



# HIKING IN NORTHERN SPAIN

*Traverse the Seldom Visited Picos de Europa*

SPAIN ~ HIKING - 9 DAYS

## TRIP DETAILS

6 days moderate to strenuous hiking on varied, sometimes rocky, terrain (maximum elevation 8,300')

Optional rock scrambling

7 nights hotels or paradors

## 2005 DATES

May 28–Jun 5

Jul 2–Jul 10

Aug 27–Sep 4

Sep 24–Oct 2

## LAND COST

\$2590 per person  
(2-16 members)

TRIP LEVEL  
STRENUOUS

This is the unexpected side of Spain. If you're looking for castanets or flamenco music, you won't find them here. But you *will* find beautiful rugged mountains to hike and a delightful culture that's a world away from the rest of Spain.

Our adventure through this wonderful, hidden corner of northern Spain is a challenging hike amid the limestone spires of the Picos de Europa, an impressive mountain range soaring to nearly 9,000 feet just 20 miles from the Atlantic coast. Local mountaineers and rock climbers consider this a prime climbing area, but you'll find the rocky trails of the Picos offer some of the best hiking around (not to mention fantastic mountain panoramas). You may even have a chance to try some rock climbing, too—strictly optional, of course. It can be difficult, but our guide, Erik Perez, somehow makes you feel you can do *anything*; he'll teach you everything you need to know.

As you follow the rugged trails of the Picos, you'll pass through villages—some reached only by foot—that seem untouched by the hand of time. Along with the great hikes, you'll take home memories of many a glass of *sidra* (a local fermented apple drink) and the taste delights of this part of northern Spain (be sure to sample the *cabrales*—a powerful but delicious “blue” goat cheese).

Our itinerary is truly unique and exclusive to Mountain Travel Sobek, and guided by absolutely one of the best guides you'll find anywhere (just ask anyone who's been on one of his trips). Erik was born and raised in this region and loves introducing new friends to places that mean the world to him. He'll make you feel right at home—in fact, you may never want to leave.

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 ~ Fly to Oviedo, Spain

Leave your hometown and fly overnight to the Asturias airport near Oviedo, Spain, via Madrid or Barcelona.

### DAY 2 ~ Arrive in Spain

Arrive in Asturias and meet with the group and trip leader at the airport around 1:30 p.m. Transfer to Cangas de Onis, where we spend the night in the Parador de Cangas de Onis, a five-star hotel that was formerly the 12th-century Monasterio de San Pedro de Villanueva. The parador is an ideal setting from which we can begin to explore the Asturian landscape.

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Time permitting we will hike for a couple of hours in El Sueve area, where we'll get an overview of the Picos de Europa.

*D...Parador de Cangas de Onis*

*Note—You can also take the train from parts of Spain or France. We recommend you consider arriving in Spain a day or two early to rest from the long international flight and to have time to look around on your own. Recommendations for hotels in Madrid will be made in the pre-trip information. You may also want to consider visiting the Bilbao Museum. Travel time from Bilbao to Oviedo is approximately three hours by car.*

### **DAY 3 ~ Lagos de Covadonga – Jou Santu**

Drive 40 minutes to Los Lagos de Covadonga (3,300') and begin hiking up a wide, gentle trail through dark green meadows dotted with yellow, white, and blue wildflowers toward the serrated grey limestone peaks on the horizon. After an hour and a half, we reach Vega Redonda Refugio (4,750'), located in a small meadow at the base of the higher peaks. ("Vega" means meadow.) We'll stop and have coffee here before continuing toward La Mazada and Horcada de Santa Maria (7,000'). Optional scramble to the summit of Peña Santa Maria de Enol (8,128'—all these mountains were named after the battles fought here in 722 between the Visigoths and the Muslims). Hike down to Jou Santu, an area where Roman legions and Celtic tribes fought 2,000 years ago, and back to Los Lagos. Before returning to the parador we will stop to visit the neo-Romanesque basilica of Covadonga and the Santa Cueva, where the 18th-century statue of the patron saint of Asturias (the "Santina") is housed along with the tombs of Pelayo and Alfonso I. (8-9 hours hiking.)

