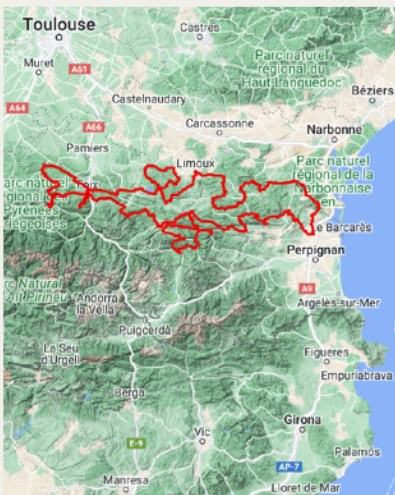


# Pyrenean Foothills

An exploration of the remote and beautiful foothills of the Pyrenees with a spectacular scenery of castle ruins, gorges, vineyards, moorland and ancient forests

## Summary

**WHERE:** Mediterranean / Southern France  
**DISTANCE:** to suit you  
**TIME :** 6 days on the bike  
**PRICE :** see website  
**DATES:** May, Sep



## Pyrenean Foothills (Mediterranean France)

This flexible road cycling itinerary has been carefully crafted to give you the opportunity to cycle this remote and beautiful landscape in Mediterranean France during spring and autumn, when the weather is cooler and ideal for cycling.

The landscape between Carcassonne, Foix and Perpignan is a delightful place to ride a road bike. It is peppered with deep gorges, vineyards, thick forests and spectacular medieval castles. The narrow roads that link the pretty, sun-baked villages are quiet and generally well surfaced, but the countryside here is far from flat.

This is a Classic Cols style holiday, so you can expect our usual route choices, Classic or Challenge as well as some easier and harder options. This holiday is ideal for mixed ability groups and those new to cycling in the mountains as the climbs are relatively short and the gradients generally kind. Those on the Classic route can expect to cycle an average of 82km/day with about 1,130m ascent. The optional extras on the Challenge route mean an average of up to 125km/day with 2,270m ascent.

Regardless of which routes you go for, this week is definitely a holiday and riding on quiet roads through stunning scenery, ticking off historical Cathar castles as you go, is a real joy.

We also offer Classic Cols holidays in the Cevennes & Ardèche, Andalusia, Corsica, Sardinia, Catalonia, Slovenia, the Picos, Alps, Dolomites and the Pyrenees too, please check our [website](#) to compare.

## Highlights

Rural France at its best - explore the stunning and varied scenery on quiet roads.

See a dozen Cathar castles, including Montségur, Quéribus and Peyrepertuse

2 customised support vehicles & experienced, energetic guides

# Itinerary

## Day 0 - Travel Out

Included transfers from Toulouse TLS Airport to the start hotel in Foix (transfer time 1hr 15min). Assemble your bikes and depending on your arrival time, go for an exploratory walk or spin. Welcome briefing and a great dinner will follow.

## Day 1: Day ride from Foix

We begin our cycling adventure by heading west to Mas d'Azil. Here the road follows the river Arize for 0.5km through a cave, complete with stalagmites. Not surprising, this unique bit of road has been included in quite a few TdFs. This takes us to the Chapel of Saint Roch (577m), where we get our first spectacular view of the Pyrenees. Nicely warmed up, we then take on the day's main climb, through the forest to the Col des Marrous (990m). From here, it is all downhill back to our hotel.

As always on a Classic Cols style holiday, there are options for those wanting more, and the vast view from the Col de Péguère (1362m) makes it the obvious extension. You will be pleased to hear that we take on the gentle side, but there is the option of descending to the Col des Caougous (957m) and taking on the 18% gradients of the Mur de Péguère (translates as Wall of Péguère).

### Classic route

[82km with 1330m ascent]

### Easier route

[67km with 1000m ascent]

### Harder route

[99km with 1720m ascent]

### Challenge route

[106km with 2140m ascent]

## Day 2: Foix to Limoux

Today's destination is the historic and pretty town of Limoux on the river Aude. It is famous for its carnival and for being the birthplace of sparkling wine (known as Blanquette de Limoux).

To get there, we head east on a series of delightful roads past Lac de Montbel to Chalabre. We then start ticking off our (so-called) Cathar castles with a detour to the Château de Puivert, which leads us into our main climb of the day, over the Col de Festes (678m) and down through the vineyards to our town centre hotel.

As always, there are options to extend your ride, and a loop over the Col du Bac (620m) from Chalabre makes for a delightful ride through rural France.

Whatever route you take, a degustation of Limoux's bubbly might be in order tonight!

### Classic route

[81km with 900m ascent]

### Harder route

[120km with 1250m ascent]

### Challenge route

[139km with 1850m ascent]



## Day 3: Limoux to Rivesaltes

Deep ravines, vineyards and holm oak forests dominate today's ride as we continue our journey through the Corbières towards the Mediterranean on a network of quiet lanes. There are various options today, but they all take us via the remote Château de Termes, a highlight of the region.

The Classic route takes us over the Col de la Loubière (599m), whilst the other options head to Arques (detour to the Château) over the Col de Valmigière (700m). Our Harder route then heads over the appropriately named Col du Paradis (627m), whilst the Challenge route embarks on a spectacular loop over the Col de La Fage (731m) via Rennes-Les-Bains.

