

Classic Cols of the Southern Alps

Discover the hidden gems of the Mediterranean Alps and enjoy some of the most beautiful and quiet Tour de France climbs amidst breathtaking scenery

Summary

WHERE: Mediterranean Alps

DISTANCE: to suit you

TIME : 6 days on the bike

PRICE : see website

DATES: June & July

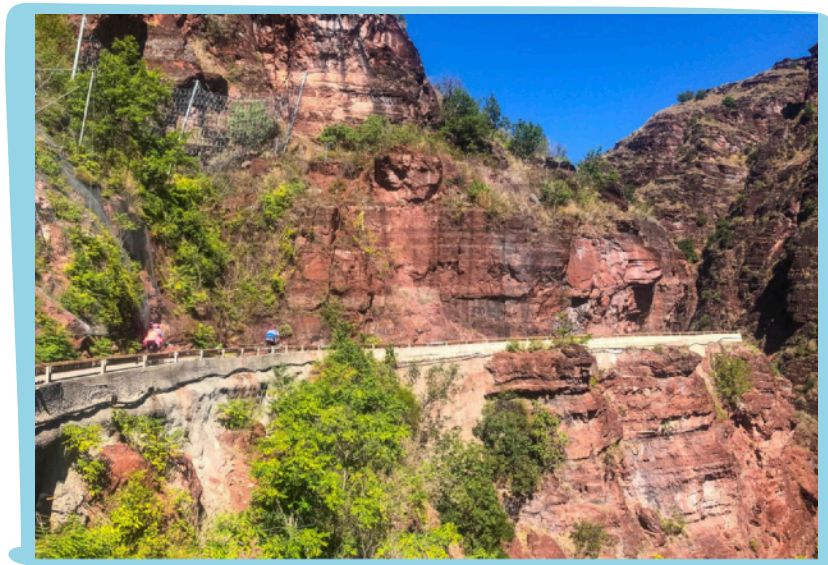


Highlights

Cycle iconic, yet quiet TdF climbs like the Cime de la Bonette, Col de Vence, Col de Turini, Col de la Cayolle and Col de Madone

Flexible itinerary to suit everyone

2 customised support vehicles & experienced, energetic guides



Classic Cols of the Southern Alps

Just inland from Nice, the Mediterranean Alps are an idyllic playground for cyclists looking for quiet roads and a variety of both challenging and gentle climbs. Throw in some spectacular and varied scenery (picture deep gorges, barren mountain sides, oak forests and narrow ravines), the Mediterranean climate, some comfortable hotels and the peerless support of the Marmot Tours guides, and this has to be the perfect Summer road cycling holiday.

During your 6 days of cycling, you'll loop around the Mercantour National Park on a point-to-point journey which takes in most of the iconic climbs that have been made famous by the Tour de France. A highlight of the trip is the the Cime de la Bonnette, which up at 2802m, is the highest surfaced road in Europe. That said, there's a 'bucket list climb' to tick off every day - Col de Vence, Col de Turini, Col de la Cayolle and Col de Madone, to name a few.

In contrast to the vibrant city of Nice (where we spend our final night), the mountains to the north are arid and unpopulated. It is a rugged landscape of deep gorges, sheer cliffs, oak and pine forests as well as serene Alpine pastures. Linking the remote villages is a network of roads that cling to the mountainside, gaining height with tightly stacked hairpins and gravity defying feats of military engineering.

We also offer Classic Cols holidays in the Cevennes & Ardeche, Ventoux & the Verdon Gorge, Andalusia, Corsica, Sardinia, Catalonia, Slovenia, the Picos, Alps, Dolomites and the Pyrenees too, please check our website to compare.

Itinerary

Day 0 - Travel Out

Included transfers from Nice Airport to the start hotel in the hills of the Var valley (25min transfer). Assemble your bikes and, depending on your arrival time, go for an exploratory spin or relax in the hotel grounds with bar and swimming pool. Welcome briefing and a great dinner will follow.

Day 1: Circular ride from Carros

The **Col de Vence (963m)** is the perfect way to kick start our week of cycling. The gradients are kind (6.5-7%) and incredible scenery provides a good distraction. From the summit, mountain after mountain stretch out into the distance; this our playground for the rest of the week.

As always we offer various route options, the most challenging of which takes in a big loop of the Parc Naturel Régional des Préalpes d'Azur over the **Col de Bleine (1440m)**.

Shortest route

Col de Vence [61km with 1150m ascent]

Classic route

Col de Vence + Roquestéron
[101km with 1420m ascent]

Challenge route

Col de Vence + Col de Bleine
[128km with 2410m ascent]

Day 2: Carros to Valberg

The Gorge de Cians dominates today's ride. Hewn into the sheer burgundy cliffs is a famous balcony road, which snakes its way up to the ski resort of **Valberg (1673m)**. En route, you pass waterfalls, deep ravines and precariously placed natural rock sculptures. It is a truly memorable ride.

The routes split at the start of the day. Those wanting to save their energy enjoy a descent down to the valley road and follow the River Var to the base of the gorge. The other option is to head over the **Col de Vé Goutier (1093m)** and the Col de Saint-Raphél (876m) on another beautiful quiet road.