*B,L,D...Parador de Cangas de Onis.*

### **DAY 4 ~ Posada de Valdeon**

Drive 45 minutes along the river Sella to Soto de Sajambre, a small village at the foot of the south face of Peña Santa and in an area of beech forests. We begin hiking on a good trail to Collado El Frade, an ascent of about 2,500 feet. Descend to the Vega de Llos and along an easy trail to Valdeon, a valley between the two large massifs of the Picos de Europa. (7 hours hiking.)

*B,L,D...Hotel Cimas de Valdeon*

### **DAY 5 ~ Cares Gorge – Sotres**

We hike past the villages of Cordinanes and Cain, where the gorge formed by the Cares River and the big peaks of the Picos becomes very narrow. The trail, though easy and well-marked, is often only a few yards wide, with peaks soaring 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the canyon. In places it's cut out of the sheer cliffs so the walk is exciting. This trail forms a boundary between Covadonga National Park on the west and the central massif of the Picos, an area of rocky summits dominated by the towering peak of Naranjo de Bulnes. The Asturians are avid mountaineers, and this hike is one of their favorites. After three hours we arrive at the village of Poncebos, where we have lunch in a local restaurant. From Poncebos, we start ascending La Canal del Tejo, following the Rio Bulnes. We start with a steep ascent up a limestone canyon, well-defined and traveled regularly by hikers and local villagers. The trail gradually opens up and we hike a few more miles through meadows and small farms into Bulnes (2,100'), a village that can only be reached on foot. It was in this area of isolated farms and peaks that members of the Spanish resistance to Franco hid out for decades after the civil war. As brown burros wander past the gray stone houses, Bulnes seems far removed from modern Spain. We'll have a snack while visiting the town, then continue hiking across an open valley to the Collado Pandebano (3,960'). From there we descend to the village of Sotres by an easy trail. (9 hours hiking.)

*B,L,D...Hotel Casa Cipriano*

### **DAY 6 ~ To Aliva**

A long but great hiking day takes us across the central massif of the Picos de Europa. These are the highest mountains in the area, and their rocky spires attract thousands of rock climbers every year. We retrace our steps to Pandebano, then ascend through narrow canyons up into the heart of the spectacular white peaks of the Picos. We gradually leave the trees behind and ascend more steeply into a truly alpine landscape as we approach the towering and distinctive peak of Naranjo de Bulnes (8,262'), a favorite climbing objective and locally known affectionately as "El Picu." After three hours we arrive at the base of Naranjo de Bulnes, where we have lunch at the Vega de Urriello (6,500'), a mountain hut located below the west face of the impressive peak. After lunch we hike up to Horcados Rojos (7,590'), our high point for the day, with an optional scramble to Pico Tesorero (8,300'), then descend along a good trail to Fuente De and the Aliva meadows. (9 hours hiking.)

*B,L,D...Hotel de Aliva*

*"What can I say about Erik that probably hasn't been said by everyone else before? I'm sure everyone has mentioned his incredible warmth, intelligence, courage, and sense of humor. But perhaps the highest compliment I can pay Erik is that he brought out the best in me. He believed in me more than I believed in myself. As a result, I not only had a wonderful vacation, but a week I'll never forget."*

*Karen Smith  
New York, New York*

### **DAY 7 ~ Aliva**

Today we have two hiking options. One is an easy hike on gentle terrain to the south valley of the Picos, passing through the villages of Espinama and Pido, then taking the cable car *teleferique* back to the Hotel de Aliva (5 hours hiking). The other option is a longer and more challenging hike (8-9 hours roundtrip) from the hotel to the magnificent overview at the Collado Jermoso, with an optional ascent of Pico de la Padiorna (7,500'). The trail crosses part of the Central Massif and is on fairly good terrain but there is no trail in some sections. It's a great option for those wanting one last strenuous hike with spectacular mountain views.

