

# Winter Photography in The Spanish Pyrenees

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

**Day 1** Fly Zaragoza and transfer to Berdún

**Day 2/4** Berdún

**Day 5** Fly London

### Departs

February

### Focus

Photography, Birds, Mammals, Scenery.

### Grading

Day walks only. Some Grade B

### Dates and Prices

See Website (tour code ESP39) or brochure

### Highlights

- An ideal mountain holiday for the all-round naturalist
- Stunning winter scenery with ideal light conditions
- Expert tuition, get the best from your camera
- Look out for Marmots & Chamois
- Golden Eagles, Lammergeiers & Griffon Vultures
- Mountains, gorges, forests, snow and ice
- Spanish sunshine, longer days, milder weather



From top: Chamois, Egyptian Vulture and snow clad scene.



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## Introduction

The scenery of the Spanish Pyrenees has a grandeur that attracts many visitors each year, but with photography as our focus on this new 5-day holiday to rural Aragón we'll view the region's stunning cliffs, canyons and limestone erosions with a more artistic eye than the general tourist. Aimed at beginners and intermediates, you will have a chance to hone your wildlife and landscape photography skills in a beautiful and unspoilt setting, with breathtaking Pyrenean scenery as a backdrop to your shots. The comfortable base for our activities is a delightful 300-year-old property situated in the pretty hilltop village of Berdún which enjoys fine views of the Pyrenees, surrounding foothills, and valleys of the Veral and Aragón Rivers. Our friendly hosts will make us most welcome, keeping us well fed on local cuisine, while our tutor will be experienced local photographer Sergio Padura. Sergio fine-tuned his artistic appreciation with a B.A. in Art History at the University of Barcelona, as well as completing a 5-year course at the Institute of Photographic Studies of Catalonia. Now based in the Aragonese Pyrenees, he has travelled widely, and works



Snow Shoeing

as a professional photographer in a variety of different sectors from architecture to landscape. He has an open, friendly manner and an excellent understanding of how to help people make the most of their potential as a photographer, whatever level they start at. This tour is designed for those who want to learn more about the basics of photography and who also have a keen interest in nature.

Advances in technology mean many of us now own digital SLR cameras. If you have become accustomed to setting the dial to 'AUTO', and have forgotten or are only dimly aware of such concepts as focal length, aperture and shutter speed, but have the kit and are keen to learn (or remember) how to use it, this holiday offers such an opportunity. Sergio will teach you the basics, and more depending on how fast you progress, then head straight off outside each day to help you practice your new skills, with the natural beauty of the setting providing the backdrop of scenery, birds, plants and butterflies that will be the subjects of the holiday. It is important to stress, however, that this holiday is about learning to take photographs, and not about your camera. Excellent results can be achieved with the simplest of cameras, and despite all the technical wizardry on offer, there is no substitute for a good eye, good subject matter and knowing how to make the most of the light.

We aim to make the most of the mountain photography with the special winter sunshine of the Spanish Pyrenees at this time of year. The amazing light with the sun low in the sky all day long guarantees ideal photographic conditions against the backdrop of high snow-clad peaks, dramatic gorges, mountain forests and rushing rivers. We will explore some hidden locations known only to Sergio in local Natural Parks, sometimes using snowshoes.

Lammergeier, Griffon Vultures and Golden Eagles are permanent residents of the Pyrenees, while we coincide with the Crane, Lapwing and Black Kite migration. Accommodation and meals are at the excellent Casa Sarasa, where after a long day in the field evening meals are taken by an open fire.

**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Day 1

### Berdun

We depart from London Stansted on a flight direct to Zaragoza. From the airport we will pick up our hired minibuses and continue on to Berdun, stopping en route if time allows and should anything of interest be sighted. Previous journeys have certainly offered us a good variety of birds of prey, as well as spectacular scenery.

Berdun is a spectacular old hilltop village, sitting amidst the floodplains of the Aragon and Veral rivers, yet surrounded by the mountains and foothills of the Spanish Pyrenees.



Berdun

Nearby is Jaca, once the capital of the kingdom of Aragon, now a small historic town situated in the Aragon Valley in the southern foothills of the central Pyrenees. The town has a 15th century fort and an interesting 11th Century Romanesque cathedral - the first indeed to be built in that style surrounded by a maze of medieval streets.

