

Classic Cols Of The Pyrenees



Duration: 6 days

KING OF THE MOUNTAINS CYCLE

Cycle the mountains made famous by the Tour de France! This prestigious and extremely tough cycling challenge sees us tackling some of the most legendary cols of the Pyrenees - including the Col d'Aubisque and the Col du Tourmalet – with a few newer climbs in the mix too.

From lush green valleys and picturesque villages to the barren heights among glaciers and jagged peaks, every pedal-stroke piles on the spectacular views, and the challenge. Often considered tougher than their Alpine cousins, the untamed Pyrenean roads shun steady gradients – where's the fun in that?!

Conquering these mountains will earn you a fantastic sense of achievement and give you something in common with the most elite cyclists of the past century!

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Meet Foix

We meet at the hotel in Foix*, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, (approx 1 hour from Toulouse). After assembling and checking your bike, any free time can be spent exploring this lovely town, dominated by its ancient hilltop castle. In the evening we gather for dinner and a trip briefing. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

**It is easiest to fly to Toulouse and make your own way to the hotel. If you need details of local transfers, we would be more than happy to help, just get in touch!*

Day 2: Foix – Mur de Péguère – Col d'Agnes – Saint-Girons

Today's route starts with a steady ascent into the Lower Pyrenees, with beautiful valley views opening up as we ride on quiet roads that gradually gain height. Staying high, our route undulates over a couple of minor cols before reaching the Mur de Péguère (1365m), which featured in the Tour for the first time in 2012. This is the moderate side to ascend; the descent is steep but becomes steadier when we join the descent of the famous Col de Port, to picturesque Massat in the valley. There's not much valley; we're soon on the slopes of the Col d'Agnes (1570m), a fairly steep climb with fabulous vistas of the surrounding mountains. Sweeping downhill towards the spa village of Aulus-les-Bains, its hot springs used as treatment since the early 19th century. Our last climb of the day, to the Col de Latrape, is absolutely stunning, and the last miles roll along the gradually-descending valley to Saint-Girons. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 113km (70 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



Day 3: Saint-Girons – Col de Portet d'Aspet – Col de Menté – Bagnères-de-Luchon

A longer day taking us into the higher peaks. We warm up with a beautiful undulating road which climbs gradually through villages and green pastures towards the Col de Portet d'Aspet (1069m). Even when the official climb starts, it's fairly steady until the gradient ramps up in the last half, with tight, steep hair-pin bends. This is our first real Tour legend, first featured in 1910. Sadly, it's equally well-known for the tragic death of young Italian rider Fabio Casartelli, who in 1995 crashed while descending on a stage of the Tour. You can stop to pay your respects at his memorial before continuing the descent, which becomes less technical after a few kilometres, allowing you to

relax and enjoy the views of the surrounding peaks. We're then straight onto the steep slopes of the Col de Menté (1349m), our highest point today. The gradient changes frequently, and it's tough, but it's a beautiful climb. A long descent follows, then a gradually rising road takes us across the Spanish border as we tackle our last climb of the day, the Col de Portillon (1293m) – which has featured regularly in the Tour since the fifties. An exhilarating descent brings us right into Bagnères-de-Luchon. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 94km (58 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



Day 4: Bagnères-de-Luchon – Col de Peyresourde – Col d'Aspin – Col du Tourmalet – Argelès-Gazost

Today is the most demanding of them all – three infamous tour climbs all in quick succession. The Col de Peyresourde (1569m) is another legendary climb – also a 1910 Tour first – and its steep slopes through open pasture lay down the challenge for the day. The spectacular views are good distraction from aching muscles! After the descent, enjoy the lovely (flattish) valley before pretty Arreau, where our next climb starts. The Col d'Aspin (1489m) is another classic; we climb its shorter, steeper side. Again, there are lovely views from the upper slopes. Descending through shady pine-woods to the tiny village of Saint-Marie-de-Campan, we turn back into the mountains. Our last climb of the day is the one you've been waiting for – the iconic Tourmalet. In 1910, it was unpaved and in terrible condition, and the bears that frequented the area added to the riders' nerves. Nowadays the road surface is smooth and the wildlife tamer, but the renowned length and severity of the climb are unchanged. The hair-pin bends start in earnest halfway up; we battle our way up the increasingly-barren slopes until we finally reach the steepest bends above La Mongie ski station. Unsurpassed views of glaciers and other mountain peaks await us, but our real reward is getting to the top of a climb which has inspired cyclists for

generations. Congratulations: you have just joined the elite!

