



The Pyrenees

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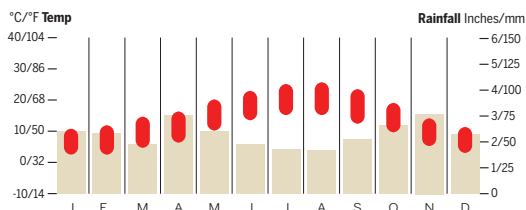
Why Go?

They might not be on quite the same lofty scale as the Alps, but the Pyrenees still pack a mighty impressive mountain punch. Crested by snow for much of the year, these high, wild peaks form a natural frontier between southwest France and northern Spain. End to end, they cover a total distance of around 430km, including the 100km strip of protected land known as the Parc National des Pyrénées, created in 1967 and now an important haven for rare wildlife such as eagles, griffon vultures, izards (a type of goat) and some of the last remaining wild brown bears in France.

Needless to say, if you're a hiker, biker or skier, or if you're simply a sucker for views, you'll be in seventh heaven in the Pyrenees. From historic ski stations to isolated valleys, from subterranean caves to snow-dusted peaks, there are enough sights to fill a lifetime of visits. Breathe deep: the wilds are calling.

WhentoGo

Pau



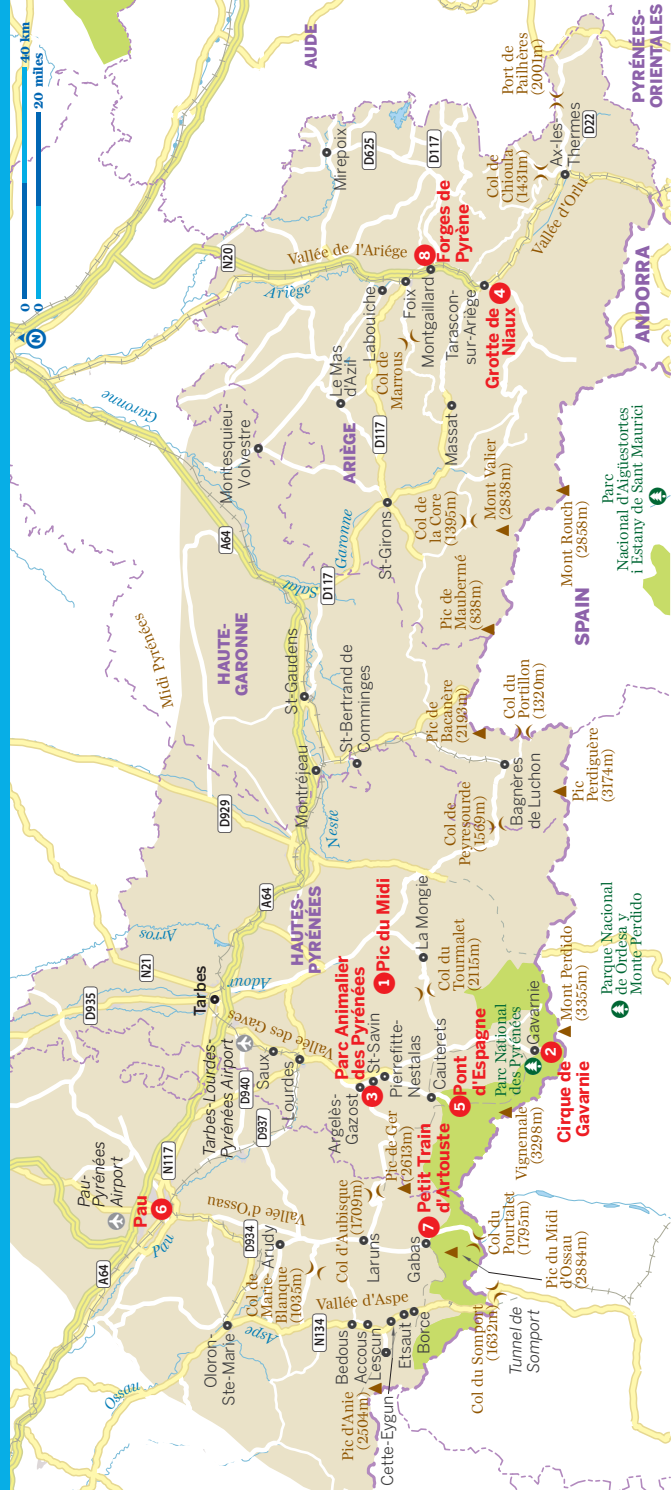
Feb Pau's annual carnival. Visit during Easter for the Festival International de Musique Sacrée.

Jul Shepherds move their flocks in the Transhumance, and the Tour de France races by.

Nov – Mar Peak skiing season – book hotels well ahead.

The Pyrenees Highlights

- 1 Marvel at the views from the mountain-top observatory at the **Pic du Midi** (p682)
- 2 Trek to the face of the amazing **Cirque de Gavarnie** (p682)
- 3 See some Pyrenean wildlife at the **Parc Animalier des Pyrénées** (p674)
- 4 See prehistoric artwork by torchlight at the **Grotte de Niaux** (p684)
- 5 Tackle the trails around Cauterets from the **Pont d'Espagne** (p679)
- 6 Explore the château and chocolate shops of **Pau** (p667)
- 7 Trundle high above the Vallée d'Ossau aboard the **Petit Train d'Artoúste** (p678)
- 8 Experience traditional Pyrenean life at the **Forges de Pyrène** (p685)



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