

A Week in the Pyrénées-Orientales: Between Mediterranean and Mountains

Welcome to this detailed itinerary for exploring the exceptional diversity of the Pyrénées-Orientales department in southern France. This region offers a perfect blend of Mediterranean coastline and Pyrenean mountain landscapes, with a rich Catalan heritage that influences everything from architecture to cuisine. Over the next seven days, you'll discover historic cities, picturesque villages, stunning natural landscapes, and delicious local specialties. This guide will take you from the vibrant streets of Perpignan to the sacred Canigó mountain, from the crystal-clear waters of the Vermillion Coast to the high plateaus of Cerdagne and Capcir, ensuring you experience the very best this remarkable region has to offer.

E by Erasmus 3MS



Day 1: Perpignan, The Catalan Capital

Morning Explorations

- Stroll through the historic centre with its colourful façades and Catalan atmosphere
- Visit the Castillet, the emblematic monument of the city
- Enjoy a coffee or breakfast on a terrace at Place de la République

Afternoon Discoveries

- Tour the Palace of the Kings of Majorca with panoramic views of the Roussillon plain
- Explore the Saint-Jacques quarter, the historic heart of the gypsy community
- For art lovers, visit the Walter Benjamin Contemporary Art Centre

Evening Activities

- Dine at Canet Village or on the port of Canet-en-Roussillon by the sea
- Optional: attend a concert or show at the Archipel theatre



The Gothic façade of the Loge de Mer, former maritime commercial court, illuminated at night in Perpignan's historic quarter. This architectural gem exemplifies the Catalan Gothic style that characterises much of the city's historic centre. As you explore Perpignan, you'll discover a city that proudly displays its Catalan heritage through its architecture, cuisine, and vibrant street life.

Day 2: The Vermillion Coast - Coves and Artists' Villages

Morning in Collioure

Depart early for Collioure, the jewel of the Catalan coast. Visit the Royal Castle, stroll along the seafront, and discover the Church of Notre-Dame-des-Anges. Art enthusiasts can visit the Museum of Modern Art or follow the "in the footsteps of Matisse" trail, exploring the town that inspired the Fauvist movement.

Afternoon Activities

Swimming or snorkelling at Paulilles Cove (a former dynamite factory converted into a natural site). For hiking enthusiasts, take the coastal path between Port-Vendres and Banyuls to experience breathtaking views of the Mediterranean.

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Lunch by the Sea

Enjoy tapas or fresh fish on the port or at a wine merchant in Banyuls. The local cuisine combines Mediterranean flavours with Catalan traditions, offering a delightful culinary experience with views of the sparkling sea.

Evening by the Sea

Watch the sunset over the sea, dine on a terrace in Banyuls, and taste natural sweet wine, for example at La Cabane d'Arno. The evening light on the Vermillion Coast creates a magical atmosphere that has inspired artists for generations.



Collioure, voted one of France's favourite villages in 2024, is a picturesque coastal town where the Pyrenees meet the Mediterranean. Its distinctive bell tower, converted from a medieval lighthouse, has been immortalised in countless paintings by artists including Matisse and Derain. The vibrant colours of the buildings against the azure sea create a stunning palette that continues to attract artists and visitors alike.

Day 3: The Sacred Canigó Mountain

Morning Mountain Adventure

- Ascend towards the Canigó massif, the sacred mountain of the Catalans
- Visit the Abbey of Saint-Martin-du-Canigou perched in the rock (30-40 min walk)
- Alternative for motivated hikers: depart from Casteil towards the Mariailles refuge

Midday Break

- Picnic or rustic lunch in Casteil or Vernet-les-Bains

Afternoon Relaxation

- Relax at the hot baths of Saint-Thomas-les-Bains (outdoor jacuzzis with mountain views)
- Option for families: visit the Casteil animal park

Evening in the Mountains

- Dinner at a mountain inn, overnight in a gîte or in Vernet-les-Bains or at Casa ilicia in Eus



The Abbey of Saint-Martin-du-Canigou, perched dramatically on a rocky outcrop at an altitude of 1,055 metres, dates back to the early 11th century. This Benedictine monastery represents one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture in the region. The journey to reach it involves a scenic 30-40 minute walk through mountain terrain, but the effort is rewarded with both spiritual atmosphere and breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding Pyrenean landscape.