For those wanting a bit more, then the nipping down to Guillaumes at the end of the day is a fitting challenge.

Classic route

Col de Valberg [68km with 1500m ascent]

Classic Cols of the Southern Alps

Challenge route

Cols de Vé Goutier + Saint Raphaël + Valberg
[96km with 2600m ascent]

Extra option

Guillaumes [adds 28km with 900m ascent]

Day 3: Valberg to Barcelonnette

We start the day with a wonderful descent to Guillaumes at the head of the Gorges de Daluis. From here the only way is up, as we follow the river Var towards its mountainous source. After 33km of spectacular riding you arrive at the **Col de la Cayolle (2327m)**, where your efforts are rewarded with some stunning mountain vistas.

The descent to the lively mountain town of Barcelonnette, where we spend the night, is a delight. Here you can decide to either retire gracefully or head out for more cycling in the form of the **Col d'Allos (2247m)**.

Classic route

Col de la Cayolle [77km with 1600m ascent]

Challenge route

Col de la Cayolle + Col d'Allos
[112km with 2700m ascent]



Day 4: Barcelonnette to Auron

The gravity-defying road to the **Cime de la Bonette (1808m)** was built in the 1930s as part of the Maginot line military fortifications along the French/Italian border. Cyclists really get to fully appreciate this magnificent bit of road building into the remote mountains, with only the occasional crumbling concrete gunning post deterring from its natural beauty. The actual Col de la Bonette (2717m) has been cut out of the narrow ridge, providing a cunning short cut for those who can't face the final cheeky gradients.

The descent to Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée will certainly put a smile on your face. All that remains is a final push to the ski station of **Auron (1610m)**.

Today's optional extra takes you up the very narrow, remote and challenging **Col de la Moutière (2452m)**, which in places is not much more than a surfaced farm track.

Classic route

Cime de la Bonette + Auron
[65km with 1800m ascent]

Easier option

Skip the last ascent of the Classic route and catch a lift in the van [55km with 1400m ascent]

Challenge route

Cime de la Bonette + Col de la Moutière + Auron
[93km with 3100m ascent]

Day 5: Auron to Col de Turini

A sweeping descent lines us up for the main event and one of the highlights of your week - the **Col de Turini (1605m)**. Etched out of the mountainside, this road was made famous by the Monte Carlo Rally, which enjoys its endless, well-graded hairpin bends. Naturally, it's also great (but somewhat challenging!) on 2 wheels and is a favourite of Chris Froome, who trains a lot in this area. Our hotel is on the top of the climb, so the only way is up; hopefully the thought of a cool beer on the hotel terrace might help motivate you for the final push.

Today's optional extra is early in the day and takes the form of the brutal but stunning **Col de la Lombarde (2347m)**.

Classic route

Col Saint Martin + Col de Turini
[90km with 2050m ascent]

Challenge route

Cols Saint Martin + Lombarde + Turini
[131km with 3500m ascent]

Day 6: Col de Turini to Nice

To end our week of world class cycling, we head to the city of Nice, where our 4* hotel is within easy walking distance of the Vieille port and the Café du Cycliste.

We start the day with a rollercoaster descent down the Turini, however there is the option of first taking in the **Circuit de l'Authion (2016m)**. This is a 'noose' shaped loop around the mountainside on a narrow military road which comes recommended by Chris Froome (Cyclist, November 2017 - we featured in The Big Ride in this issue). This lines us up nicely for the **Col de Braus (1005m)**, the climb itself is nothing special, but the descent down a series of tightly stacked hairpins is truly epic.

The climbs keep coming today and the next is the **Col de Saint-Pancrace (673m)**. For those of you wanting even more of a challenge, you can continue to the **Col de la Madone (927m)**, which was made famous by Lance Armstrong who favoured this area for his training. Descending to La Turbie, we pick up the 'upper balcony road', which snakes along the coastal mountains with spectacular views down to the Mediterranean far below. Made famous by the time-trial on the Paris-Nice Classic (known as the 'Race to the Sun'), the Col d'Èze (507m), is a fitting finale.

Classic route

Cols de Braus + Saint-Pancrace + d'Èze
[86km with 1200m ascent]

Challenge route

Circuit de L'Authion + Cols de Braus + Madone + Col d'Èze [110km with 2000m ascent]

Day 7: Travel Back

We offer included transfers back to Nice Airport (20min) - read on for more detail about your travel options.





Start & End Hotels

Start: Promotel, 123, 1ère Avenue, 06510 Carros, France (+33 493 087 780)

End: Novotel Centre Vieux Nice, 8-10 Esplanade du Parvis de l'Europe, 06300 Nice, France (+33 493 133 075)

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 NCE'. 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 Nice 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...

There are many flights in and out of Nice and the hotels both at the start and end are close to the airport, so if you prefer a flight that does not tie in well with our transfer times, it's an easy option to take a taxi independently.

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.

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 **Nice airport (NCE)** are included in the holiday price. The transfers times are around 30min at the start of the trip and 20min at the end of the trip.

