and avalanche forecasting fills his winter days. He lives at the base of the Picos by the coast with his wife and son.

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## PHYSICAL EXPECTATIONS

You should be an experienced hiker in good physical condition. This trip is rated moderate to strenuous, as you will be hiking five to eight hours a day on trails with steep ascents and descents. For physical preparation, we recommend regular cardiovascular exercise for one hour at least 4-5 times a week. We suggest stair climbing, running, and mountain biking on hills, squats, and lunges or elliptical or treadmill training in the gym. And, of course, the best way to train for a trek is to go hiking! We recommend you get out on the trails at least once a week. Wear your boots and daypack and pick some trails with hills so you so you can strengthen your leg muscles and build up your stamina, as well as trails with uneven terrain to train your balance. We believe other important prerequisites are a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude.

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

You will need a passport, valid for at least six months beyond the date of completion of the trip. No visas are required for this trip. Note—it's a good idea to make a photocopy of the photo page of your passport and carry it separately from your passport. If your passport is lost or stolen, a photocopy will help the local consulate speed up authorization for replacement. Extra passport photos can also be helpful to have just in case.

## AIR TRAVEL

Airfare is not included in the land cost of the trip. For air reservations, please contact the airlines directly, either by phone or via the Internet. Plan your arrival in Bilbao (BIO) by 2:00 pm on Day 1. Many travelers elect to use their "frequent flyer" miles when traveling, but please check with us before purchasing or obtaining your tickets. We need to verify your arrival and departure schedule and ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip. Note—Names on air tickets and passports must match!

## MEDICAL MATTERS

Please advise us of any pre-existing medical conditions that may affect your health on the trek (recent injuries or surgeries, chronic illnesses, etc.). We recommend you bring your own personal first-aid kit, pain killers, and allergy medicines if you are prone to allergic reactions (especially epipens if you are allergic to bee stings). Moleskin or Second Skin for blisters is also recommended, as well as Band-Aids and antibiotic ointment. Consult your doctor about bringing other medications, such as antibiotics like Cipro. The trip leader will also carry a basic kit for emergencies, but will not have any prescription medications.

## MONEY MATTERS

You should bring enough money for any souvenirs you may buy, plus a few items like aperitifs, extra beverages, and the like (most of your meals are included in the cost of the trip). Depending on how much of a shopper you are, \$200-\$300 should be plenty for incidentals and souvenirs. You should bring an additional amount for gratuities to the leaders, and driver. At least US \$350 per guest is recommended for you trip leader, at least \$115 - \$140 per guest for your local leader and at least \$75

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- \$85 per guest for the assistant guides. You can present your gratuities to your leaders and assistant guides individually.

The currency of Spain is the Euro. We suggest you withdraw money from an ATM in Bilbao before the trek begins, as there are no ATMs along the way while trekking until we reach Ribadesella. Credit cards, traveler's checks, and US dollars are not generally accepted at the inns while in the mountains of the Picos de Europa.

## WEATHER & CLIMATE

The climate in Asturias is quite nice for hiking, especially in the autumn. But as in most mountain environments, the weather in the Picos de Europa can be unpredictable, so each day on the trail you need to be prepared for a variety of weather conditions: hot sun, windy rainstorms—even the possibility of light snow. Temperatures will range typically from 59 – 72 degrees F. For that reason, you will carry your raingear and jacket in your daypack every day, even if the morning starts out bright and hot. Dressing in layers that can be adjusted to suit the prevailing conditions is highly recommended.

## WHILE ON THE TRIP

Our accommodations are the best available nearest to the trails we take each day. Located in mountain or valley villages, they are generally small simple inns that accommodate hikers in the summer months and are closed during the winter. They have a homey atmosphere and serve great food that is reflective of the particular region. While comfortable, most of them do not sport all the amenities, such as hair dryers, internet access, and the like. We are confident, however, that you will enjoy the experience.

## INCIDENTALS

**Laundry:** You will not really have time to have your laundry done during the hike. You can hand wash a few items and hang them to dry in your room. Wool or synthetic, quick drying fabrics are best (see the equipment list).

**Electricity:** Spain is on the 220V system. Sockets are usually the round two-pin variety, but they vary. If you are planning to use something like a hairdryer, electric shaver, camera battery, or phone charger, bring a converter and a selection of plug adapters (you can buy these in drugstores or travel specialty stores in the U.S.).

**Time Zones:** Spain is Greenwich Mean Time plus one hour. That means that Spain is six hours ahead of New York and nine hours ahead of California.

**Communications:** While we discourage the use of cell phones on our trip, we can't deny the fact that you may want to be in touch with your friends or family. Please be sensitive to the needs of others and use them in the privacy of your room. Contact your cell phone service about international coverage.

## MEALS

Spanish meal times are a bit different from those of North America. Breakfast is usually served at about 8:00 or 9:00 a.m., and it consists of coffee, tea, juice, cereal, yogurt, fruit, and bread or toast. Then there is a mid-morning snack like cheese or ham. The main meal is usually a larger lunch around 2:00 p.m. Generally this consists of soup, salad, a variety of meat platters, fried potatoes, and dessert. We will usually be in mountain Refugio's or villages for this meal. On the few times when that is not possible, we will arrange for a picnic on the trail. Sometimes we may have a light meal around 6:00 p.m. Small snacks (*tapas*) of fish, meat, cheese, or eggs are available with a drink or glass of wine. Finally, there is a late dinner around 8:00-9:00 p.m., which can be a hearty meal (you can choose to eat lighter). This meal schedule is a bit different from American eating patterns, but it's easy to get used to. Our schedule may vary a bit, especially when we're in the mountains. It is likely we will be the only ones dining as Spaniards typically begin their dinner as we are finishing ours!

