

# Pyrenean Classic Cols

Put on your Polka Dot Jersey and challenge yourself on the legendary climbs of the Pyrenees

## Summary

**WHERE:** French Pyrenees

**DISTANCE:** to suit you

**TIME :** 6 days

**PRICE :** see website

**DATES:** June, July & Sept



## Highlights

**Flexible itinerary to suit everyone**

**Climb the legendary TdF Cols and stage endings**

**Optional Challenge route with up to 3670m ascent per day**

**2 customised support vehicles & experienced and energetic guides**



## Pyrenean Classic Cols

This holiday has been carefully crafted to give you the opportunity to cycle the best cols and stage endings that the Pyrenees have to offer. It is a point to point journey, traversing the region from east to west, taking in the infamous climbs (Portet d'Aspet, Col d'Aspin and the mighty Tourmalet, among others) that the professional Tour de France cyclists head up every year.

The joy of our Classic Cols itineraries is their flexibility and suitability for mixed ability groups. We have used our in-depth knowledge of the Pyrenees to devise for you both a **Classic Route** which warms up gently, getting progressively tougher and a **Challenge Route**, full of optional extras (cols and TdF stage endings) to test even the most experienced of cyclists. Taken at a steady pace the Classic Route is both manageable and enjoyable for healthy cyclists, regardless of experience in the mountains. It is a route to open up the Pyrenees to you.

Whether you opt for the Classic or Challenge Route (or something in between), this week is a holiday and riding on the quiet roads through the stunning mountain scenery of the Pyrenees is a real joy. Our experienced guides will support you from their well-stocked vans and ensure that you have everything you need.

We offer Classic Cols holidays in Corsica, Sardinia, Provence, Spain, Slovenia, the Dolomites and Alps too, please check our website for details. For cyclists new to the mountains we recommend starting with this itinerary, our Tour of Tenerife or Sardinia holidays.

# Itinerary

## Day 0 - Travel Out

Included transfers from Toulouse airport to Ax-les-Thermes. Meet your guides and have a welcome briefing and great dinner. Ax is a lively thermal spa town on the banks of the river Ariège, surrounded by roads heading up in all directions. It is the perfect place to start our holiday. We stay in our hotel here for two nights.

## Day 1: Day Ride from Ax-les-Thermes

Assemble bikes after breakfast before heading off to explore the many options you have right on the doorstep. The **Col du Chioula (1431m)** commands big views over the eastern Pyrenees and the ascent from the west has some very agreeable gradients.

After lunch you have choices to make! Options range from enjoying a leisurely ride up the stunning U-shaped valley of Orlu or stepping up the tempo a bit and beasting yourself up the stage ending of **Bonascre (1380m)**, to the Hors Categorie climb of the **Col de Pailhères (2001m)**.

### Easier Route

Col du Chioula [38km, 830m ascent]

### Classic Route

Col du Chioula + Orlu Valley  
[54km, 1030m ascent]

### Harder Route

Col du Chioula + Plateau de Bonascre  
[54km, 1500m ascent]

### Challenge Route

Col du Chioula + Col de Pailhères  
[76km, 2111m ascent]

## Day 2: Ax-les-Thermes to St-Girons

From Ax you set off on the gorgeous Route des Corniches which undulates its way to the market town of Tarascon along the south facing side of the valley of Ax, with constant views and beautiful villages. You can pause here for lunch or those wanting a real challenge can take on the tough **Plateau de Beille (1800m)** stage ending.

After lunch everyone heads over the **Col du Port (1250m)**, a lovely climb with a couple of cheeky sections before descending to your hotel. Relaxing is a good option but those with some energy to spare could always take on the mighty **Col d'Agnes (1570m)** – worth it for the views and the lakeside café!

### Easier Route

Lift to Lordat, Route des Corniches + Col de Port  
[82km, 950m ascent]

### Pyrenean Classic Cols



### Classic Route

Route des Corniches + Col de Port  
[100km, 1500m ascent]

### Harder Route

Route des Corniches + Col de Port + Col d'Agnes  
[128km, 2340m ascent]

### Challenge Route

Plateau de Beille + Route des Corniches + Col de Port + Col d'Agnes [149km, 3000m ascent]

## Day 3: St-Girons to Luchon

With two days under your belt, your legs are ready to take on two of the most popular cols in the Pyrenees. Climbing gently through ancient farmsteads, you barely notice the incline to the **Col de Portet d'Aspet (1075m)**. A short descent through mixed forest (past the memorial to Fabio Casartelli) prepares you for the never-ending **Col de Menté (1345m)** or if you prefer, there is the option of the beautiful and gentle climbs of the **Col de Buret (599m)** and the **Col des Ares (797m)** instead.