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 Tour of Tenerife, the Classic Cols of the Pyrenees, Ventoux & the Verdon Gorge 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 687km with 16880m of ascent during your week which is comparable to 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.

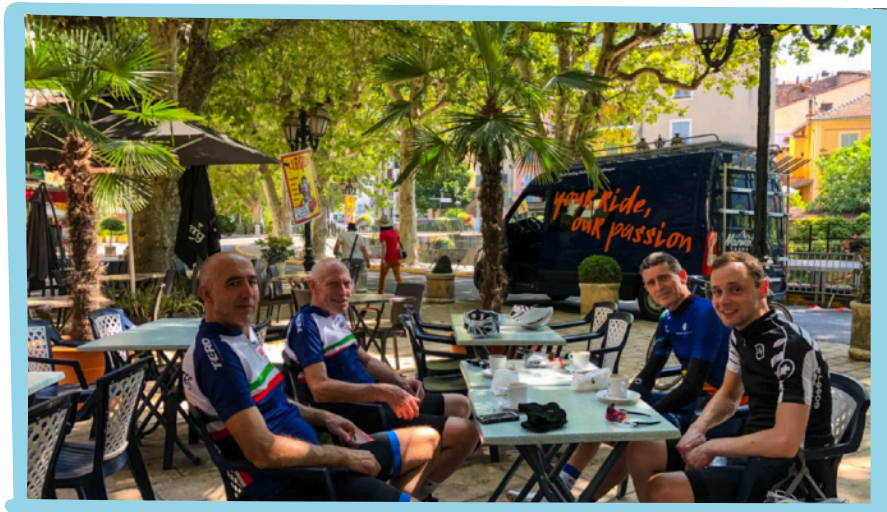
Pacing and Training

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

"This trip was fabulous and made by the awesome guides...the small things and attention to detail really made a big difference" H Gray

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!

"Just coming down to earth now after an unforgettable week of amazing scenery and new friendships made". R Bill

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 variety of hotels selected for their location and great cycling opportunities. Although all comfortable and with en suite facilities, the accommodation for three out of the seven nights is more basic than our average choice of hotels. 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

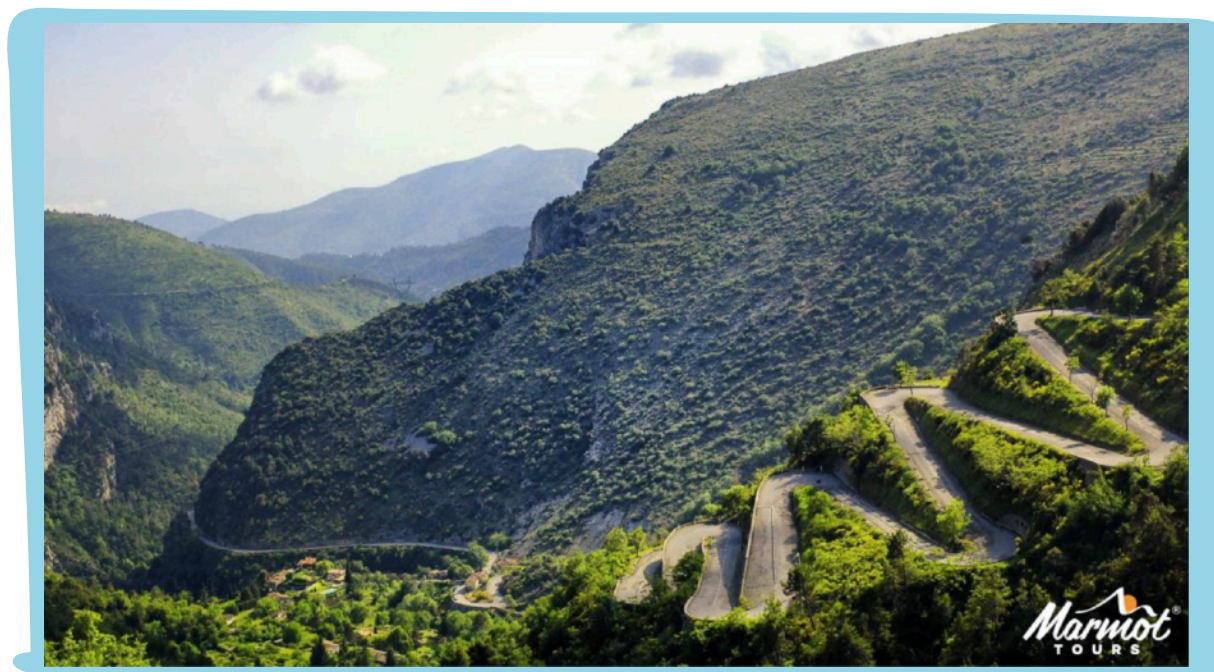
We eat as a group in the evening - either in the hotel or at a nearby restaurant. Expect three courses (and generous portions) which are tailored to the needs of cyclists. Dinner will be served at around 19:30. Wine at dinner is included, however, coffees/soft drinks and beers are not.

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).