Regional specialties include *fabada*, a hearty bean stew with bits of sausage (and sometimes with clams), the astoundingly strong Cabrales cheese (best when tempered with a hunk of fresh bread), outstanding fresh trout, a variety of freshly-caught seafood, and other Spanish delicacies like chorizo, Manchego cheese, flan, paella, and gazpacho.

## WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT LIST

### Packing Notes

It's best to go as light as possible and take only the essentials. Excess baggage can be a burden, not only to you but to support personnel.

Always bring all irreplaceable items, such as camera, medications, important documentation, and trekking boots in your carryon luggage.

### Luggage

- Duffel bag or wheeled duffel, large enough to hold your trekking clothes and gear. It should have a full-length zipper (for easy access), and be sturdy. Hard-shelled suitcases are not advisable (they are difficult to load compactly in the vans). Your baggage will be delivered to the hotels by vehicle. (Baggage should be confined to one medium-sized duffel bag per person. We can make arrangements to store your other baggage.)
- Daypack with a capacity of about 2,800-3,200 cubic inches, with a good padded waist belt. It can double as your carryon bag. Remember, you must carry your fleece jacket and rain gear with you every day on the trail, as well as your picnic lunch, 2 liters of water, sunscreen, warm hat, gloves, camera, and cover for daypack in case of rain. Be sure your daypack is large enough!

- Spare roll-up duffel (optional). This is essential if you wish to bring home those great souvenirs! It should be lockable.

### *Clothing Notes*

You should be prepared for very unpredictable weather. Bring comfortable clothing that will protect you from cold and possibly wet weather. Synthetic fabrics (such as polypropylene, capilene, or wool) are the most effective barriers against the cold. They provide the best insulation, are light in weight, wick away perspiration, and dry quickly if wet. (Cotton garments are not good in cold or wet mountain conditions.)

When layering, your innermost layer should be a synthetic T-shirt or long underwear. The middle layer can be a synthetic turtleneck or wool shirt, and pants. The outermost layer should be a synthetic fleece jacket, and/or a good quality wind/rain parka and over-pants.

We haven't included quantities for each item listed. Use your own judgment, based on the expected weather conditions, your personal needs, and the overall weight restrictions for your luggage.

### *Underwear*

- Regular underwear. Synthetics are easier to wash and dry.
- Thermal underwear (lightweight), top and bottom.

### *Socks*

- Casual socks (synthetic for easy washing and drying) that are suitable for your walking (not hiking) shoes.
- Light to mid-weight hiking socks (synthetic or wool/synthetic).
- Synthetic or silk sock liners—optional. Some people wear sock liners to help prevent blisters, and some wear the same pair of hiking socks for three days in a row and achieve the same result.

### *Shirts*

- Long-sleeved, synthetic or wool shirt.
- Short-sleeved synthetic T-shirts.
- Shirts for non-hiking activities.

### *Pants*

- Full-length synthetic hiking pants or synthetic sweat pants.
- Hiking shorts, cotton or synthetic.
- Casual pants or skirts for non-hiking activities.

### *Outerwear*

- Medium-weight jacket of synthetic fabric, such as fleece or down.
- Rain/wind parka (must fit over bulky clothing).
- Rain/wind pants, preferably with full-length side zipper (must fit over your other pants).



- Gloves or mittens (wool, fleece, or synthetic).
- Waterproof daypack cover.

### Head Gear

- Sun hat with wide brim, preferably with a chin strap to keep it from blowing off, or baseball cap.
- Fleece or wool hat
- Bandana or buff. A generally useful item—it will keep your neck from getting sunburned and can double as a hand towel in the field.

### Footwear

Please break new boots in well before the trip.

- Medium-weight hiking boots with padded ankle, good arch support, and lug sole for traction. Your hiking boots must be waterproofed, well broken in, and suitable for prolonged walking on rocks.
- Comfortable walking shoes to wear while in towns.

### Other Items

- Water bottles, 1 or 1.5 quart capacity. Make sure they are leak-proof. Bring 2 and mark them with your name or initials as several people may have the same bottle.
- Hiking poles—highly recommended. These are essential to relieve the impact on your knees during long downhills; they are also useful on uphill. Practice with them before the trip.
- Toiletry kit—toothbrush, etc.
- Purell hand sanitizer for quick hand washing and hygiene (a must!).
- Toilet paper and a Ziploc bag (for stops along the trail).
- Personal medical kit, including blister protection.
- Ace bandage or brace if you're prone to sore knees or ankles.
- Sunglasses (100% UVA/UVB protected).
- Spare pair of prescription glasses, prescription sunglasses, or contact lenses.
- Sunscreen lotion and lipstick of SPF 25 or higher.
- Small padlocks or combination locks for your duffels.
- Heavyweight plastic garbage bag to help keep the contents of your daypack dry during hikes.
- Backpack cover in case of rain.
- Small flashlight for the mountain hut in Aliva (there is no electricity from 11:00 pm to 7:00 am).

### Optional Travel Accessories

- Camera and plenty of memory cards, and extra batteries.
- Repair kit with needle, thread, and safety pins.
- Pair of compact binoculars.
- Swiss Army-type pocket knife.
- Powdered electrolyte mixes for your water.
- Your favorite trail snacks or supplements, especially if you have dietary restrictions.

- Reading and writing material.
- Swimsuit and towel (in case you feel like taking a dip in the Atlantic Ocean in Ribadesella!).
- Sit upon pad for the trail.
- Sun gloves.

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