

Raid du Massif Central (Southern France)

916km cycling challenge through the stunning and mountainous Auvergne, Cévennes and Haut-Languedoc regions of France, amassing 16,900m ascent!

Summary

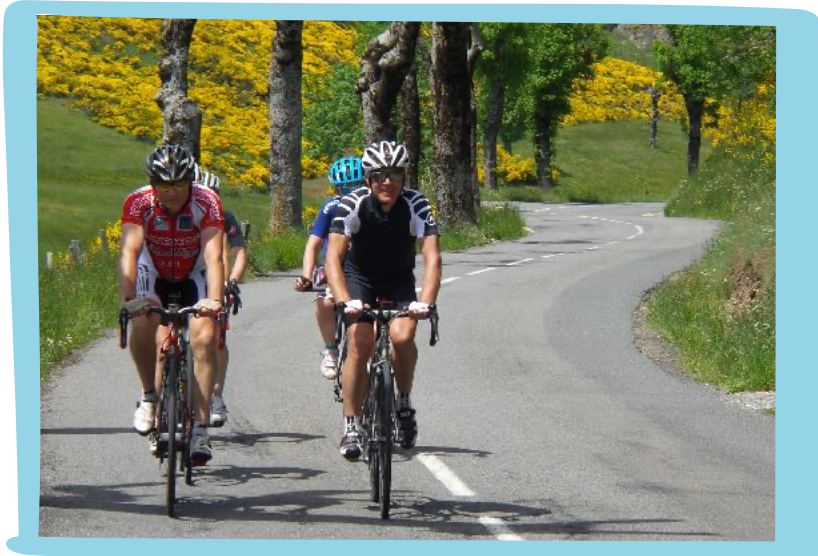
WHERE: Massif Central

DISTANCE: 916km

TIME : 6 days

PRICE : see website

DATES: September



Raid du Massif Central

The Massif Central in Southern France includes a host of mountainous areas separated from the Alps by the Rhone Valley. Spanning 15% of France, it offers you an incredibly beautiful and varied backdrop for your Raid - from the volcanoes of the Auvergne through the chestnut forests and limestone gorges of the Cévennes and on to the dry mountains of the Haut-Languedoc.

The Mazamet Cycling Club created the Raid du Massif Central to showcase the best of the area's road cycling and you will follow the official Raid route, stamping your carnet in a variety of places along the way. For successful finishers there is a certificate and medal to reward you for your endeavours. On close inspection of the region, however, there were some cycling 'gems' not included in the Mazamet Raid so we felt it absolutely necessary to 'embellish' the official route with some worthy Marmot diversions. These don't interfere with any of the compulsory stops but nicely add to the charm of this route and ensure you will not be missing out on some 'must-do' climbs!

The Raid is a cycling challenge but it is also your holiday. Marmot Tours has been supporting clients on our Raid challenges for over 15 years and ensuring that you have a great time is what we are passionate about. You will love the ride, the country and the route, enjoying some great banter along the way. We leave no stone unturned in preparing for your holiday and making it the best it can be. Which is why you just have to eat, sleep and turn the pedals....

Highlights

Cycle the volcanic region of the Auvergne, limestone gorges of the Cévennes & mountains of the Haut-Languedoc

Official Mazametain Raid with certificate & medal

6 days on the bike, averaging 153km and 2800m ascent per day



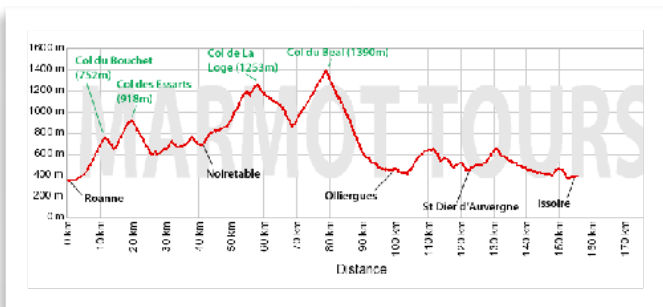
Your Raid Route

Day 0 - Travel Out

We offer included transfers from Geneva airport to the start hotel in Roanne (approx 2hr 45min). Meet your guides, assemble and test out your bikes in the mountains of the Madeleine just west of the hotel. In the evening there is a welcome briefing followed by a good dinner.

