

Northern French Alps

Escape to the majestic scenery of the Savoie Alps and set yourself against the mighty climbs made famous by the Tour de France

Summary

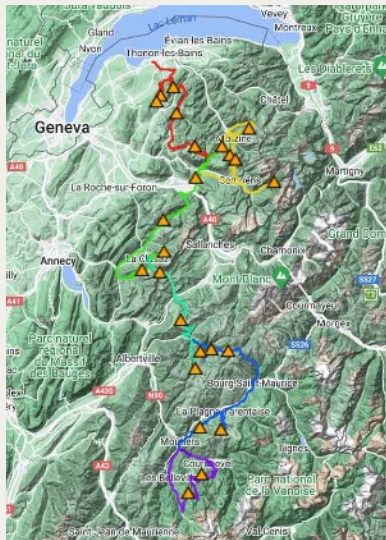
WHERE: French Alps North

DISTANCE: to suit you

TIME : 6 days

PRICE : see website

DATES: June to August



Highlights

Climb famous TdF cols: Col de la Ramaz, Col de Joux Plane, Col de la Colombière, Col des Saisies, Cormet de Roselend and more

Ride the Alps' most extraordinary cycle path over the Col de la Loze and Col de la Tougnète

2 customised support vehicles & experienced, fun and energetic guides



Northern French Alps

Inspired by the 2023 Tour de France route through the Northern French Alps, Marmot Tours is thrilled to add this exciting new itinerary to our portfolio of road cycling adventures.

Starting on the shore of Lake Geneva and ending in Les Trois Vallées, this journey involves six exceptional rides through some of the most spectacular scenery in the Northern Alps. Some of the climbs are already infamous, and some are future classics, but all the cycling is world-class. Every day our Classic route takes on a bucket-list col, and the Harder and Challenge routes add some lesser-known but equally worthy and beautiful climbs. The grand finale of the week is that you get to ride the recently surfaced, traffic-free mountain roads linking Val Thorens, Méribel, and Courchevel.

Regardless of whether you opt for the Classic or Challenge route (or a few days of either!) this week is definitely a holiday and riding through the stunning mountain scenery of the Alps is a real joy. The views are far reaching and dramatic, and the sense of achievement as you summit these climbs will stay with you.

We offer Classic Cols style holidays in many different mountain ranges so you may want to check the [website](#) for more details. For cyclists new to the mountains we recommend starting with the Pyrenean Foothills or Pyrenean Classic Cols holiday as opposed to the Alpine holidays, which involve a little more ascent each day.

Itinerary

Day 0 - Travel Out

Included transfers from Geneva airport to Thonon-les-Bains (1hr 10min). Meet your guides, assemble your bikes and have a welcome briefing and great dinner. Those arriving earlier in the day can go for a warm-up ride along the lake for some beautiful views.

Day 1: Thonon-les-Bains to Les Gets

The gentle and forested 26km climb of Col de Jambaz (1028m) is the ideal introduction to cycling in the Haute-Savoie. From the col, you join a quiet alpine road that undulates through meadows and well-kept villages to the base of the Col de la Ramaz (1619m). This climb is no stranger to the Tour de France and is most famous for the steep middle section hewn out of a sheer cliff. After the ski station of Sommand, the gradients become kinder, and it opens out into high pastures with extensive alpine views. The descent is worth the effort, and all there is left to do is ride up to our lovely hotel (with spa facilities) in the centre of Les Gets (1164m), where we spend two nights.

Today's Classic route is slightly tougher than others on this holiday, but it can be made easier by catching a lift up the steeper section of the Ramaz.

There are a couple of optional extras early in the ride that take in the Col des Moises (1135m), Col de Cou (1116m) and the Col du Feu (1117m).

Classic Route

62km with 1690m ascent

Harder Route

67km with 2140 ascent

Challenge Route

89km with 2720m ascent

Day 2: Day ride from Les Gets

The Col de Joux Plane (1691m) is a climb that has to be on every cyclist's bucket list. It is by no means the highest in the Alps, but it is one of the most characterful. The gradients and scenery are constantly changing, the views towards Mt Blanc are breathtaking, and an idyllic mountain lake and cafe adorn the col. We take on the climb from the south, so we get to enjoy the descent into Morzine before climbing up the Col des Gêts (1172m) and back to the hotel. Les Gets in the Summer is a vibrant but relaxing place to spend the afternoon.

There are a couple of optional extras today. The first is a truly pleasant ride up the Vallée du Fer-à-Cheval (999m) for a look at the famous Cirque. The second is a loop from Morzine up to the Col de la Joux Verte (1760m) and the ski station of Avoriaz.

Classic Route

53km with 1390m ascent

Harder Route

77km with 1720m ascent

Challenge Route

106km with 2560m ascent



Day 3: Les Gets to La Clusaz

Today's destination is the popular Alpine ski station of La Clusaz - a town well worth exploring. To get there, we must cycle over the Côte de Châtillon-sur-Cluses (741m) and then the Col de la Colombière (1613m) - another Tour de France classic. This punchy 16.3km climb passes through lush meadows dotted with picture-perfect chalet-style houses. The serenity is only broken by the sound of cowbells - this is Reblochon cheese country!

The optional extras are at the end of the day. Heading up to the lakeside cafe at the Chapelle des Confins (1420m) is an extremely pleasant way to spend the afternoon. Meanwhile, the Col de la Croix Fry (1460m) from the Manigod side will not disappoint those wanting more of a challenge.

