

Picos Classic Cols

Explore this lesser known area of northern Spain and cycle the beautiful climbs in the Picos and Cantabrian mountains, made famous by La Vuelta

Summary

WHERE: Picos, Spain

DISTANCE: to suit you

TIME : 6 days

PRICE : see website

DATES: May/Jun/Sep



Highlights

Flexible itinerary to suit everyone

Experience Spain's least known and underrated cycling paradise

Vuelta passes: Fuente Dé, Lagos de Covadonga & Angliru

2 customised support vehicles & experienced, energetic guides



Picos Classic Cols

The Picos de Europa in Northern Spain is a little known paradise for cyclists. Few places offer so much variety: rugged limestone mountains, deep gorges, ancient forests, mountain pastures and unspoilt villages. The cycling is varied too: some climbs are gentle and meandering, others are short and sharp, then there is the Alto de Angliru, which is just brutal (and optional!)

The Classic route is manageable and enjoyable for most cyclists if taken steadily but each day there are 'optional extras', building up to the Challenge route, making this holiday suitable for those looking to really push themselves. You really can ride as much or as little as you like, at a pace that suits you, without holding up or being held up by others in the group. That said, with a group of around 20, you can be sure to find someone else on the trip with similar aspirations to you, whether that be sampling 'una cerveza, por favor' in a rustic village bar, or taking on every optional climb on offer.

Whether you opt for the Classic or Challenge route (or a mix) this week is a 'holiday'; the Picos is still unspoilt and more frequented by walkers than cyclists. This, plus the good company of the others in your group and the local Spanish culture and cuisine, all make for an excellent week.

We also offer Classic Cols holidays in the Alps, Dolomites and Pyrenees as well as in Andalusia, Catalonia, Provence, Cevennes & Ardeche, Sardinia and Corsica - please [check our website](#) for more details.

Itinerary

Day 0 - Travel Out

Included transfers from Bilbao airport to Potes, taking about 2hr 45min. Potes is the capital of the Picos and the perfect place to start and end our holiday. It is a lively place with lots of restaurants/bars and a historic old town with a maze of narrow alleys, traditional buildings and steps! Meet your guides, assemble your bikes and have a welcome briefing and great dinner. Our hotel for the first two nights, which is about 1km from the town centre, is in a peaceful setting with a big garden and outdoor pool.

Day 1: Day ride from Potes

The **Puerto de Piedrasluengas (1355m)** to the east of Potes provides you with a great introduction to the Picos. It starts off 'relatively kind', but does have a few cheeky sections in the middle. You climb up through a vast variety of scenery, but eventually emerge from the trees to be treated with a great view from the Mirador (view point) overlooking the Picos to the east and the plains to the south.

From here you head back to Potes, where you have the option of relaxing by the pool, visiting the town or cycling on to **Fuente Dé (1105m)**, in the heart of the Picos d'Europa National Park.

Classic Route

Piedrasluengas [60km with 1100m ascent]

Challenge Route

Piedrasluengas + Fuente Dé
[107km with 1900m ascent]

Day 2: Potes to Soto de Cangas

You have a pleasant start to the day, heading north through the deep gorge of the Desfiladero de la Hermida, almost down to sea level. Turning west you join a beautiful road that skirts around the north high peaks of the Picos. The significant climb on the Classic route is the **Alto de Ortiguero (443m)**. After 75km, at the hotel, you have the option of retiring gracefully, so you can visit the interesting mountain town of Cangas de Onís, or taking on the infamous Vuelta stage ending of **Lagos de Covadonga (1120m)**.

The climb has been called the 'most important climb in the modern history of the Vuelta' and has always been a bit of a fighting ground for the competitors. The challenge comes 7km from the lakes when there is a 800m section of 15%! Ouch - that is going to test your gears (and your legs!). Your reward - a justifiable lie on the grass by the

side of a beautiful lake and cafe at the top, before free-wheeling most of the way back to the hotel. If that is still not enough cycling, then the **Alto de Riensena (534m)** to the North would be a fitting finale to the day.

Easier Option

Ortiguero [75km with 400m ascent]

Classic Route

Ortiguero + Lagos de Covadonga
[114km with 1600m ascent]

Challenge Route

Ortiguero + Lagos de Covadonga + Riensena
[150km with 2400m ascent]

Day 3: Soto de Cangas to Riaño

Fuel up with a post-breakfast churro in Cangas de Onís today (and take a look at the Roman bridge), before the 46km climb up to the **Puerto del Pontón (1280m)**. Its gradients are generally kind and the constantly changing scenery will keep you motivated. You are now on the high plateau of the Picos: forested peaks surrounded by lush fields, laboriously levelled from this otherwise harsh, rocky land. Although going straight up the climb is a good option, it is hard to ignore the beauty of the **Alto de Les Bedules (993m)**, making this a very worthwhile detour.

Our destination is the 'new' town of Riaño which was built on a rocky peninsula when the old town was flooded under the huge reservoir. Despite resembling a set from a wild west film, the setting is amazing with mountains either side of the reservoir. Our hotel offers classic hospitality and its kitchen produces some fine local dishes.

Today's optional extra is at the start of the day, the **Alto de Cazo (653m)**, a beautiful climb on narrow roads through some very rural countryside.