## Day 2 – 4

Over the following days we explore the Hecho, Ansó and Aisa valleys. We start every morning with a brief classroom session during which Sergio outlines the photographic objectives of the day, making sure that we'll know the settings on the camera and the photographic opportunities we are likely to come across. Every day we drive for about 40 minutes to our destination, then we get spend time in the field to take pictures in the Parque Natural de los Valles Occidentales (The Natural Park of the Western Valleys). Covering more than 27,000 hectares, with altitudes ranging from 900 to 2,700m, it is an unspoilt mountain reserve where nobody ventures in winter. There are no ski resorts, no villages, no through roads, no power lines – just wilderness. Atlantic mixed forest, high uplands, rocky cliffs, deep gorges – the park encompasses a whole range and variety of habitats and scenery. Home to several breeding pairs of Lammergeiers, whose chicks will be hatching at the beginning of February, while Golden Eagles, Griffon Vultures, Snowfinches and Chamois seek refuge in the lower wooded slopes and are relatively accessible.

To make the most of the mountains we will head out on snowshoes on one day, pacing through untouched snow to find a perfect vantage point for the perfect winter photograph. On other occasions we'll try to capture the sunlight catching a nearby peak, the reflections from icicle-covered trees, or the rushing movement of a mountain river plunging through snow-covered rocks. On at least one occasion we'll head outdoors after dark to capture the moonlight on the snow or the brilliant winter stars. At the end of the day we head down to the milder climate of Berdún where at Casa Sarasa, Melanie will have prepared a warming supper by the open fire. We will spend a while going through the day's pictures with Sergio for those that wish, before heading off to bed, full of ideas for the next day's session.

The end of February is migration season through the Pyrenees for Cranes, Lapwings and Black Kites. The Cranes gather at the nearby Sotonera and Yesa reservoirs, waiting for ideal weather conditions before attempting to cross the Pyrenees. Flying in their distinctive V formations, sometimes thousands at a time, they circle over Berdún, gaining height, before turning north and attempting to cross into France. Less spectacular, but just as reliable are the flocks of hundreds of Lapwings that head over the Western Pyrenees at this time of



year, while Black Kites in a less organised manner, go up the valleys and over the peaks. Down in the Aragón valley around Berdún, we'll find the first of the migratory birds putting in appearances – huge flocks of Chaffinches, Starlings and Meadow Pipits hang around the fields, while it's easy to find Hawfinch, Bullfinch and Nuthatch at the birdfeeders in the garden of Casa Sarasa. The nearby Foz de Binies is a great spot to find Wallcreeper at this time of year as they spend the winter at lower altitudes before heading up to the high mountains to breed.

Both Lammergeiers, Griffon Vultures, Golden Eagles, Buzzards, Choughs, Alpine Choughs, and other high altitude species can be seen whilst exploring the areas and the valley's peaceful and remote location makes it a haven for large numbers of Alpine Marmots and the Pyrenean race of the Chamois - the Izard.

A walk through the woodland usually produces Short-toed Treecreeper, Firecrest and Crested Tit while Citril Finch and Black Woodpecker can be seen with some luck.

It is a wonderful area to explore with superb wildlife, scenery and countless photographic opportunities!

## Day 5

Berdun

London

We must rise early this morning for the drive to the airport to check in for our flight back to London. It is likely that we will arrive back at London in the early afternoon.

### Trek grading

From our outstanding base in Berdun we will explore both the foothills and mountains of the Spanish Pyrenees on daily outings, enjoying their natural history by means of gentle day walks. Our pace will be slow, as we look for birds and mammals and of course take many photographs. We shall aim to be outdoors as much as possible covering perhaps between 4 to 5 miles each day. This holiday should suit those of all ages who enjoy natural history and mountain environments. Walks will of course vary in severity with some steeper than others but we will move at a gentle pace with regular stops of course.



### Weather

Although around Berdun is often more mild than the UK in February, conditions can indeed be very cold particularly when up in the mountains. For this tour warm winter clothing is essential, including hat and gloves. Footwear must be suitable for standing in the snow for a couple of hours at a time, and it may be a good idea to bring two pairs of boots. The snowshoeing does require some physical effort, but would present no difficulty to anyone capable of a 5 mile walk. There is no need for any special camera equipment, although a tripod is always useful.

### Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

### How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Our picturesque accommodation in Berdun (Photos taken in Spring)