After a pleasant winding descent we can stretch our legs with a very gentle (almost flat) finale into the bustling spa town of Luchon. There are two optional extras today, one at the start of the day, taking you over the **Col de la Core (1395m)** – famous for its cheese, and the other towards the end of the day where you can make an excursion to Spain taking on the **Col du Portillon (1293m)**.

### Easier Route

Cols de Portet d'Aspet + Buret + Ares  
[83km, 1300m ascent]

### Classic Route

Col de Portet d'Aspet + Col de Menté  
[78km, 1600m ascent]

### Harder Route

Cols de Portet d'Aspet + Menté + Portillon  
[95km, 2270m ascent]

### Challenge Route

Cols de la Core + Portet d'Aspet + Menté + Portillon- east [131km, 3050m ascent]



## Day 4: Rides from Luchon or Rest Day

Today is an opportunity to rest aching limbs in the thermal baths and enjoy what Luchon has to offer, from its spa facilities to paragliding or mountain biking!

The die-hard tour enthusiasts and those who can't bear to be separated from their road bike for the day can take in the stage finish of **Superbagnères (1804m)** or the ever changing gradients of the **Port de Balès (1755m)**, where Schleck and Contador had the famous chain incident!

### Classic Route options

- Col du Portillon (west) [22 km, 670m ascent]
- Superbagnères [39km, 1200m ascent]
- Port de Balès [70km, 1300m ascent]

### Challenge Route

Port de Balès + Superbagnères  
[109km, 2500m ascent]

## Day 5: Luchon to Bagnères-de-Bigorre

The day starts with the rather steep but very beautiful **Col de Peyresourde (1565m)**. You will be rewarded at the top by a cafe serving fabulous crepes!

Those who really want to abuse their bodies could take in the **Col d'Azet (1580m)** and the mountain hugging **Pla d'Adet (1680m)**. On the Classic Route, next up is the beautiful **Col d'Aspin (1490m)** which has been used more often by the Tour de France than any other Pyrenean climb. A spectacular downhill takes us through the small and quaintly bizarre town of Campan and on to our hotel in Bagnères -de Bigorre.

### Classic Route

Col de Peyresourde + Col d'Aspin  
[70km, 1750m ascent]

### Harder Route

Col de Peyresourde + Col d'Azet + Col d'Aspin  
[90km, 2315m ascent]

### Challenge Route

Col de Peyresourde + Col d'Azet + Pla d'Adet + Col d'Aspin [114km, 3215m ascent]

## Day 6: Bagnères-de-Bigorre to Argelès Gazost

Today is all about the world famous and rather punishing **Col du Tourmalet (2115m)** - make sure you get your photo taken at the top - this is a real achievement!

From here you can enjoy a 35km downhill all the way to the picturesque thermal spa town of Argelès-Gazost for an afternoon of justifiable relaxation. A few tempting optional extras include the TDF stage finishes of **Luz Ardiden (1720m)** and **Hautacam (1534m)**, or a nice detour 'up' the valley to the village of Gavarnie for a glimpse of the world-famous Cirque.

### Classic Route

Col du Tourmalet [64km, 1515m ascent]

### Easy optional extra

Trip to Gavarnie from Luz-St-Sauveur  
[adds 38km, 665m ascent]

### Harder Route

Col du Tourmalet +Hautacam  
[93km, 2700m ascent]

### Challenge Route

Col du Tourmalet + Luz Ardiden + Hautacam  
[123km, 3670m ascent]

## Day 7 - Travel Back

We offer included transfers from Argelès Gazost to Toulouse TLS airport - read on for more travel details.







## Start & End Hotels

Start: Hôtel Le Chalet, 4 Avenue Durandeau,  
09110 Ax-Jean-les-Thermes, France  
(Tel. +33 561 642 431)

End: Hôtel Du Soleil Levant, 17 Avenue des  
Pyrenees, 65400 Argelès-Gazost, France  
(Tel. +33 562 921 380)

## Travel

### Finding flights

We recommend using a comparison tool such as [www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net) when searching for direct or indirect flights from various airports/regions/countries. It can be helpful if you search for one-way flights, giving results of all direct routes available, eg. 'UK to TLS'. Search results may change as airlines release their schedules for the following year at varying times.

