

A 3-day hike in the Pyrenees around the Pic du Midi d'Ossau:
our route between Pombie and Ayous



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By Floriane

If you're looking for a **3-day backpacking trip in the Pyrenees** that's suitable for beginner to intermediate hikers, this loop around the Pic du Midi d'Ossau is a wonderful option.

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In mid-June, I set off with four friends for a three-day hike in the **Béarn Pyrenees**. On the itinerary: two nights in mountain huts, numerous lakes, marmots, a little snow, and absolutely magnificent mountain scenery.

In this article, I'll share **our itinerary**, the distances we covered, our experience at the Pombie and Ayous mountain huts, our budget, and the key tips I wish I'd known before setting out.

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Our hike around the Pic du Midi d'Ossau at a glance

- ☐ **Duration:** 3 days and 2 nights
- ☐ **Date:** mid-June
- ☐ **Start and finish:** Bious-Oumettes parking lot

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- **Overnight stays:** Day 1 at the Pombie shelter and Day 2 at the Ayous shelter
- **Reservations:** required; ideally several weeks in advance
- **Distance:** about 33 km
- **Budget:** about 150 €
- **Difficulty:** moderate, for hikers accustomed to long days and elevation gain
- **Water sources:** Refreshments at mountain huts

Nearby hotels for before or after the trek (about 20 km from the starting point)

- [Hôtel d'Ossau - Information and Reservations](#)
- [Villa Le Clos - Information and Reservations](#)

Stage	Distance	Elevation Gain	Walking time
Bious-Oumettes → Pombie Shelter	About 8 km	About 800 m	4 hours 30 minutes
Pombie Shelter → Ayous Shelter	14.88 km	881 m	5 hrs 10 mins
Ayous Shelter → Bious-Oumettes via the Pic d'Ayous	About 10 km	365 m	3 hours

The durations are not directly comparable: the first day reflects our total time, including breaks, while the data for days 2 and 3 are based on the travel time recorded by the watch.

Our fitness level before this hike

There were five of us in our thirties with **moderate hiking experience**. We had already gone on multi-day hikes that included overnight stays in mountain huts, but not all of us were regular exercisers.

As for me, I had given birth nine months earlier. I had started running again and doing strength training, but I didn't feel like I was back in top shape yet.

This preparation helped me, and my bag was very light. Despite that, I started to feel severe pain in my knee on the second day.

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Where should I stay before or after the hike?

We stayed overnight in Bordeaux at my sister's house before heading to the Pyrenees the next morning.

□ In hindsight, I'd recommend spending the night in **Laruns**, which is about **18 km and a 20-minute drive from the Bious-Oumettes parking lot**.

One night is enough before the trek. The main goal is to avoid a long drive before the first leg, to pack your bags at a leisurely pace, and to be able to start hiking early enough.

Mountain huts **generally** prefer **that hikers arrive around 6 p.m.**, since dinner is served around 7 p.m. Staying overnight in Laruns therefore gives you some leeway in case of an extended break, traffic, or a slower-than-expected pace.

Here are two lodging options in Laruns:

- **[Hôtel d'Ossau](#)**: Convenient for a one-night stay before departure, this family-run hotel offers several double rooms, twin rooms, and family rooms. Breakfast

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is served before departure.

It is located about **18 km from the Bious-Oumettes parking lot**, which is approximately **a 20-minute drive**. Its central location also makes it convenient to run some errands or pick up some last-minute snacks before heading up the mountain.

☐ [Check availability at the Hôtel d'Ossau](#)

- [Villa Le Clos](#): a great option for a small group, as it's an apartment with two bedrooms, a living room, a fully equipped kitchen, a bathroom, and a terrace with a view of the mountains.

The kitchen is where you can prepare dinner, breakfast, or a last-minute snack before the trek.

Like the Hôtel d'Ossau, Villa Le Clos is located about **18 km and a 20-minute drive from the Bious-Oumettes parking lot**.

☐ [Check availability at Villa Le Clos](#)

☐ **Extend Your Stay in Laruns After the Hike**

Laruns can also be a good base for spending a few days in the valley after the hike.

After three days of hiking, you can relax, enjoy the village's restaurants and shops, or explore other sites in the Ossau Valley at a more leisurely pace.

Where should I park for this hike?

There are two parking lots providing access to the Bious-Artigues Lake area:

- **The Bious-Artigues parking lot**, located on the lakefront: €8 for daytime parking only
- **The Bious-Oumettes parking lot**, located below: €5 to park one vehicle during a multi-day hike

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The BiOUS-Oumettes parking lot is located about **1 km from Lake BiOUS-Artigues**. You'll need **to climb** approximately **120 meters** to reach the lake and the actual starting point of the main trails.