Easier Option

Puerto del Pontón [69km with 1300m ascent]

Classic Route

Les Bedules + Pontón [90km with 1950m ascent]

Challenge Route

Cazo + Les Bedules + Pontón
[106km with 2600m ascent]



Day 4: Riaño to Campomanes

The high plateau to the west of Riaño has a unique, rural beauty. We traverse the region over several small mountain passes, though narrow gorges, remote villages and terraced hillsides. It is a truly stunning ride and the descent from the **Passo Pajares (1378m)** is a real treat. Then you have the option of retiring gracefully to our rustic hotel with atmospheric bar in Campomanes or taking on one of two great climbs...

The **Alto de La Cobertoria (1173m)** is no stranger to the Vuelta and with good tarmac and stunning views it is bound to be a highlight of the trip, despite being fairly tough! Those wanting even more can then add on the **Alto del Gamoniteiro (1772m)**. This is often referred to as the Ventoux of Spain and a brutal climb to the top of the mountain. Being on the highest point of the highest mountain around, the views are mind-blowing!

Classic Route

Valdeteja + Cármenes + Pajares
[129km with 1330m ascent]

Challenge Route

Valdeteja + Cármenes + Pajares + Cobertoria + Gamoniteiro [168km with 3080m ascent]



Day 5: Campomanes to Riaño

What goes down, must go up again! The **Alto de San Isidro (1520m)** is another epic climb, going on for the best part of 30km to a small ski station and welcome restaurant opportunity. This is followed by a short descent and a beautiful gentle climb up to the **Puerto de Las Señales (1625m)**. From here you roll back down to the shores of the reservoir and your hotel in Riaño. For those on the Classic route, a detour up the **Alto de la Collaona (850m)** early in the day is well worthwhile.

Foolhardy masochists might want to take on the gradients of the mighty **Alto de l'Angliru (1570m)** today - a climb that needs no introduction and warrants serious respect! It was first included in the Vuelta back in 1999 as a rival to the Alpe

d'Huez and Mortirolo and it did not take long before it was dubbed 'the most demanding climb in professional cycling'. The main climb is only 7km, but has an average gradient of 14% and an extended section of 24% - ouch! In order to get to the Angliru, you must first endure the **Alto de El Cordal (789m)** which serves as a good warm-up!

NOTE: If you want to attempt the Angliru but find the statistics daunting, we propose that you catch a lift to the summit of El Cordal first thing. We also have a limited number of places in the van for those wanting a lift from the Mirador de l'Angliru to Levinco (25km from the top of San Isidro, saving 46km of less picturesque riding).

Classic Route

San Isidro + Las Señales
[115km with 1800m ascent]

Challenge Route

El Cordal + Angliru + San Isidro + Las Señales
[171km with 3600m ascent]

Day 6: Riaño to Potes

Today you venture into the heart of the Picos d'Europa National Park. It is a day of narrow gorges, towering limestone cliffs and lush green meadows. You set off very gently to the understated **Puerto de Panderruedas (1450m)** and descend to the mountain town of Posada de Valdeón. Over a coffee you can contemplate the option of taking on the most famous 'tourist road' in the Picos - the narrow gorge to Caín de Valdeón. Unusually, it starts with a descent to the isolated village of Caín where the road turns into a narrow path. Here you turn around and now take on the climb back up! It is a decision requiring some commitment, as the road is narrow and our support vehicles cannot get down here!

Next 'up' is the **Puerto de Pandetrave (1562m)**, a cheeky climb that leads onto the **Puerto de San Glorio (1608m)** and a fun descent back to Potes and the hotel pool!

Classic Route

Panderruedas + Pandetrave + San Glorio
[91km with 1400m ascent]

Challenge Route

Panderruedas + Caín + Pandetrave + San Glorio [109km with 2300m ascent]

Day 7 - Travel Back

We offer included transfers from Potes to Bilbao airport - more info in our travel section.



Start & End

Hotel Infantado, Carretera General s/n, 39584 Ojedo, Cantabria, Spain (+34 942 730 939)

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 BIO'. 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 Bilbao 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 take a ferry to Santander and drive to Potes, leaving your car there till you return on the last night of the holiday.

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 **Bilbao (BIO)** are included in the holiday price. The transfer time to the start/end hotel is around 2hr 45min.

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 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 Pyrenean Foothills, the Classic Cols of the Pyrenees, Catalonia, Sardinia, Corsica, Cevennes & Ardeche and Ventoux & the Verdon Gorge - 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 at 800+km with 15,900m of ascent during your week, which is comparable to some of our Raid trips. This Challenge route is also comparable to the Gran Canaria, Alps, Southern Alps and Pyrenean ones: more km and slightly less ascent but with some rudely steep climbs!

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. Those looking at taking on Angliru (optional extra) will certainly be needing a low gear - it is the steepest climb in pro cycling!

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

"Picos: a great area to cycle. Classic Cols trips suit me and my maturing body down to the ground - length of cycling days was good, plenty of unwinding & socialising time but suitably challenging riding" K Fitzgerald

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!

"I think you have found another winner in the Picos". N Salmons

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 and 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 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. All hotels have a buffet style breakfast with cereals, eggs, meats and cheeses. We supplement hotel breakfasts with cereals and fruit. Breakfast in Spain is generally from 8:30am.

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! Bear in mind that this is Spain, so lunches are generally served from 2pm.

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 20:30 (this is Spanish culture, so you may want to bring some recovery bars, etc. to keep you going until then). 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 on arrival and departure days 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).