If you are flying long haul we recommend arriving into Toulouse a day early in order to get over any jet lag before you start cycling. We can generally only offer an airport transfer on the start/finish days of the itinerary but can certainly arrange a taxi transfer for you (payable direct to your driver) on other days.

If you are travelling in a group of 6 or more and are unable to join the group airport transfers, we may be able to organise a private transfer for you. Please contact us to discuss.

### Under your own steam...

If you are going to meet us at the start hotel or are leaving independently at the end of your trip to go on elsewhere, please let us know so we can plan accordingly; we may also be able to help you with your travel plans, so do get in touch if you need assistance.

### Driving

The start hotel has a car park, so it is possible to leave your car there. At the end of the holiday you would need to get our transfer to Toulouse and then catch the train back to Ax les Thermes.

### Using the Train

If you cannot meet our transfer times, then the train works very well with this holiday itinerary. You can get a train from TLS mainline station to Ax (2hrs). The start hotel is very easy walking distance from Ax station. At the end of the holiday we may be able to drop you at Lourdes train station (or it's a short taxi ride away).

### Foreign Travel Advice

For the latest travel advice from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office including security and local laws, plus passport and visa information, check [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

## Airport Transfers

Marmot Tours offer airport transfers at designated times from the most convenient airport for the start of your trip. Transfers are timed to fit in with as many flights from as many regional airports as possible.

Transfers at set times from and back to **Toulouse airport (TLS)** are included in the holiday price. Both the start and end transfers are around 2 hours long.

If you arrive earlier than the transfer time then you will need to wait at the airport for your pick up. If flights are delayed then transfers may also be delayed. If flights are significantly delayed or cancelled then you may need to take a taxi to the start hotel and make a claim on your insurance or to your airline.

You will find our most up to date transfer times on the **Holiday Details** page on the Link (once you've made your booking). If you need to know the timings before booking, please get in touch via email: [cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk](mailto:cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk).

## Navigation

We provide you with colour maps and altitude profiles, as well as detailed directions of where to go. Our guides will even aim to be at those 'easy to miss' junctions and as you will see the van and guides regularly, navigation does not tend to be a problem.

For those of you with GPS units, we have GPS files available and will post them on The Link a few weeks before departure, in .gpx, and .tcx formats.

The files can be downloaded onto most units, including Garmin and Wahoo and in their most basic form provide a purple line to follow. With the more recent units you will also receive a set of visual instructions as you approach a turning. Our GPS tracks take you from hotel to hotel.

## Am I Fit Enough?

It is normal (and only right) that you should consider whether or not you are fit enough for a cycling holiday in the mountains.

We have created our Classic Cols range of holidays in order to open up the world of road cycling in the mountains to those who may not have experienced it before. Our itinerary warms you up gently to the altitude, the extended climbing and to the technique of descending.

Our Classic Route is an achievable goal for regular and fit cyclists who have never climbed a mountain on a bike before. Our vehicles and guides are on hand to support you on your holiday and can offer advice, moral support and lifts in the van if you are tired.

Other holidays where the Classic route is considered 'easier' are the Cévennes & Ardèche, the Classic Cols of Sardinia, Catalonia and Corsica, as well as our Ventoux & the Verdon Gorge tour (although if you like to test yourself, their Challenge routes certainly pack a punch!)

Our goal at Marmot Tours is to create an ambience of non-competitive cycling with no pressure to keep up with anyone else. It is about achieving your own individual goals and having a fabulous time doing it.

## Am I too fit?

We have designed our Classic Cols style holidays to be accessible to a wide range of riding ability. Having a quick peek at each day's stats for the Challenge route should reassure you that even if you are a very fit and experienced road cyclist, there will be plenty to entertain you on this holiday.

With our daily route options you have the opportunity to cycle all day long, making yourself very tired indeed! If you do our Challenge Route each day then you are looking at 700km with 17500m of ascent during your week, which is more climbing than on some of our Raid trips.

What is so nice about this range of holidays is that you can come along with people who are either less or more experienced than you and you can each get out of it what you want by choosing the daily route for you.

## Pacing and Training

As with all sports holidays, the fitter you are, the more you can relax and enjoy the stunning route.