Day 4: Conflent and the Village of Eus



Morning in Villefranche-de-Conflent

Visit Villefranche-de-Conflent, a UNESCO-listed fortified city (ramparts, Grandes Canalettes caves). Then board the Yellow Train, the mythical tourist train heading towards Cerdagne. This bright yellow narrow-gauge railway, inaugurated in 1910, is an engineering marvel that climbs through spectacular mountain scenery.



Lunch in Prades or Eus

Return to Prades or Eus for lunch under the fig trees. The local cuisine features fresh, seasonal ingredients with Catalan influences. Traditional dishes might include trinxat (cabbage and potato cake), escalivada (roasted vegetables), or various mountain cheeses. You also can try cactus Tapas and homemade vermouth at [Le MOOT Bar Tapas in Eus](#)



Afternoon in Eus

Visit the village of Eus, classified among the most beautiful villages in France. Discover the "Jardineus" cactus garden 🌵, stroll among exotic plants and sculptures with panoramic views. Take a break at [the MOOT](#), a cultural venue blending art and conviviality in this artists' village perched on a hillside.

Evening Entertainment

Enjoy tapas at sunset, attend a small concert at the [MOOT guinguette in Eus](#), or visit a night market depending on the season. [The MOOT](#) offers a relaxed mountain atmosphere where you can sample local vermouths and wines while enjoying the spectacular views over the Conflent valley and towards the Canigó massif.

Day 5: High Plateaus - Cerdagne and Capcir

Morning Exploration

Head towards Font-Romeu or Mont-Louis (Vauban fortified town). Take a walk or mountain bike ride at Lake Bouillouses (protected site with breathtaking landscapes). This high mountain lake sits at an altitude of 2,000 metres and is surrounded by pine forests and peaks, offering some of the most spectacular scenery in the eastern Pyrenees.

Midday Meal

Picnic by the lake or in an inn at Angoustrine, La Llagonne, or Formiguères. The high plateau cuisine features hearty mountain dishes that reflect the cooler climate of this elevated region.

Afternoon Activities

Enjoy natural hot baths at Llo or Dorres (open-air Roman baths). These thermal springs have been used since ancient times and offer the unique experience of bathing in naturally heated mineral water while surrounded by mountain views.

Family activities: summer sledging, tree climbing adventure courses, donkey or llama trekking. The high plateaus offer numerous outdoor activities suitable for all ages and fitness levels.

Evening Accommodation

Spend the night in a chalet, yurt, or mountain gîte. The clear mountain air and distance from major cities make this area perfect for stargazing on clear nights.



The Bouillouses Lakes form a stunning high mountain landscape at the foot of the Carlit peak. This protected natural site features crystal-clear waters reflecting the surrounding peaks and pine forests. The main lake was created by a dam built in the early 20th century to supply hydroelectric power, but the area now serves as an important ecological reserve and popular destination for hikers, mountain bikers, and nature enthusiasts.

Day 6: Aspres and Medieval Villages



Morning in Castelnou

Visit Castelnou, a medieval village nestled in the Aspres. Discover the artisans and craftspeople, and wander through the flower-lined streets. This fortified village, dominated by its 10th-century castle, is considered one of the most beautiful in France with its preserved medieval character and stunning views of the surrounding countryside.



Lunch and Wine Tasting

Enjoy a tasting at a vineyard in the Aspres region (Grenache, Muscat, dry Rancio). The Aspres terroir produces distinctive wines that benefit from the unique combination of Mediterranean climate and foothills terrain. Many of the vineyards maintain traditional methods alongside modern winemaking techniques.



Afternoon in the Albères

Take a walk in the Albères: Saint-Ferréol hermitage, Col de l'Ouillat, or Tour de la Massane according to your preferences. Visit the cellera of Saint-Génis-des-Fontaines or the Romanesque cloister of Monastir del Camp. These historic sites offer insights into the religious and cultural heritage of the region.



Evening Return to the Coast

Return towards the inner coast (Argelès-Village or Le Boulou), dinner in a traditional farmhouse or at a night market. The evening offers an opportunity to sample more local specialties in authentic settings, from traditional Catalan dishes to Mediterranean seafood preparations.



The village of Castelnou sits picturesquely at the foot of Mount Canigou. Its medieval stone houses, narrow winding streets, and 10th-century castle create an atmosphere that seems frozen in time. The village is arranged in a circular pattern around the castle, with ancient ramparts still visible. From various vantage points, visitors can enjoy spectacular views of the Roussillon plain stretching towards the Mediterranean.

