

C253-ST Saint James way

Via Podiensis from Cahors to Lectoure



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.

You will leave Cahors and the Lot Valley across the White Perigord, a vast, undulating stretch of whitish landscape where sheep pastures alternate with rich valleys producing tobacco, fruits, wine and grains. The villages are perched on the tops of steeply sloped hills called Les Puech, and dominate the surrounding landscape. After passing through Moissac, well-known for its abbey and its production of sweet white grapes, you will cross the

Garonne River and enter into Gascogne. You will discover the rolling countryside of Lomagne, dotted with beautiful old pigeon-houses.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival at CAHORS. Wedged in a loop of the Lot River, and lying in the shadow of high rocky hills, is the old city of Cahors. Very prosperous during the Middle Ages, Cahors became the greatest banking center in the world during the 13th century. As you stroll the city you will find numerous vestiges of its glorious past : the famous Valentré Bridge, the Saint Etienne Cathedral, a cloister and the old neighboring quarters. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 2 - LABASTIDE MARNHAC – MONTCUQ (23 km – 6.00 hour walk). Transfer by taxi from Cahors to Labastide-Marnhac. To avoid the southern part of Cahors, a large industrial and commercial area, your taxi will pick you up more centrally, saving you several kilometres of this long walk. Labastide once housed a hospital, but today the only evidence of it is the little chapel of Saint Remy, just outside the village. You will walk to the Hospitalet and will reach the tiny village of Baffalie, at the bottom of a small valley, and continue on to the pleasant village of Lascabanes. You will next arrive in Montcuq, a medieval village perched on a rounded hillock and dominated by a square keep built during the 12th century. In this village, bloody battles took place as it changed hands numerous times during the fight against the Cathars and the 100 Years War. Nowadays, it provides a pleasant walk through inclined streets to the top of the keep, and inspiring panoramas - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 3 - MONTCUQ – DUFORT LACAPELETTE (25 km– 6.30 hour walk) - You will walk now in the White Quercy, named for the colour of its earth. The relief here is untroubled, with vast plateaus occasionally interrupted by valleys. On the hillsides grow vineyards, fruit and melon, whereas tobacco, corn and sunflower grow down in the valleys. The atmosphere of the Midi is already apparent in the land around you, in the houses of pink brick and cypress trees in the gardens. This phase is short, but will allow you time to enjoy a visit of Rouillac's Church. You will climb along the crests overlooking the valleys of the Targutie and Lendou rivers, and head to the village of Montlauzun, and then Lauzerte. Perched on its rocky spike, Lauzerte has served as a lookout, protecting the road between Cahors and Moissac for many centuries. The high city, built around Saint Barthelemy's Church and the Place des Carrières, still holds houses that were built during the 13th and 15th centuries. You will continue your way through vast orchards; you will discover in turn small chapels and gorgeous pigeon-houses. You will admire Saint Senin Chapel before reaching the hotel on heights before Dufort Lacapelette - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 4 –DUFORT – MOISSAC (16 km – 4 hour walk). From the hotel you walk down to the village of Durfort-Lacapelette, stretching out across a hillside and distinguishing itself by... the absolute lack of a church, very uncommon in a French village! Once passed Durfort, vineyards rise up everywhere. In this region grows the famous Golden Chasselas. Finally, you arrive at Moissac and the Tarn River. Moissac is an important stop on the pilgrimage route of Santiago de Compostela. Saint Pierre's Abbey in Moissac holds master-pieces of Roman art, such as the Tympanum, a 12th century representation of the Apocalypse, and the cloister, an image of lace carved out of stone. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 5 - MOISSAC – AUVILLAR (21 km – 5.30 hour walk). This stage is an exceedingly pleasant one, especially in summer's heat, as you will be walking in the shade along the water's edge! At Moissac, you will find the Garonne's side-canal and follow it for several kilometres. At the confluence of the Tarn and Garonne rivers, you will take to the banks of the Golfech River's canal, which runs parallel to the Garonne. Leaving the waters, you will begin walking straight south towards Espalais, where you will cross the Garonne by a hanging-bridge to reach Auvillar on the other bank. This little village is an ancient harbor, and Sainte Catherine's Chapel, on the riverside, reminds us of the port's activity and prosperity in the last centuries. Built on a promontory, Auvillar continues its story into present day, bringing with it such old structures as Saint Pierre's Church, the clock tower and the gorgeous Halle aux Grains (corn exchange). *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*



Day 6 - AUVILLAR – MIRADOUX (18 km – 4.30 hour walk). You will cross La Lomagne, an area of fertile hills and an important producer of garlic, to step into the region of Gers, whose name alone evokes images of country cooking and the art du bien vivre. Once outside of Auvillar, you will make your way to Bardigues, with its 13th century fortified castle. On your way to Arrats, you will pass through the lovely village of Saint Antoine. You will cross the old barrier-bridge to Arrats, and continue through Flamarens where, sitting high above the village, an old château undergoes restoration. You will arrive finally at Miradoux, a village with a beautiful church built on the ruins of an ancient château, and a gorgeous 16th century covered market. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a guesthouse.*

Day 7 - MIRADOUX – LECTOURE (16 km – 4.30 hour walk). You will pass quite close to the château of Gachepouy and will pass through the village of Castet-Arrouy, whose 16th century church was completely decorated at the end of the 19th century by a local painter. You will then make your way to the elevated village of Saint Avit-Frandat and pass close by the château of La Cassagne before reaching Lectoure, the principal town of La Lomagne, perched on a promontory above the valley of the Gers. The city has a very rich Roman past that you can discover at the Musée Gallo-Roman. The Saint Gervais Cathedral was built on a Roman Temple - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 8 - LECTOURE. Tour ends 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 handpicked 2 and 3-star hotels or charming guesthouses
- 7 breakfasts – 7 gourmet 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

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: Cahors is on A20 motorway. Shared taxis from Lectoure to Cahors (contact us for reservation)

Where to park: toll guarded car park in Cahors.

By train: Cahors is on the Paris-Toulouse train line. On return, several SNCF buses a day from Lectoure to Agen rail station where you catch direct trains to Paris or Toulouse.