It can be difficult to find extended climbs for training in the UK, but generally, if you can build up your comfort on the bike (ideally on consecutive days) and your stamina and cardio vascular fitness overall, then you will really benefit when it comes to the holiday itself.

As well as training before the holiday, pacing yourself will go a long way towards you achieving your goals. The joy of a group holiday is that you are likely to find someone to cycle at a similar speed to you, so you don't need to try and keep up with your partner/friend/room mate. The quickest way to injure yourself or burn out is to cycle faster than you feel comfortable going.

We can't emphasise enough that this is your holiday and so, if you want a lift up the hill for whatever reason, your guides will be happy to help.



## Strava

Many cyclists nowadays are using apps like Strava and Garmin Connect to track their progress, training and to compare themselves to their peers.

These apps make for great training tools and interesting post-ride analysis but there are obvious risks associated with competitive cycling styles, pushing yourself beyond your usual tolerance and focusing on live feed information whilst on the bike.

We therefore ask our clients to avoid such 'Live Segment' features when cycling on a Marmot Tours holiday, especially descending, and to focus on the road at all times.

## Gearing/Bikes

Mainly, climbs are not particularly steep (compared to a lot of hills in the UK) but they do go on for a very long time. It is best to make sure that your bike will be suitable for your level of strength/fitness.

For most people a compact (smallest ring on front having 34 teeth), fitted with a 30 or 32 cassette on the rear, is a good choice. It is possible to fit your bike with larger cassettes, using a rear hanger extender, like the WolfTooth RoadLink.

If this all sounds too complicated then we do have some excellent titanium-framed bikes for hire, which are fitted with SRAM 50-34 at the front with 11 speed 11-36 toothed cassettes.

## Guiding

Supporting you on your holiday will be two of our experienced, approachable, knowledgeable and fun guides. Despite being passionate about cycling, both guides will be in support vans as this holiday is all about you and your needs. Between them they will have knowledge of the area and the language and be skilled at bike mechanics.

Having two vehicles per group (regardless of the number of bookings up to a group size of around 20) is what allows us to offer you freedom to cycle at your own pace with a level of independence on this holiday. One van stays on the Classic route and one van covers the Challenge route. Due to the distances involved, those cyclists doing the full challenge route may need to be more independent than those on the Classic Route. Our guides are experts at advising you on the routes, where you can expect to see the van, and what you might need with you.

In the event that you need help for a mechanical issue (for example) one of the vans will be able to quickly get to you with full tool kits, spare back wheels and even a spare bike. We hope you won't need us for anything serious but being prepared for all eventualities is what we do exceptionally well.

You can expect to see a support van with water, snacks and your personal day bag 2 - 4 times a day, so you don't need to carry much on your bike, unless the weather is exceptional!

"Brilliant fun, well organised and supported. I'll be back to do the challenge tour!" C Foot

## Group Dynamics

Your group will be any number up to around 20 riders. This number works really well - it's big enough for you to find others to cycle with at your pace, but not so huge as to feel impersonal! We get lots of clients booking alone and lots of small groups of friends. If you think you can get a group of 18 - 20 people together then we can offer you a custom departure date.

We love that we get a really big variety in terms of cycling experience... from club cyclists, people training for other events, those raising money for charity, ex-pro cyclists and people who are relatively new to cycling who like to try something new on holiday.

## Accommodation

We stay in a selection of 2-3\* hotels with en-suite facilities. The hotels have been selected for their customer service towards cyclists and their location. You will be sharing a twin room with another client (of the same gender) unless you book a single room for a supplement (contact [cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk](mailto:cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk) for availability). Each hotel has a garage/locked room to ensure that your trusty steed has a comfortable night too.

## Food

### Breakfast

No surprise that this is the crucial meal of the day. We're in France of course, so expect continental style breakfasts. We supplement hotel breakfasts with cereals and fruit. Some hotels offer cheese, eggs & meats for your protein kick start.

### Lunches

You know what you like to eat when you are riding and it is not likely to be the same as what the others in your group will want to eat. We don't include lunches so there are no enforced group stops. We strongly advise that you stop for 'proper' food at lunchtime. Each day we recommend a suitable place serving cyclist friendly food which is great for you, and the locals appreciate your custom. We will be sure to have a van there for your midday faff!

## Snacks

Your support van aka snack-shack will be well stocked with a variety of tasty delectables: Salty crisps, bars, cakes, fresh fruit (bananas obviously!), nuts & sweets are the staples. We suggest you bring your own favourite energy powders/gels/bars with you as these will not be easily available en route.