From Termes we undulate between remote villages with some views of the Mediterranean to our resort hotel (with a swimming pool) on the outskirts of Rivesaltes. Despite being a long way, the gradients are generally kind, making it a pleasurable ride.

### Classic route

[107km with 1550m ascent]

### Harder route

[128km with 1800m ascent]

### Challenge route

[149km with 2100m ascent]

## Day 4: Rivesaltes to Quillan

As cyclists we are used to the idea of bagging cols, but today we become “Château baggers”! Nearly every rocky outcrop is adorned with a semi-ruined castle balancing precariously on the clifftops, maximising its defensive position. Once inaccessible, they now have narrow roads snaking their way up to their gates. These climbs are all optional and make up our Challenge route.

We start by heading to Tuchan, where you have the option of detouring up the Château d’Aguilar (261m). This leads us through the vineyards into the gorge of the Grau de Padern to Cucugnan at the base of the Château de Quéribus (612m) and onto Duilhac overlooked by the Château de Peyrepertuse (699m). This is truly wonderful riding through rural France.

A short climb over the Col d’en Guilhem (498m) lines you up for a spectacular descent into the Gorge De Galamus on a narrow road that has been hewn into the cliffs of this deep canyon – this is a real highlight of this cycling holiday. Our final (optional) climb to the Col de Saint-Louis (696m) is another remarkable bit of road building, gaining altitude with loop-the-loops and some challenging gradients. From here it is downhill to our hotel in Quillan, where we will spend the next two nights.

### Easier route

[96km with 1150m ascent]

### Classic route

[102km with 1500m ascent]

### Challenge route

[123km with 2300m ascent]

## Day 5: Day ride from Quillan

Being based in Quillan affords us many options, both on and off the bike. The town is charming, and there are some lovely walks into the surrounding countryside. Those wanting to enjoy the full Cathar experience could take the bus to the medieval citadel of Carcassonne. There is also a lot of fun to be had white water rafting down the river Aude!

However, this is a road cycling holiday, and there are a few delightful circular rides to be done in the foothills of the Pyrenees. All routes take in the Gorges de la Pierre-Lys, the beautiful Rebenty valley, climb over the Col d’Aunat (960m) and descend through the Gorges de Saint Georges. The Challenge route takes you past the Château d’Usson and then on a beautiful road over the Col des Moulis (1099m) and Col du Garavel (1256m).

Alternatively, or in addition, cycling over the Col du Campérié (514m) to “bag” the mountain top Château de Puilaurens (610m) is well worth the effort.

### Classic route

[67km with 800m ascent]

### Harder route

[86km with 1250m ascent]

### Challenge route

[116km with 2050m ascent]

## Day 6: Quillan to Foix

We climb straight from the hotel to the Col de Portel (601m), where we descend gently over a beautiful high plateau to Château de Puivert and then over the Col de Babourade (658m) to Bélesta. This is a good place for refreshments before taking on the Col de Montségur (1056m). The col is at the base of a massive “pog” adorned with the Château de Montségur, which is famous for being the final stronghold of the Cathars back in 1244. The siege lasted for 10 months and ended with 200 Cathars being burned alive, having refused to renounce their faith!

You will be pleased to hear that there is no road going all the way up the castle, but there is still a bit more climbing to the base of the Château de Roquefixade (756m). This beautiful balcony road with spectacular views takes us all the way back to our town centre hotel in Foix. Time for a much-deserved beer at the riverside microbrewery!

Those wanting a longer ride have the option of climbing over the Col de Coudons (883m) and the Col de la Croix des Morts (898m) first thing or challenging yourself up the Prat d’Albis (1460m) – a climb made famous in the 2019 Tour de France.

### Classic route

[72km with 1400m ascent]

### Harder route

[83km with 1700m ascent]

### Challenge route

[117km with 2780m ascent]

## Day 7 - Travel Back

We offer included transfers back to Toulouse TLS airport (1hr 15min) - read on for more details about your travel options.





## Start & End Hotel

Hôtel Lons, 6 place Georges Dutilh, 09000 Foix, France. (Tel. +33 534 092 800)

## 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

Driving works well for this itinerary as we start and finish at the same hotel in Foix. Whilst it is not possible to leave your car at the hotel, there is

a free car park at Foix train station, 500m from the hotel.

### 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 Foix (1hr 10min). The start/end hotel is 500m from Foix station.

### 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 and take about 1hr 15min.

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. This itinerary has generally got gentle gradients and the climbs are not as long. The terrain is more undulating, with multiple climbs a day, giving you an opportunity to rest your legs in between.

Our Classic Route is an achievable goal for regular and fit cyclists who have never climbed a mountain on a bike before and one of our easiest itineraries. 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 Classic Cols of the Pyrenees, Cévennes & Ardèche, Catalonia, Sardinia, Corsica 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. If you do our Challenge Route each day then you are looking at 750km with 13220m of ascent during your week.

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!

"Out tour guides were exceptional. They worked tirelessly to ensure our holiday experience was perfect in a professional, caring and fun way." Dave C

## 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 comfy 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.

## 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](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).