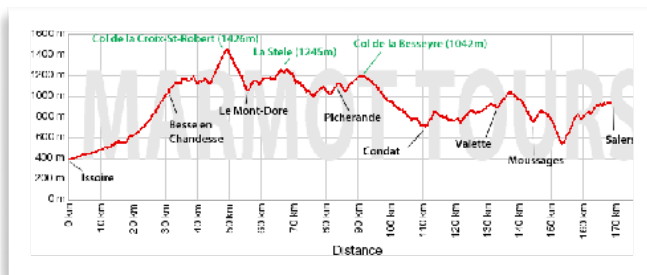
Day 1 - Roanne to Issoire 163KM WITH 2900M ASCENT

With the sun on your back you warm up in more ways than one on the Col du Bouchet (752m) and the Col des Essarts (918m). This takes you to the base of the Monts du Forez: a high ridge that marks the edge of the Loire valley. In the true spirit of Raiding you take on this ridge twice - first via the Col de la Loge (1253m) before dropping back down and taking on the challenging Col du Béal (1390m). The latter is the highest pass on the ride and is topped with a fine restaurant offering spectacular views. From here you head to the pretty town of St-Dier-d'Auvergne for your first 'tampon'. For the final 30km of the day you will undulate through rural France at its best to the large town of Issoire and to your 3* hotel with outdoor heated pool.



Day 2 - Issoire to Salers 170KM WITH 3100M ASCENT

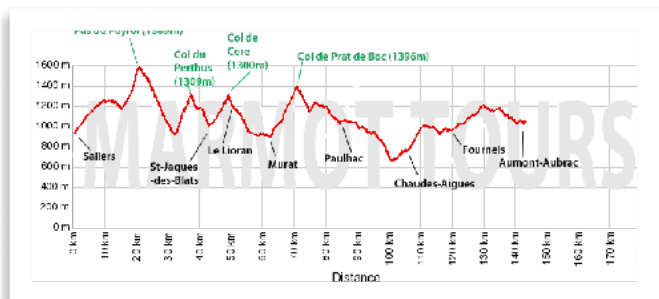
Today you traverse the Parc Naturel Regional des Volcans d'Auvergne, a landscape of volcanoes, contrasting lush meadows and happy cows! After 50km of climbing through gorges, open pastures, ancient forests and past historic walled cities you eventually get to the open moorland and the Col de la Croix Saint-Robert (1426m). The horizon is dominated by the Puy de Sancy, which up at 1885m is the highest point in Central France.



Fortunately for you, there is no road going up it, so you will just have to be content with undulating around its base!

Recharged by a sneaky coffee in the resort/spa town of Le Mont-Dore, you undulate your way south over numerous short climbs including La Stèle (1245m) and the Col de la Besseyre (1042m). This is a stunning ride on a good road with hardly any traffic - cows outnumber people in this part of the world! Your destination is one of the most beautiful towns in France: Salers, famous for its cheese production.

Day 3 - Salers to Aumont-Aubrac 143KM WITH 3200M ASCENT



Your ride today is dominated by the Puy Mary: the ‘Volcano of Cantal’. The TdF has showcased this area as one of the greatest places to ride a bike, not only due to the amazing scenery but also due to the gradients of the climbs (more about that later)!

Before the climbing begins in earnest make sure you have collected your ‘tampon’ in Salers. Onwards and upwards from here: the Pas de Peyrol (1589m) has gradients resembling the slopes of a child’s drawing of a volcano, cranking up to 14% in the final few km. Ouch!

