

Carcassonne, Cathar Country & Catalonia

8 days from £729 April, June, September & October



The ramparts of Carcassonne, the mystery of Rennes-le-Château, the surrealism of Dali's Theatre Museum, combined with a visit to modernist Barcelona, and stays in unspoilt locations on the Catalan coast and in a pleasant spa town in the hills of Roussillon - this is a holiday to one of the most scenic parts of the Mediterranean. The area is also fabulously rich in history, legend and stunning castles. Discover the land of the heretical Cathars and solve the mystery of Rennes le Chateau – inspiration for Dan Brown's da Vinci Code.

• 3 nights hb in Spanish Catalonia, 4 nights hb in the Roussillon area of France • Visits to Rennes-le-Château, Carcassonne, The Dali Museum in Figueres, and Barcelona

PROGRAMME

DAY ONE: Flight to Catalonia. On arrival, transfer to your hotel on the Catalan coast for two nights half board accommodation. Transfer time 50 minutes.

DAY TWO: Optional half day excursion to the Roman city of Tarragona where you can see the amphitheatre, port and beach and stroll through the medieval centre. Under the Romans, Tarragona was the capital of the Province of Northern Spain and home to the Emperor Augustus – a Temple in his honour stood on the site of the current Cathedral. Your excursion includes a walk with expert guide.

DAY THREE: Today you depart for France. En route you will stop in Dali's home town of Figueras with its surreal (in the truest sense!) theatre-museum (entrance included). The Dali Museum, with its luminous-egg façade, seems to want to stretch your mind even before you enter! From there you proceed to your hotel in Amelie-les-Bains, for four nights half board accommodation. Distance today is 156 miles, mainly motorway.

DAY FOUR: Full-day included excursion to Carcassonne and Rennes-le-Château.

Although a longish day, it is packed with interest. You start with a scenic drive past two spectacular Cathar castles – Puilaurens, perched high above the valley, and Quéribus, whose rocky spur saw the last stand of the Cathars in 1255. In Rennes-le-Château you will see the church, presbytery, villa, tower and grounds built by the priest, Abbé Sauniere, at the end of the 19th century. You will discover the true extent of the mystery that has spawned so many books and several tv programmes. You will not be the first to try and solve the mystery – a bye-law had to be passed to stop unauthorised digging in the village by treasure-hunters!

You continue to Carcassonne for lunch (not included), and a free afternoon in the most spectacular walled city on earth. A UNESCO Heritage site, the cité is a remarkable defensive structure with barbican, dry moat, outer and inner walls, inaccessible watch-towers, posterns, loopholes and arrow slits. The last part of your circular route is motorway, and you arrive back at the hotel at approx 1830. Total today is just under 200 miles.

DAYS FIVE AND SIX: There is an optional

half day excursion to the walled village of Prats de Mollo, just 12 miles up the Vallespir valley, on the side of Mount Canigou. There is also an optional excursion to nearby Perpignan, the capital of the Roussillon, and to the artists' resort of Collioure. A port since Roman times, many crusades to the Holy Land set off from here, and reproductions of works by artists who painted in Collioure (Matisse and Dérain in particular) will be found on the quaysides.

DAY SEVEN: Today you return to the Costa Dorada for your last night, again on a half board basis. En route there is a short tour of, and free time to explore, the exciting city of Barcelona, capital of Catalonia. Distance today is similar to Day Three, approx 160 miles.

DAY EIGHT: Free time until your transfer to the airport for your return flight.

YOUR HOTELS

NUBAHOTEL ★★★★★

Coma-Ruga, (first two and last nights) The hotel stands close to the broad sandy beach. This unspoilt resort is quiet out of season, rather busier at weekends. A reasonable selection of shops, bars and restaurants is about 10 minutes' walk (700m) away, and the railway station with half-hourly departures to Barcelona is about 15 minutes' walk away. In Coma-Ruga itself is Pablo Casals' villa, now an interesting museum. The hotel has a spa centre (a reasonable extra charge applies), restaurant, bar, lounge, and outdoor pool. Rooms, which all have balcony, also have 2 queen size beds, bathroom with hairdryer, phone, air-conditioning/heating, satellite LCD tv, and safety deposit box (charge applies). Free wifi in public areas. (www.nubahotelcomarruga.com)

HOTEL DE LA REINE AMELIE ★★★

Amélie-les-Bains (four nights) Four nights are spent in the Hotel de la Reine Amélie in the Vallespir Valley. Situated close to the River Tech, Amélie is a spa town 19 miles from the coast and surrounded by pleasant mountain scenery. The hotel has a bar, lounge area, restaurant, free wifi, and comfortable bedrooms with private bath/shower, wc, tv and phone. Some have a balcony too. (www.reineamelie.com)

We have prepared some brief historical notes about Rennes-le-Chateau and Carcassonne. These are available online at www.preferredts.com/pdfs/camhist.pdf or on request.

A WALKING HOLIDAY is also available from this hotel. Please ask for a copy of our Walking Holidays brochure or visit preferredts.com.