*B,L,D...Hotel de Aliva*

### **DAY 8 ~ Ribadesella**

An easy three-hour morning hike through the Duje River valley returns us to Sotres, where we have lunch. Vehicles will pick us up for the one-hour trip to the coastal town of Ribadesella, where we will visit the nearby cave of Tito Bustillo, with its outstanding Paleolithic art. The remainder of the afternoon is free to explore on your own. There will be an option for those wanting to do one last, long hike to ascend

Pico Cortes, in the Eastern Massif, a 7-hour hike that will end in the early afternoon in Ribadesella. We'll have a memorable seafood dinner at a local restaurant tonight.

*B,L,D...Gran Hotel del Sella*

### **DAY 9 ~ Departure**

Early morning departure (7:00 a.m.) to the Asturias airport, arriving in time for the 8:50 a.m. Oviedo-Madrid flight. Flights out of Madrid should be scheduled after 12:00 noon. Depending on airline schedules, if you fly home via Madrid it may be necessary to overnight there (cost of accommodation on your own) before connecting with flights to the U.S.

*B...*

## LAND COST

\$2590 per person (2-16 members)

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

Single Supplement—\$500 for “requested” singles; \$250 for “forced” singles. If you want a single room, we encourage you to sign up early and we’ll do our best to get you a single room. There is a maximum of four single requests per trip. A “forced” single is a person for whom we cannot find a roommate—one woman and/or one man. If we are unable to find you a roommate, we will only charge you half of the single supplement (\$250).

### What’s Included

- ◆ expert leadership
- ◆ accommodations (except for possible forced overnight in Madrid on Day 9)
- ◆ meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- ◆ airport transfers
- ◆ sightseeing as noted in the itinerary
- ◆ ground transportation
- ◆ entrance fees and permits
- ◆ basic medical and evacuation insurance

### What’s Not

International airfare; flights within Spain or other transportation to Oviedo; accommodation on Day 9 if needed due to flight schedule; meals not noted in itinerary; optional tips to leader, guides and local staff; cost of medical immunizations; insurance other than basic medical and evacuation insurance noted above (we strongly recommend you purchase the supplementary trip insurance offered by Mountain Travel Sobek, which includes trip cancellation insurance); excess baggage charges; airport taxes (if any); and items of a personal nature (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

### Air Travel

Airfare is not included in the land cost of our trips. For air reservations, we recommend you contact the airlines directly, either by phone or the Internet. In addition, many travelers elect to use their “frequent flyer” miles when traveling with us. **But please check with our staff 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.

## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

### Expert Leadership

Expert leadership is the key to an exciting, unforgettable experience. Our trips feature gifted leaders for whom leading trips is a true vocation. Besides showing you wonders you’d never find on your own, they make sure everything runs smoothly and safely without a hitch. They are knowledgeable about all aspects of your trip, and take great pleasure in sharing their insights with you. More than just guides, they positively elevate your experience by being teachers, companions, and the best of friends. You’ll be in good hands with them every step of the way.

**Erik Perez** regularly leads this trip. Erik, 45, was born and raised in the province of Asturias in Spain and has been climbing the local mountains since he was a boy. He operates a mountain guide company in Cangas de Onis, Spain, and has written two books about the mountains of Asturias, *Excursiones Selectas de la Montana Asturiana* and *Cinco Montanas Clasicas Asturianas*. He was educated at the University of Oviedo, from which he holds a degree in history. A highly intelligent and caring person, Erik is the ideal leader for our *Hiking in Northern Spain* trips. His knowledge of the life and culture of northern Spain, his love for the mountains and his capacity to share that with you, and his friendly rapport with all the people along the trails make him one of our most popular guides. Erik also leads treks for us in the Pyrenees, Nepal, and Patagonia.

Erik will be assisted by **Fernando Calvo**, 27. Fernando has known Erik since he was a teenager and Erik was his climbing instructor. Ever since, Fernando has had close ties to Erik and our trips to the region. His professional training is in nursing.

Leader assignments will be confirmed in the Final Bulletin sent to you three weeks prior to departure.

### Activity Level

Mountain Travel Sobek trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active and intellectually involved, and have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. ***We expect participants to be strong, experienced hikers in good physical condition***, who enjoy hiking, even up steep hills. Many of the trails are quite rocky, and you should have some experience in hiking off-trail. There will be lots of opportunities to do some “scrambling” and climbing on local peaks (no previous experience required). You need to be in good health and physical condition to enjoy this trip, with adequate muscular strength, cardiovascular endurance, and good balance.