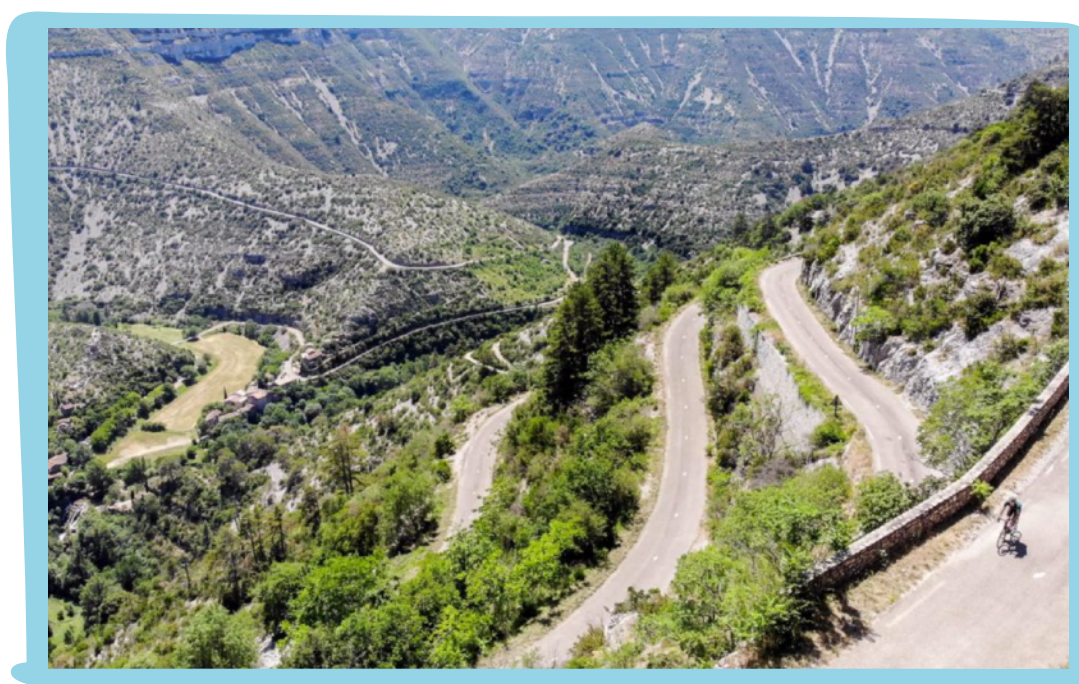
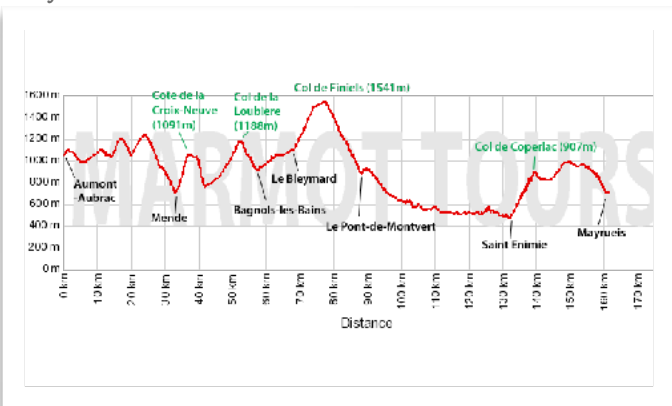
Following the exact route of stage 5 of the 2016 TdF you will head over the Col du Perthus (1589m) and up to the Col de Cère (1300m).

After a quick stop in Murat you take on the Col de Prat de Bouc (1396m) and then turn your back on the volcanoes and head for the deep Gorges de la Truyere and beyond to your destination in the mountain town of Aumont-Aubrac.