## Dinner

We eat as a group in the evening - either in the hotel or at a nearby restaurant. Expect three courses (and generous portions) which are tailored to the needs of cyclists. Dinner will be served at around 19:30. Wine at dinner is included, however, coffees/soft drinks and beers are not.

Please note that for this itinerary there is a free night in Luchon on day 4, for which dinner/wine are not included. You will be able to choose from one of the many restaurants in town.

## Special diets

Please note your special dietary requirements on the booking form or contact us. Our hotels can cater for most dietary needs and allergies if we know well in advance. Please note that we request that you stick to your dietary preference for the entire trip, as it is very complicated for the hotels (and guides) if an individual is vegetarian for some meals and not for others.

## What's Included

- 6 days supported riding
- Airport transfers at specified times
- Route notes, directions, maps and GPS files
- 7 nights half board accommodation including wine at dinner (excludes evening meal & wine on day 4)
- 2 customised and well stocked vehicles with experienced guides, offering moral support, and nutritional, mechanical and first aid assistance, plus snacks & water





## Bike Hire

Marmot Tours has an excellently maintained fleet of custom built, titanium framed bikes available to rent for your holiday. Advantages of rental include:

- avoiding hefty fees levied by airlines for transport
- worry free travel (knowing your trusty steed is safely stored away at home!)
- the chance to try a titanium bike built specifically with climbing cols in mind (gearing!)
- relinquishing responsibility for cleaning and maintenance to our experienced team.

Please see our [Bike Hire webpage](#) for details like prices as well as full specs and dimensions.

Please note that despite the size of our fleet steadily growing, we cannot guarantee that we will have a bike in your size available. If you would like to hire a bike, please check availability before booking your holiday.

## How to Book

1. Email [cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk](mailto:cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk) to check availability for your preferred departure date. Remember to also check availability for single room and bike hire if they are your preference.
2. Bag your spot with a provisional booking for a week or so while you get planning.
3. Log on to or register with our online booking system, The Link ([link.marmot-tours.co.uk](http://link.marmot-tours.co.uk)), to make your holiday booking.
4. Pay the £400 deposit by BACS or by card online. Receive a confirmation email.
5. Confirmed single room supplements and bike hire are being added manually to your balance invoices, so may take a day or two to appear.
6. We'll post regular holiday information and updates on the Link (you'll receive an email notification).
7. You can meet your fellow holiday makers via The Link Forum and share training / travel plans etc.



## Insurance

Holiday insurance is **essential** for all Marmot Tours holidays and anyone without insurance is not able to take part in the trip. Please arrange your insurance cover at the time of booking, as this will ensure that you are covered if you incur an injury during training and are unable to go on your holiday. We have a very high cancellation rate so are unable to deviate from our cancellation policy.

Your insurance needs to cover you for non-competitive road cycling (cycle touring) at altitude with the following fairly standard inclusions:

- Medical Expenses
- Repatriation

Some clients also like to ensure they have the following optional items:

- Cancellation cover
- Loss or damage to their bike

NB if you are hiring a bike from us there is an insurance element in the fee so you will not need additional cover.

Once you have arranged your insurance, please add the relevant details to the **Before you go...** section of your holiday on [The Link](#). Unlike your passport and emergency contact details, you will need to add insurance details for every trip you are taking.

This ensures we have the most up to date information and are able to assist you in case you have an accident on your holiday.

## Financial Protection

Marmot Tours are members of ABTA, the Association of British Travel Agents.

ABTA and ABTA members help holidaymakers to get the most from their travel and assist them when things do not go according to plan.

As part of our membership contract we are obliged to maintain a high standard of service to you by ABTA's Code of Conduct.

- In line with our ABTA membership (no Y6184), we hold an insurance policy that gives you full financial protection for all funds you pay us for your holiday
- We have full Tour Operators Professional and Public Liability Insurance with specialist brokers Campbell Irvine
- We carry out risk assessments on all of our holidays to ensure we have thought through every detail
- We employ staff with the correct experience and skills to ensure you have a safe and fun trip, and have a thorough training programme each season.

For further information about ABTA, the Code of Conduct and the arbitration scheme available to you if you have a complaint, please contact ABTA, 30 Park St, London, SE1 9EQ (Tel 0203 117 0500).

