



We offer tours of Cathar Castles in Southern France. These tours are lead by an English-speaking local expert. Scheduled tours in the summer are either for three days or for a full week. Whatever your level of knowledge we guarantee that you will learn a lot – not just about the Cathars, but life in the Middle Ages, the concept of heresy, crusading and medieval warfare, chivalry, some of the strong personalities involved, Occitan (the language of the troubadours), and the mechanics of the Inquisition. You will also be surprised by the modern ramifications of events eight hundred years ago.

Week-long tours are available in June and September. Staying at hand-picked quality hotels you will visit the most important sites associated with the Cathars and the Crusade against them, ranging from iconic sites such as Montsegur to the best preserved Cathar Castle, Carcassonne, and including Toulouse, the centre of events in the thirteenth century. Transport, meals and accommodation are provided

Groups are typically small – fewer than 16 people.

Custom tours are also available – dates and itinerary by arrangement.





THE CATHARS

The Cathars flourished in Europe eight hundred years ago. They were wiped out by sustained campaign of violence ordered and directed by the papacy. A prolonged war of conquest failed to eradicate the Cathars, but an Inquisition – the first Papal Inquisition – was established to root-out and destroy the last vestiges of their belief.

For many centuries all memory of the Cathars lay forgotten. The few documents from the period lay in obscure Church archives, ignored by all but a few churchmen who knew Catharism as “The Great Heresy”. Within the last century, the Cathars have become better known. Interest in them has increased year by year, and is still increasing. The number of people interested in the Cathars, their beliefs and their fate, has never been greater. They even feature in popular culture – films, books and even songs. *The Singing Nun* and *Iron Maiden* both had hits with their very different songs about the Cathars.

One reason for the increasing interest is that the Catharism now seems so far ahead of its time. Almost everything associated with Cathar belief has a strong modern resonance. What was seen as demonic eight hundred years ago, now appears normal, inoffensive, sympathetic and to some admirable. Cathars lived in a uniquely liberal and tolerant society. They were pacifists. They declined to eat meat or animal products. Their ministers included women as well as men. They found no intrinsic moral difficulty with abortion, suicide or euthanasia. In contrast to other Christians of the period, they led ascetic lives, living in poverty, working for their daily bread and fasting for extended periods. They would not swear oaths, tell lies, or kill – not even animals. They believed in reincarnation. They showed the most astonishing and well-attested fortitude in the face of persecution and death.

All of these aspects are covered in our tours. There is also plenty for those with more rarefied interests. For example the Cathars and the vestiges of their strongholds offer much to historians – Where did Cathar ideas come from? And why were they seen as such a threat, justifying a full-scale crusade launched within Christendom. How did medieval armies besiege castles? Why were the lands of the Count of Toulouse annexed by France? Why did events here affect every state in Europe – and even the constitution of the USA? Again, the Cathars claimed to preserve a very early strand of Christianity. Not so long ago, the claim was considered absurd, but mounting evidence reveals it to be plausible.





YOUR GUIDE

Your guide is James McDonald, a well-known international author and public speaker. He has been interested in the Cathars for many years and has lived in a late-medieval castle in the heart of Cathar Country for the last 20 years.

His knowledge of the subject is encyclopaedic. Although academically rigorous, he presents it in an engaging manner. As in his writing, he manages to combine erudition with an entertaining style. You will find his enthusiasm infectious. One minute you will be noting the very spot where a Crusade leader fell – killed instantly having been hit on the head by a huge stone fired shot from a trebuchet – the next you will be involved in the great sweep of European history: medieval power struggles, the creation of the Inquisition, the origin of European nation states. He can also bring to life some of the personalities involved in these events: Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominicans who created and operated the Inquisition; the tragic Raymond-Roger Trencavel; the ambitious Simon de Montfort; the hapless Raymond of Toulouse the overweening pope, Innocent III; the irrepressible Count of Foix.

James' talks are not scripted and he will be happy to answer questions as they arise. He will be prepared to cover anything from abstruse theology to the development of heraldry, from medieval monastic diets to modern local delicacies, and from building and transporting siege engines to local wines.



UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

Top of the Range Experience
Deep & wide expert knowledge, based on factual primary sources
Locations visited are not the typical tourist sites



MORE INFORMATION

You can find more information about Cathar Tours at www.catharcountry.info

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You can also read more about James McDonald:

James' entry on [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)

James' website on the Cathars: www.cathar.info

James' website on Cathar Castles: www.catharcastles.info

James' website reviewing books on the Cathars: www.renneslechateaubooks.info