We arrived on a Thursday and had no trouble finding a spot. However, when we returned on Saturday around noon, the parking lot was full, and parking options nearby were very limited.

It's therefore important **to plan ahead for your visit, especially on weekends**, during school breaks, and when the weather is nice. The area serves as the starting point for several hiking trails that are very popular with both tourists and valley residents.

□ Parking

- BiOUS-Oumettes Parking Lot.
- 5 € for the stay, payable in cash
- Add about 1 km and 120 m of elevation gain to reach the lake.
- Arrive early on the weekend.
- Parking is permitted, but not overnight in a vehicle or in a tent.

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Day 1: From Bioux-Oumettes to the Pombie Shelter

Weather: sunny

Distance: about 8 km

Elevation gain: about 800 meters

Duration: 6 hours 30 minutes, including breaks

Overnight: Pombie Mountain Hut

Our watch encountered a problem on this first day and only recorded a small portion of the route. The data showing 3.24 km and 451 meters of elevation gain therefore does not represent the entire stage.

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A gradual climb, but a long first day

Our impressions: The first day was pleasant, and the climb was gradual. After having a picnic at Lake Bioux-Artigues, we continued on toward the Pombie mountain hut, taking the time to take in the scenery.

The distance wasn't very long, but the breaks, the photos, the picnic, and the group's pace explain why the hike took us 6 hours and 30 minutes. Since the mountain hut wanted us to arrive around 6:00 p.m. for dinner served at 7:00 p.m., we didn't have unlimited time to spare.

Our favorites of the day

- **Our first marmots:** listen for the whistles echoing through the valleys—they often help you spot them.
- **The snowfields were still there in mid-June:** against the blue sky, they gave the landscape a true high-mountain feel.
- **The view upon arrival:** the Pombie refuge is set against a spectacular backdrop at the foot of the Pic du Midi d'Ossau.

⚠ **Set out early enough.** Even though the trail didn't seem technically difficult to us, you need to factor in the drive, the lower parking lot, breaks, and the arrival time requested by the mountain hut. That's the main reason why I recommend staying overnight near the trailhead the night before.

Conditions can vary greatly from one year to the next. Before setting out in mid-June, check with the mountain huts and review the latest conditions. A section that was easy during our stay may become more challenging due to more snow, fog, or less favorable weather.

Staying at the Pombie Shelter: My Experience

The Pombie Mountain Hut enjoys an **exceptional location at the foot of the Pic du Midi d'Ossau**. The view of the mountains is magnificent, and arriving at the hut more than makes up for the day's exertions.

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The positives

Exceptional Setting
Very good hot meal
Nice, cozy atmosphere
Water bottles can be refilled
A magnificent view upon
waking

Things to Watch Out For

A much more rustic lodge than I had imagined
Large communal sleeping area rather than
individual mattresses
Bedding is rather basic
No showers, individual sinks
Significant temperature fluctuations overnight
Very few electrical outlets

There were five of us, and we slept on a sort of **large communal mattress**, rather than on individual mattresses. It wasn't particularly comfortable.

Dinner, on the other hand, was a wonderful surprise. We had a kind of hot stew—hearty and truly delicious—exactly the kind of meal we were craving after that first day.

Estimated Budget for the Pombie Shelter

We paid about **50 € per person**, which included:

- spending the night at the shelter;
- dinner;
- breakfast.

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Day 2: From the Pombie Mountain Hut to the Ayous Mountain Hut

Distance: 14.88 km

Elevation gain: 881 meters

Walking time: 5 hours 10 minutes

Main passages: Peyreget pass, Peyreget lake, Moines pass and Bersau lake

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A series of lakes and marmots

♥ The second day was the best of the trip.

From the Pombie mountain hut, we followed the trail toward the **Col de Peyreget**, before descending toward **Lake Peyreget** and the huts in the valley. We then reached the **Col des Moines** area , which offers unobstructed views of the French and Spanish Pyrenees, followed by **Lakes Castérau and Bersau**. The final stretch of the trail led us to the Ayous mountain hut, situated across from Lake Gentau.

We mainly followed our GPS track. The route was clear under the conditions we encountered, but some junctions may be less obvious: **it's best to download the offline map before setting out.**

The day was marked by a succession of mountain and lake scenery. With its crystal-clear water and rocky surroundings, **Lake Bersau** was one of our favorite stops.

We also spotted several marmots. They were close enough to observe without leaving the trail.