Most hikes are of about eight hours in duration, but there will often be optional versions for those who wish to do a shorter hike. You’ll be hiking with just a daypack containing a camera, water bottle, and perhaps a rain jacket. 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.)

The level of fitness and endurance needed for this trip requires regular aerobic exercise at least one hour 3-4 times per week, performing moderate intensity hiking, cycling, swimming, or other forms of cardiovascular exercise. You must be able to hike four to six hours a day for at least two consecutive days and be comfortable hiking on rough terrain.

If you are not optimally conditioned, we recommend that you start a training program ***at least three months*** before departure, gradually increasing the intensity and duration. If your health is questionable or your physical stamina is limited, please discuss other trip options with us.

### Weather

Although Asturias is known as “Green Spain” and rain is likely sometime, the climate is quite nice for hiking, especially in the autumn. It’s generally cool to warm in the mountains (60-75 degrees F.) The coast can be foggy in the mornings, but this often clears early. The fog can go inland into the valleys where you look down into it as you hike up in the mountains. There may be some warm to hot days in August, with temperatures rising up to 85°F in the mountains. The weather is very changeable, so be prepared for a little of everything, although it never gets extremely cold during the summer and fall months when these trips are scheduled.

### **Accommodations**

Accommodations are in comfortable country hotels with double rooms and baths. They vary in standard from five-star (the parador in Cangas de Onis) with large modern rooms, bars, and large dining rooms to very simple with fairly small rooms, all with private bathrooms. Most of the hotels are small, but clean and comfortable. All serve excellent food and have a friendly staff.

### **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 refugios 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 astounding, 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.

## **THE NEXT STEP**

### **Ready to go? Signing up is easy!**

Call us at 1-888-MTSOBK (687-6235) and reserve a space with your credit card or use the enclosed reservation card. You can also book a reservation online at our website ([www.mtsobek.com](http://www.mtsobek.com)). If you prefer to use a travel agent, he or she can book your trip at no extra cost and provide other helpful assistance. Frequent flyers with mileage-earning credit cards take note: you also have the option to make all your payments by credit card so you can rack up even more mileage for your next trip!

### **Then Leave the Rest to Us**

Before you go, we provide you with extensive pre-departure information, including clothing recommendations, suggested reading lists, and other details.

### **Why Mountain Travel Sobek is Your First Choice for Adventure**

Mountain Travel Sobek is the pioneer in active adventure travel. No other adventure travel company can lay claim to that title. We were the first to take Americans trekking in Nepal, raft the wild rivers of Africa, and open up many previously inaccessible corners of the world to curious travelers. We set the standard for adventure travel and have a strong reputation for excellence that we do everything we can to maintain. Since we are the leading adventure company, we have a lot to live up to, so we make sure we provide safe, quality trips and the best customer service to our passengers.

With Mountain Travel Sobek, you'll see this part of Spain as only an insider can, with friendly, hospitable guides who know the region intimately. They'll accompany you throughout the day, lending support and insights about where you are and what you see. Their close familiarity with the local geography, history, culture and traditions (plus their entertaining stories and great jokes) are the key to a superb, informative experience—one you just can't get on your own.

### **References**

Don't take our word for how great our trips are. We'll be happy to provide you with references of satisfied past travelers.

### **Questions?**

Feel free to call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) if you still have any questions or concerns. We're here to help you. You can also check out our award-winning website at [www.mtsobek.com](http://www.mtsobek.com).

### **Note on Itinerary**

Although we will do our very best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control. Please read the Limitations of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form.

### **Conditions of Participation**

Your participation on a Mountain Travel Sobek trip is subject to the conditions stated in the four-page Participant Information Form, which includes the Agreement and Release from Liability and the Booking Conditions. We urge you to read this information carefully, and to call us if you have any questions.

### **Note on Services**

We often use local suppliers who provide services that may include transportation, equipment, logistic support, and other services (hotels, restaurants, etc.). We do not own or operate these independent suppliers. We work with service providers who share our commitment to safety and quality, and work closely with them to develop itineraries unique to Mountain Travel Sobek.

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