



(Spain-France-Andorra)

“5 great Marian Shrines in an single pilgrimage”

STAGES:

From Madrid/Fátima... to Zaragoza and...

II Pilar - Torreциudad

“Between Aragonese sanctuaries”

Distance: 150 km.

Estimation time: 1'40 h.

Recommended itinerary: Zaragoza-Huesca-Barbastro-Torreциudad

Regions (Country): Aragón (Spain)

This is a good way of seeing both Aragonese shrines. In **Zaragoza**, the **Basilica of “El Pilar”** is one of the most important sanctuaries in the Catholic world. It's visited by millions of people each year. Not far from Zaragoza you will find **Huesca** city. It is worth taking a look at the historic quarter with the San Pedro el Viejo church (declared as National Monument). its cloister is a Royal Pantheon, the place where the remains of the kings Alfonso I “the Warrior” and Ramiro II “the Monk” are kept, and the Cathedral is a magnificent gothic temple.

From Huesca we move towards and into the ‘**Sierra y Cañones de Guara Natural Park**’ and the Somontano Region, land of great wines. The Cañones and Sierra de Guara Natural Park is a place that has the most spectacular ravines and canyons in Europe.

The impressive village of **Alquezar**, at Guara mountain chain, offers a medieval urban area declared ‘**Historic and Artistic Site**’ from which the Colegiata-Castle of Santa María la Mayor stands out. **Barbastro**, capital city of the Somontano shire, is the birthplace of St Josemaria Esciva de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei (nowadays you can take a guided visit called ‘The St. Josemaria Route’). The city has important monuments such as the magnificent Cathedral of the Assumption of the 16th century. It has Gothic appearance and design, inside is Renaissance style. It stands out due to its large size and for its spectacular vaults. The Cathedral of Barbastro is set at the level of the best churches.

The **Sanctuary of Torreциudad** was open to public in 1975. It has become the main center of devotion for people living in the Aragonese Valleys of the Pyrenees and is a meeting point for many groups and families. It is known as the Sanctuary of the Families. Approaching **Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park** from Torreциudad is easy. This park is a UNESCO World Heritage.

From Torreциudad you can go to Lourdes in another stage of the Marian Route.

From Torreciudad to Lourdes

“Discovering the origins”

Distance: 200 km.

Estimation time: 3 h.

Recommended itinerary: Torreciudad-Ainsa-Bielsa/Aagnouet-Tarbes-Lourdes

Regions (Country): Aragón (Spain) – Hautes Pyrénées (France)

Just after leaving Torreciudad, you will find the small village of **Abizanda**. It will surprise you due to its skyline shaped by the silhouette of the fortress. The view from the top will allow you to contemplate the beauty of the shire and the Pyrenees. After this, you will arrive to **Ainsa**, one of the most beautiful medieval villages in the Iberian Peninsula. It has been declared ‘**Historic and Artistic Set**’. The walls that surrounds the village, as well as its historic site are extremely well preserved. The castle, the cathedral and the square stand out within the monumental area. Close to the border with France, we arrived to **Bielsa**, place of departure of countless tours through **the Pineta Valley** (one of the most wild but attractive valleys). If you have time, we recommend a visit to the open area where the image of “Virgin of Pineta” rests, near to the Parador (hotel). This tour goes through a beautiful road with superb scenery.

From Bielsa, we will cross the Bielsa-Aagnouet Tunnel entering France. The ski resorts are an important appeal for the winter sports lovers. As we get to Lourdes, thermal water towns like **Bagnères de Bigorre or Capvern les Bains** come to our way. Villages with a splendorous past that even today preserve their enchantment and glamour. The city of **Lourdes** itself has a reach area of springs and thermal waters. After this beautiful trip, you arrive to the sanctuary.

From Lourdes to Meritxell

“Brother sanctuaries”

Distance: 270 km.

Estimated time: 3’45 h.

Recommended itinerary: Lourdes-Tarbes-Capvern-Foix-Ax les Thermes-Pas de la Casa-Meritxell

Regions (Country): Hautes Pyrénées (France) - The Principality of Andorra

Leaving Lourdes, we continue towards Tarbes and Foix, crossing the Midi Pyrénées region (the most extensive region in France). The main characteristic of the first part of this stage is the diversity of sceneries that come to our way, as well as the beauty of the contrasts. The county **castle of Foix**, built on top of a rock, reminds of the power that feudal lords had in these lands. We continue our way south and we cross **Ax-les-Thermes**, an important tourist center of winter sports. Its location in the Pyrenees and at the border of Spain and Andorra, grants the city a privileged position. The underground hot waters, the thermal benefits, the ski resorts and the nature beauty are different possibilities to enjoy and to take advantage of in this area.

Once in the Pincipality and after crossing Pas de la Casa (important shopping area specialized in winter sports), the road goes down towards Soldeu. The itinerary passes by the Incles glacier valley, one of the Andorran nature jewels, all the way to Canillo. Here the **Saint Joan de Caselles** church welcomes the visitor. This magnificent Romanesque construction is the prelude to the **sanctuary of Our Lady of Meritxell**. It is just 6 miles from the capital, **Andorra la Vella**.

From Meritxell to Montserrat

“The sweet ‘M’ stage”

Distance: 170 km.

Estimated time: 2'35 h.

Recommended itinerary: Andorra la Vella-La Seu d'Urgell-Bellver de Cerdanya-Berga-Montserrat

Regions (Country): The Principality of Andorra-Catalonia (Spain)

The Pyrenean sceneries and skylines will become our travel companions in the first part of this stage. As we continue on the road, we will see that the skyline gets smoother gradually. The high peaks will be giving way to lower and more rounded formations. A few minutes from Andorra, we go across **la Seu d' Urgell**, the most important city in north Lleida and the Diocese of Urgell. The archbishop of Urgell is also co-prince of Andorra (together with the President of the French Republic). The most important monument is the Cathedral, a beautiful example of Lombard Romanesque. We continue and we will go across the village of Berga, with the small **Sanctuary of Queralt**, located on the top of the mountain.

The road continues to **Manresa**, just 13 miles away from Montserrat. This important city had a splendid past. An indication of this is the gothic basilica of Santa Maria de la Seu, but mainly, for being the icon of the Catalan Modernism. There are several examples of modernist buildings. Finally, from Monistrol de Montserrat, a beautiful mountain road will guide us to the gate of the **Sanctuary of Montserrat**.

From Barcelona, the travel can continue to others cities or countries or return to the depart place...

From Montserrat to the Pilar

“By the river Ebro lands”

Distance: 265 km.

Estimated time: 2'45 h.

Recommended itinerary: Montserrat-Tárrega-Lérida-Zaragoza

Regions (Country): Catalonia (Spain)- Aragón (Spain)

While taking this route, you will be taking the natural road that links the two most important Marian sanctuaries in the north east of the Iberian Peninsula. The first part of the trip goes through the province of Lleida. Once in Aragón, you will go through the Monegros Desert. In this part of the journey, you can find one of the most beautiful monastic constructions in Aragón: **the Sigena Monastery**. Of Cistercian-Romanesque style is declared a National Monument.

A few miles from **Zaragoza**, River Ebro will meet with you and the two of you will go together to the city center, place where the sanctuary is located.

From Zaragoza, to continue to Madrid and return to the depart place...

More information: www.rutamariana.com