Continue despite severe knee pain

My knee pain started halfway through that second day, during a descent.

I managed to keep going by using my poles, slowing down my pace, and adjusting how I planted my feet. In particular, I tried to shift more of my weight onto my heels. My mental toughness also played a big role in getting me to the shelter.

The trekking poles were especially helpful to me. I recommend them for the entire trail, especially on the descents when carrying a heavy backpack.

However, severe pain should not be ignored. You need to be able to adjust your routine, skip a variation, or ask for help when the situation calls for it.

In my case, this pain led me to change the itinerary for the third day and skip the Pic d'Ayous.

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Staying at the Ayous Shelter: Our Favorite Shelter

After the very rustic atmosphere of Pombie, arriving at the Ayous shelter was a real change of scenery.

♥ The mountain hut is located on **the shores of the magnificent Lake Gentau**, facing the Pic du Midi d'Ossau. The view of the lake and the surrounding peaks is superb.

We slept in a dormitory that slept about 15 people. This time, everyone had their own bed. The bedding and bathrooms were very clean, and overall it seemed much more comfortable to us—almost like a mountain lodge.

A great atmosphere

The team gave us a wonderful welcome. Before dinner, the rangers took the time to explain how the shelter operates and provide some information to all the hikers. This brief group gathering really adds to the atmosphere of an evening in the mountains.

Our package included:

- **Dinner:** a stew-type dish;
- **Breakfast:** bread and jam;
- **The picnic:** a salad, some fruit compote, and a cake.

We had booked and paid directly online. The price was about **60 € per person**, including the overnight stay, dinner, breakfast, and a picnic for the next day.

Between the comfort, cleanliness, hospitality, meals, and the view, the Ayous lodge was clearly our favorite.

A family-friendly shelter

□ Several young children were staying at the shelter when we were there. It made me want to come back with my 7-year-old daughter to spend two or three nights there and explore the nearby trails on day trips.

From Lake Biou-Artigues, the trail to the Ayous mountain hut follows the GR10 and

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passes by Lakes Roumassot, Miey, and Gentau, among others. The refuge describes this ascent as a hike lasting about 2 hours and 30 minutes to 3 hours, suitable for families accustomed to hiking, with an elevation gain of nearly 600 meters.

The team explained to us that they regularly use this trail to carry supplies and equipment. The shelter is not connected to any roads, and the helicopter remains a last-resort option, particularly because of its cost.

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Day 3: Return to the parking lot, with an optional hike to Pic d'Ayous

On the third morning, we went our separate ways right at the mountain hut. My four friends decided to climb Pic d'Ayous before heading back to the parking lot. My knee was still hurting, so I chose to head back down directly via the standard route.

The option with Pic d'Ayous

Total distance: approximately 10 km

Elevation gain: 365 meters

Travel time: 2 hours 49 minutes

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Additional time for the summit: approximately 1 hour 30 minutes round trip

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My friends found the hike up Pic d'Ayous very easy. They spotted some marmots again, and they said the view from the summit is definitely worth the trip.

We recommend that you leave your backpack at the shelter for the round trip and then pick it up before heading back down.

The summit is therefore a great way to wrap up the hike when the weather and your physical condition allow it.

My Direct Descent to Bious-Oumettes

As for me, I set out alone on the classic route. From the mountain hut, the trail first descends toward Lake Gentau, then runs along Lakes Miey and Roumassot. It then follows the **red-and-white** markings **of the GR10** through the forest to the Bious Bridge and Lake Bious-Artigues.

From the lake, there was finally about 2 km of descent left to reach the Bious-Oumettes parking lot. My knee was still hurting, so I walked slowly with my trekking poles, without trying to keep up my usual pace.

I'm not giving a specific distance for my personal route, because the complete recorded track corresponds to my friends' route, which includes the Pic d'Ayous.

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In which direction should I take this hike?

We hiked the loop in the order of Bious-Oumettes, Pombie, Ayous, and then back to Bious-Oumettes because the Ayous shelter was fully booked for our first night.

The Benefits of Our Hiking Trail

- We saved **the most comfortable shelter** for last .
- The difficulty level of the section between the two mountain huts is generally comparable in both directions.
- **Pic d'Ayous was still** an option for the last morning.
- The final day then followed a classic, well-traveled descent toward the lakes.

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What to Expect

With that in mind, you should head to Pombie on the very first day and arrive by the time specified by the shelter. The day wasn't technically difficult for us, but the morning hike, the extra 2 km from Bious-Oumettes, and the breaks can quickly eat into the time you have available.