Day 4 - Aumont-Aubrac to Meyrueis 162KM WITH 2900M ASCENT

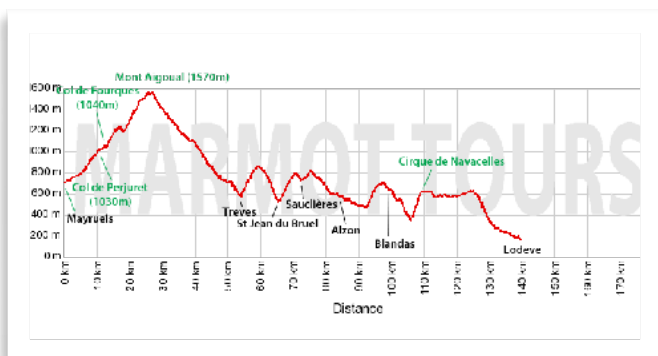
Your ride starts pleasantly, undulating its way to the town of Mende. Here you take on the Cote de La Croix-Neuve (1091m), a climb that is dedicated to Laurent Jalabert. It is short (3km) but exceptionally steep (lots of 12-16%), so caused a bit of a stir in the 2015 TdF when they had a stage ending at the top of it! The suffering will soon be over (honest!) and the Col de la Loubière (1188m) is a hidden treasure. Next up is the Col de Finiels (1541m), which takes you over Mont Lozère. It is a bleak landscape strewn with granite boulders, but the views from here are spectacular.

With most of the climbing behind you, enjoy a leisurely riverside lunch in the picturesque town Le Post de Montvert. Next, head deep into the Gorges du Tarn for 40km before climbing over the limestone plateau of Mejean. A breathtaking descent takes you into the Gorges de la Jone and the market town of Meyrueis.



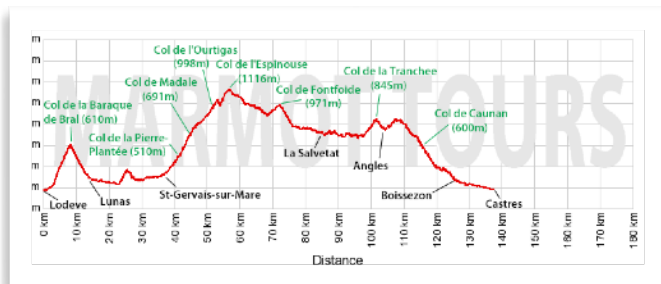
Day 5 - Meyrueis to Lodève 140KM WITH 2400M ASCENT

First up today is the mighty **Mont Aigoual (1567m)**. It is a fantastic climb through chestnut, beech and pine forests. On emerging you are greeted with a stunning view of the Med to the south and Provence to the east, broken only by Mt Ventoux in the distance. Enjoy the descent to Treves before undulating across barren plateau and deep gorges with the highlight of the **Cirque de Navacelles**. Your destination is the vibrant town of Lodève.



However, the river Vis has gouged a deep trench in your way, dictating that you descend and climb back up to **St Thomas-Navacelles (581m)**.

A coffee and a tampon stop in Lodève prepares you for the **Col de la Baraque de Bral (610m)** and the stunning climb up the **Col de l'Espinouse (1166m)**. From here you descend (mostly!) through beautiful rural France to our comfortable 4* hotel in Castres.



Party Time!

Day 6 - Lodève to Castres 138KM WITH 2400M ASCENT

The mountains of Haute-Languedoc are one of the hidden treasures of the Massif Central. You will find great tarmac, quiet roads, well graded climbs and vineyards plus a great climate! Is it any wonder that so many cyclists retire to the region? You start by climbing up to **Montdardier (616m)** onto a sparse barren plateau, at which altitude you would no doubt like to stay.

Day 7 - Travel Back

All good things must come to an end. We offer included transfers to Toulouse airport. Please see the Travel Section below for airport drop off times.



Start & End Hotels

Start: **Hotel Kyriad Direct Roanne**, 38 rue de Matel, 42300 Roanne. (+33 4 77 72 72 73)

End: **Hotel Mercure Castres L'Occitan**, 201 Ave Charles De Gaulle, 81100 Castres. (+33 5 63 35 34 20)

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 into Geneva 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.

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 **Geneva airport (GVA)** to the start hotel, and from the end hotel to **Toulouse airport (TLS)** are included in the trip price. The transfer times are around 2hrs 45min and 1hr 30min respectively.

For some departures we are able to offer a drop off at **Carcassonne (CCF)** airport for a supplement of £50, please get in touch if you are interested.

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 annotated altitude profiles as well as tailored GPS files. These will be available on The Link a few weeks before departure in .gpx, and .tcx formats.