Day 7: Local Markets and Relaxation

Morning Market Visit

Explore the market in Céret (Saturday), Prades (Tuesday), or Le Boulou (Thursday): Catalan products, crafts, and warm atmosphere. These vibrant markets are central to local life and offer an authentic glimpse into the regional culture and cuisine.

Make your final gourmet purchases: goat cheese, honey, olive oil, rousquilles (traditional Catalan pastries)... The markets are perfect for collecting edible souvenirs to take home, with many products available directly from local producers.

Midday Meal

Enjoy a brunch made from local products or a picnic by a stream (Tech, Têt, or Agly rivers). The region's three main rivers offer pleasant spots for a relaxing meal surrounded by nature.

Afternoon Relaxation

Relax at the beach (Canet, Saint-Cyprien, Le Racou) or enjoy wild swimming in a river (Gorges de Galamus or d'Allau). The diversity of the region allows you to choose between Mediterranean beaches and refreshing mountain streams for your final day.

Final Evening

Last Catalan dinner: boles de picolat (meatballs with olives), cargolade (grilled snails), crème catalane (similar to crème brûlée)... according to your appetite! This final meal is your chance to enjoy more of the distinctive Catalan cuisine that blends French, Spanish and Mediterranean influences.



The Abbey of Saint-Michel de Cuxa is one of the most important Romanesque religious buildings in the region. Founded in the 9th century, it features a distinctive pink marble bell tower and an impressive cloister. Parts of the original cloister are now housed in The Cloisters museum in New York, though significant portions remain in situ. The abbey continues to be an active spiritual centre and hosts the famous Pablo Casals music festival each summer.

Accommodation Highlight: Casa ilicia in Eus



A Charming Guest House

Casa ilicia is a charming guest house built facing the Canigó mountain in the heart of Eus, one of the most beautiful villages in France. This bioclimatic house offers 4 charming rooms, all equipped with modern amenities while maintaining traditional character. The location provides an ideal base for exploring the Conflent region and accessing both mountain and coastal attractions.



Comfortable Accommodations

Each room at **Casa ilicia** has been thoughtfully designed to provide comfort while reflecting the local architectural traditions. Guests can enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of this historic village while having easy access to the numerous attractions mentioned throughout this itinerary. The hosts can provide local insights and recommendations to enhance your exploration of the region.



Perfect Location

Staying in Eus places you at the heart of the Pyrénées-Orientales, with easy access to both the mountains and the Mediterranean coast. From this central location, you can conveniently explore all the destinations in this itinerary while returning each evening to the tranquility of one of France's most beautiful villages. **The MOOT**, mentioned in Day 4, is also located in Eus, offering convenient dining and entertainment options.

Practical Information and Travel Tips

Best Time to Visit

The Pyrénées-Orientales can be visited year-round, but the ideal seasons are late spring (May–June) and early autumn (September–October) when the weather is pleasant and tourist sites are less crowded. Summer (July–August) offers the warmest temperatures but is also the busiest period. Winter visitors can enjoy skiing in the mountain resorts while still experiencing mild temperatures on the coast.

Getting Around

A rental car is highly recommended for this itinerary to access the diverse locations easily. The Yellow Train (Train Jaune) offers a scenic rail journey in the mountains. Local buses connect major towns but have limited schedules. Cycling is popular in the region, with many dedicated routes available for those who prefer two wheels.

Local Specialties to Try

- Boles de picolat: Catalan meatballs with olives
- Cargolade: Grilled snails with aioli
- Crème catalane: Similar to crème brûlée but flavoured with citrus and cinnamon
- Rousquilles: Ring-shaped pastries with lemon glaze
- Banyuls and Maury: Natural sweet wines

Suggested Modifications

This itinerary can be adapted based on your interests and the season:

- Winter visitors can replace mountain hiking with skiing in Font-Romeu or Les Angles
- Art enthusiasts might spend more time in Céret (Museum of Modern Art) and Collioure
- History buffs could add visits to additional Vauban fortifications along the Spanish border
- Nature lovers might extend their time in the Canigó Natural Park for more extensive hiking

Cultural Events

The region hosts numerous festivals throughout the year:

- Fête de l'Ours (Bear Festival) in several mountain villages (February)
- Pablo Casals Festival in Prades (July–August)
- Festa Major in Collioure (August)
- Wine harvesting festivals in September
- Saint John's Eve celebrations with bonfires on the Canigó (June)