Classic Route

58km with 1500m ascent

Harder Route

84km with 2240 ascent

Challenge Route

93km with 2590m ascent

Day 4: La Clusaz to Beaufort

Cycling up the Col des Aravis (1487m) is the perfect way to start any day! It is a truly beautiful climb through stunning alpine scenery.

A mid-morning coffee in Flumet is a good way to psyche yourself up for the series of irregular switchbacks that kick off your next climb - the Col des Saisies (1650m). Its flowing descent offers vast views of the Mt Blanc Massif, and is a highlight of this alpine cycling holiday.

Once in the pretty village of Beaufort, you can either retire gracefully or venture up the quiet dead-end road to the Barrage de Saint-Guerin (1570m). Those who like a cheeky gradient might also be tempted to cycle up the Col du Pré (1703m), which is not much more than a surfaced farm track.

Classic Route

53km with 1380m ascent

Harder Route

76km with 2220 ascent

Challenge Route

93km with 2860m ascent

Day 5: Beaufort to Brides-les-Bains

This morning's ride is dominated by the Cormet de Roselend (1968m). This is one of the few Alpine climbs without a ski resort at the top, making it a scenic journey around the edge of a vast reservoir, past waterfalls and through alpine meadows inhabited by Marmots.

The descent to Bourg-Saint-Maurice is equally magnificent. From here we pick up a surfaced cycle path down the river Isère to La Plagne-Tarentaise. Leaving the base of the glaciated valley, we climb over the Côte de Longefoy (1174m) and the Col du Tra (1309m) to Notre-Dame-du-Pré. This was first included in the 2023 TdF and became an instant classic! A technical descent takes you to Moûtiers and onto the spa town of Brides-les-Bains, where we spend the final two nights of our cycling holiday.

For an easier day, catching a lift down the Isère Valley (either by train or in our support van) is a good option. Those wanting more (a lot more!) might be tempted to follow in the pedal strokes of Laurent Fignon and take on the road to the ski resort of La Plagne (2093m).

Classic Route

46km with 1450m ascent

Harder Route

85km with 2150 ascent

Challenge Route

120km with 3500m ascent

Day 6: Les Trois Vallées from Brides-les-Bains

Les Trois Vallées is world famous for being a vast ski area. In recent years the governing bodies have seen the rise in cycle tourism in other parts of the Alps, and have evidently decided to trump the lot. They have set about surfacing dirt trails, ski runs, and mountain bike tracks to connect the three valleys. If that is not exciting enough, wait until you hear that these new roads are closed to vehicles! They have created a mecca for road cycling, and today we get to check it out.

The Col de la Loze (2304m) provided an exciting ending to the 2023 TdF queen stage, as it will to your holiday. You start by climbing to Méribel-les-Allues (1430m), a notable climb in its own right and where the 'cycle path' begins. Cycling on pristine car-free asphalt through this harsh, high mountain landscape is a unique experience that hopefully distracts you from the ever-changing (but generally very steep!) gradients and the final wall to the top of the cable car station on the col.

For those of you keen for the ultimate Trois Vallées challenge, your day starts by cycling up to Les Menuires (1800m), where you pick up the new road to the Col de la Tougnète (2400m) [this road is so new that at the time of writing this in July 2023 it has not yet been surfaced!]. This climb is well-positioned to become a future TdF favourite. From here, you descend to Méribel and pick up our Classic Route to pass over the Col de la Loze to Courchevel.

If this all sounds too much, the easier option is cycling to Méribel-Mottaret (1692m) and then nipping around the mountain to Courchevel via La Tania. Whatever you choose, today will be a truly memorable ride!

Easier Route

42km with 1220m ascent

Classic Route

49km with 1750 ascent

Challenge Route

84km with 2820m ascent

Day 7: Travel Back

We offer included transfers from Brides-les-Bains to Geneva airport (about 2hrs) - read on for travel details.



Start & End

Start: Hotel Côté Sud Lemán, 6 Rue du Pamphiot, 74200 Thonon-les-Bains (+33 450 703 670)

End: Hotel Les Chalets, 17 ave du Comte Greyfié de Bellecombe, 73571 Brides-les-Bains (+33 479 552 053)

Travel

Finding flights

We recommend using a comparison tool such as 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 GVA'. 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 in Geneva a day early to help you acclimatise to the new time zone 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

If you are driving, it would be best to park your car at Geneva airport and join our transfers as we are starting and finishing in different places.

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.

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 to **Geneva airport (GVA)** are included in the holiday price. The transfer from Geneva airport to Thonon takes about 1hr 10min and at the end of your trip the transfer back to Geneva takes about 2hrs.

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.

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 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 Pyrenean Foothills, the Classic Cols of the Pyrenees, Corsica and the Cévennes & Ardèche (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 585km with 17050m of ascent during your week. In terms of comparing our Classic Cols Challenge routes, the optional extras are a bit more punchy and similar to our Picos and Slovenia itineraries.

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!

"The way the route is planned to climb so many of the famous TDF climbs is superb. It was so nice to see that [the guides] so much enjoyed and contributed to making the holiday experience so special and memorable for all..."
Geoff S

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

Most of the hotels are 3*. Our hotel in Les Gets is a boutique spa hotel of a very high standard, but un-starred. In Beaufort we stay across two different 2* hotels, adjacent to each other. All rooms have 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 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.

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
- 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 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), 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).