My opinion: I'd gladly do the loop again in the same direction, but I'd stay overnight in Laruns or Gabas the night before so I can start earlier and feel more rested.

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What level of fitness is required for this hike?

The trail did not present any significant technical challenges under the conditions we encountered. However, it is not a hike that can be tackled without proper preparation.

You must be able to:

- walking for several hours a day;
- to play three consecutive days;
- cover up to about 900 meters of elevation gain in a single day;
- to carry one's belongings for several days;
- follow a GPS track and pay attention to junctions;
- accept the limited comfort of mountain huts.

Before setting out, a few day hikes with a full pack can help prepare your legs, back, and shoulders.

How much should I budget for three days?

We spent about **150 € per person on the trek, not including transportation to the valley.**

Expense	Approximate amount
Pombie Mountain Hut with dinner and breakfast	About 50 €
Ayous Lodge with dinner, breakfast, and a picnic	About 60 €
Bious-Oumettes Parking Lot	€5
Snacks and Additional Expenses	About 30 to 40 €
Total	About 150 €

The budget will vary depending on the meals you bring along, the rates charged by the mountain huts at the time of your stay, and your starting point. You should also factor in the cost of a possible overnight stay in Laruns or Gabas.

For lunch breaks 1 and 2, we had planned a picnic.

What equipment should I bring?

We decided to pack as little as possible. We refilled our water supplies at the mountain huts, which meant we didn't have to carry all the water we needed for the three days.

I find walking sticks particularly useful, especially for people with sensitive knees.

I'll devote another article to packing our backpack, including the clothes we brought, the gear for sleeping in mountain huts, electronic devices, and the items we could have ultimately left at home.

For this hike, I recommend bringing at least the following:

- used hiking boots;
- two sticks;
- a sleeping bag or sleeping pad;
- a waterproof jacket;
- a warm layer;
- sun protection;
- a first-aid kit;
- a portable charger;
- a GPS track downloaded offline;
- enough water between two water stations.

A GPS track is highly recommended

We mainly used a GPS track to find our way. Even when the trail seems obvious, I recommend downloading the following before you set out:

- the complete route map;
- a card that can be used offline;
- any possible variations;
- the locations of the shelters;
- the main crossing points.

Don't rely solely on the cell phone network, which can be unreliable in the mountains. Also, make sure you have enough battery life left to check the map at the end of the day.

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Very few electrical outlets

Charging options were limited. During our visit, only four outlets were available for campers and hikers.

- a sufficiently powerful portable charger;
- a charger with multiple USB or USB-C ports;
- possibly a small solar battery;
- maps and GPS tracks downloaded offline.

□ A charger that lets you plug multiple phones into a single outlet is especially useful when traveling in a group.

What I Wish I'd Known Before I Left

The Pombie shelter is really rustic

I knew there wouldn't be a shower and that the amenities would be limited. However, I wasn't expecting such a large communal sleeping area or such basic bedding.

Electrical outlets are scarce

A charger with multiple USB-C ports and a good portable battery pack are especially useful.

The first day takes some time

You need to factor in the distance from the lower parking lot, the many breaks, photo stops, and lunch. Since we'd like to arrive around 6 p.m., leaving late leaves little leeway.

The parking lot may be full

We didn't have any problems on Thursday. By noon on Saturday, the Bious-Oumettes parking lot was full.

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A physical issue could cause a change in the schedule

My knee pain prevented me from climbing Pic d'Ayous. It's better to accept that you have to give up a different route rather than take an unnecessary risk.

My thoughts on this hike around the Pic du Midi d'Ossau

Despite my knee pain, I have wonderful memories of those three days.

The snowfields still lingering in mid-June, the lakes, the marmots, the views of the Pic du Midi d'Ossau, and the nights spent in mountain huts really make you feel like you're on a little adventure.

The second day's hike between Pombie and Ayous was probably my favorite part of the trip. The scenery changes constantly, and arriving at the Ayous mountain hut, overlooking the lake, more than makes up for all the effort.

I would do this loop again in the same direction, but this time I would spend the night before in Gabas or Laruns. That would let me start early, well-rested, and enjoy the first leg of the hike more leisurely.

Finally, the Pic d'Ayous is a wonderful way to wrap up the trip. Even though I wasn't able to climb it, my friends came back raving about the view and the marmots they saw along the way.

Nearby hotels for before or after the trek (about 20 km from the starting point):

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Feel free to leave us a **quick note** or a **5-star rating** below to let us know if you're planning this hike or to ask us any questions. You can also message us on [Instagram](#).

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