Please note that for this particular itinerary it is essential that you have your own GPS unit. Navigation by instructions on paper is quite difficult, so you will be relying on your GPS. We also suggest you have a back-up navigation by uploading the routes onto the Ride with GPS phone App (instructions will be on the Link once the GPS files have been posted).

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 possible (or even probable) that the seed of doing a Raid was planted in your mind when you had a drink in hand, chatting with mates. In the cold light of day it is only right to consider whether or not you are fit enough to take it on! All our Raid routes are challenging and you need to be a regular road cyclist in order to enjoy and get the most out of this trip, so please make sure this trip is right for you before you book.

Many of our riders are club cyclists, have done cyclosporives or some longer distance rides. However by no means all of them have, and we have had many clients who have been fairly new to road cycling (but who have a good level of fitness perhaps from a different sport) who have effectively trained for the trip and successfully completed our Raid routes. As a first Raid however, most people tend to start with the Raid Pyrenean as it is just 4.5 days in the saddle, or the Raid Alpine (Geneva to Nice), which has slightly shorter days.

Pacing

The key to success is pacing yourself. We are very keen to emphasise that you don't need to be cycling super fast in order to manage the daily route. The joy of a Marmot Raid is that from the group of around 20 riders 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 or room mate. The quickest way to injure yourself or burn out is to cycle faster than you feel comfortable going. Two guides in support vehicles will support your every need, be it mechanical, nutritional or motivational!

Training

This is a holiday that requires training. We want you to achieve your goals and to enjoy the whole experience. The fitter you are, the more you can relax and take note of the stunning route and throw yourself into the group banter. It can be difficult finding extended climbs for training in the UK, but generally, if you can build up your stamina and comfort in doing long daily distances you will really benefit when it comes to the Raid itself. Feel free to use the Link Forum if you would like to share your training plans with your group or meet other riders local to you pre-trip.

If, after reading this, you really can't banish the doubt then it may be worth you looking at one of our Classic Cols style holidays as a starter. You get to climb many of the same climbs but there is ultimate flexibility on the holiday as you have options and can choose each day between a 'Classic' route, with perhaps one col a day, or the 'Challenge' route with optional extras and gruelling stage endings. We offer Classic Cols itineraries in the Pyrenees, Provence, Cevennes & Ardeche, Alps, Slovenia, Dolomites, Picos, Catalonia, Andalusia, Corsica and Sardinia.

How does it compare?

The Raid du Massif Central in itself would have been fairly 'easy' compared to our other Raid Challenges (Pyrenean, Alpine, Corsica and Dolomites). Not so however, with the added 'unmissable' detours en route which give you the best cycling on offer in the area.

This Raid is a steady one. Each day offers a similar level of challenge with no one daily route standing out as more or less difficult (we look forward to your thoughts on this!). The climbs are generally shorter than in the Pyrenees and Alps but there are more undulations which amass into a very respectable week of climbing (as in Corsica) and you will find some very cheeky gradients that will test both the lungs and the legs. It's a route worthy of its 'Raid' definition and one of the most varied in terms of scenery that we have on offer.

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 3* hotels with en suite facilities, finishing the week in style with 4* on the last night. 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 on arrival and departure days at specified times
- Route notes, maps and GPS files
- Raid du Massif Central registration, certificate and medal for successful Raiders
- 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



Guiding

“Our best ever Raid and the support from your team was 1st Class” J Wright

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 and with a level of independence on this holiday. It also means that wherever you are in the group (front, back or in-between), you will have access to your personal kit, snacks, water and any mechanical or first aid support. In the event of you needing help for a mechanical (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 3 - 6 times a day, so you don't need to carry much on your bike, unless the weather is exceptional!

A note to speedy cyclists who don't like stopping: Let us know so we can plan with you how to balance your needs against those of others in the group, in order for you to have utmost flexibility regarding pacing etc. If you think you are going to be very fast, please contact us to talk about this and what we can offer you as someone way ahead of others in the group.

“The Raid was absolutely fantastic. I don't have enough superlatives to describe the trip... the guides were always in the right place at the right time with excellent support” P Murray

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.



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).