After time for photos in front of the famous 'silver cyclist', the statue commemorating the first Tour cyclist to gain the summit, it's a long, twisting descent through breath-taking mountain scenery into the shady woods and small villages of the lower slopes. A cruising, scenic ride, surrounded by granite peaks with picturesque castles and churches perched on the green slopes, brings us into the lovely town of Argelès - a perfect finish to this queen day!

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 105km (65 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



Day 5: Argelès-Gazost – Col du Soulor - Col d'Aubisque – Pau

Our last day, and one of the most spectacular! The Col d'Aubisque (1709m) is a true Tour legend, one of the toughest – and we're climbing it from the toughest side. This means first conquering the steep Col du Soulor; both have seen plenty of Tour action since 1910. Steep at first, the gradient changes frequently as we ride through villages and beautiful green pastures, then ramps up in earnest just after half-way – and doesn't let up! The Soulor's summit lies on the shoulder of the Aubisque, and we descend a little before climbing again. This section, along a narrow gorge with several short tunnels, is absolutely stunning and one of the most impressive rides you can do on a bike – which on this trip, is praise indeed. The clearing of the pass was paid for by the early Tour de France organisation, and you may have a few moments wishing they had left well alone – but savour these last kilometres of climbing! From the summit we descend steeply before cruising the more moderate lower slopes into the small town of Laruns. Then it's green valley floor to Pau, with the mountains receding behind us. Pau is one of the most popular Tour de France host towns, hosting regularly since 1930, so it's a fitting end to our journey and a great place to celebrate. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 86km (55 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



Day 6: Depart Pau

After breakfast, say your goodbyes and head for home (depending on your own arrangements*).

**If you need details of local transfers to Pau or Biarritz airport, we would be more than happy to help, just get in touch!*

(Lunch not included)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Meals except where specified (breakfast and dinner will be provided at hotels each day)
- Snacks en-route
- Accommodation on a twin-share basis
- Bike transport arrangements from Discover Adventure Office to the start point of the cycle
- Return bike courier service
- Discover Adventure leader and roving crew member for mechanical support/coaching and support vehicle
- Mapping, GPX files and route information

WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- Lunch (opportunity to buy lunch to carry with you, or stop in a café en-route) and any meals specified 'not included' in

the itinerary

- Travel insurance
- Flights and transport to/from start/finish point of ride
- Bicycle
- Cycle helmet (compulsory) and water bottles
- Personal spending money, souvenirs and drinks
- Fees for any optional sites, attractions or activities
- Any applicable surcharges as per Terms and Conditions

GRADE | RED

Trips are graded Yellow, Orange or Red, in increasing level of challenge. This trip lies within the **RED** range.



The grade is determined by factors such as terrain, distance, climate, altitude, etc. Each colour grade has a **spectrum** which reflects the difficulty of these factors; trip duration, accommodation and living conditions (see icon) are also taken into account.

[Trip grading explained](#)

CHALLENGE INFORMATION

DETAILED INFORMATION

Leaders & Trip Support

Your trip will be led by an experienced Discover Adventure leader and a supporting crew member for groups of over 12 participants. Our leaders are selected for their knowledge and experience, friendliness and approachability, sense of humour and ability to safely and effectively deal with any situation that arises; they are also trained in first aid. The crew will have mobile phones and/or radios where appropriate, medical kit and other safety apparatus where necessary. The support vehicle will be with the group all of the time, and will carry all luggage and spares.

The route will be supplied as a GPX file and therefore there will be no route marking by way of orange arrows (helping us to reduce our carbon footprint).

You will also have access to the the route via Google Maps which will show where your position is relative to the route - therefore helping you get back on track if you go off course. This will also show you the location of upcoming climbs and water-stops.

Trip Safety

Your safety, and that of the rest of the group, is our highest priority. Our trips are designed and planned with safety in mind. Your crew will be equipped with communication devices (eg phones, radios and/or emergency satellite phones), medical kit and other safety apparatus appropriate to the destination. Our leaders always have access to our 24-hour emergency UK back-up. They are responsible for safety on the trip, and will make any changes to the itinerary they deem necessary, should local conditions dictate. Pre-trip administration - such as medical questionnaires and travel insurance as appropriate - is all done with your safety in mind.

Accommodation

We usually stay in hotels or lodges of a 2-3* standard or equivalent. Standards may vary between the hotels but they are generally comfortable and convenient for our route. Hotels are often on the outskirts of towns to minimise unnecessary extra mileage and avoid traffic.

Roomshare Arrangements

Accommodation is usually on a twin-share basis in hotels convenient to our route. Please tell us if you know somebody else on the trip that you would like to share with and we will try our best to accommodate your request. If you don't know anyone else in the group don't worry, we always pair you up with someone of the same gender, and a similar age where possible. We do not charge a single supplement if you are a solo traveller in a shared room.

There may be a limited number of single rooms subject to request, on a first-come first-served basis, after you have booked. Extra charges will apply.

Group Size

This challenge has been designed specifically for small groups. They can run with a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 15 participants. We have capped the number of participants on this trip to 15 so that our crew can concentrate on client experience and give coaching on route.

Food & Dietary Requirements

The food provided is plentiful and will give you plenty of energy. Being vegetarian or having other dietary requirements is not usually a problem provided you let us know well in advance. If you know there are plenty of foods you cannot eat you may wish to bring extra snacks from home so you can top up your energy supply.

All food is included except where specified. Dinners are generally eaten in the hotel. A packed baguette for lunch can be arranged with your crew or you are free to stop en-route and enjoy some of the local fayre. Please let us know of any dietary requirements well in advance.

A roaming vehicle will provide additional water and snacks to boost your energy during the ride - these will replace our standard water-stops which you may have experienced on previous challenges. On climbs, large water barrels may be left en-route.

This system will enable our crew to provide you with greater support and coaching during the ride.

PREPARING FOR THE CHALLENGE

Fitness Levels

Participants who sign on to these trips must meet the following criteria:

- Cycle at least 100miles per day at an average pace of 20km per hour, over an undulating route. Failure to do so may result in receiving significantly less support from the challenge leader
- Completed previous multi-day cycle trips
- Confidently and efficiently fix a puncture by replacing the inner tube
- Confidently navigate whilst riding using a Garmin or mobile phone app
- Ridden a Category 1 or HC (*Hors catégorie*) climb before and have the right gear set up for this - note, this may mean having a climbing cassette fitted to your bike
- Must be able to carry adequate clothing to cope with mountainous weather - jacket, arm and leg warmers, gloves and under hat
- Must be able to confidently descend using drop handlebars or have their bike set up with secondary brakes

Passport & Visa / Vaccinations

Entry requirements vary depending on your destination and nationality. It is your responsibility to ensure your passport is valid, and any visas are obtained in good time. Check the [FCO's advice](#) on entry requirements for your destination to be sure. Please ensure you allow plenty of time to apply for your visa; we will provide you with all necessary information 6 weeks prior to departure to assist with your application.

Your routine UK schedule of vaccinations should be up-to-date (especially tetanus). We recommend you check [Fit For Travel](#) for further details. You should always check with a GP or travel clinic for up-to-date travel health advice as it does change.

Clothing & Kit

We plan our trips around the optimal weather conditions, but could still be exposed to bad weather at any time. It is vital you are prepared for all conditions. We provide you with a detailed packing kit-list on registration, with plenty of information, and we are always available if you need advice.

Cancelling your booking

In the unfortunate circumstance that you need to cancel your booking, we would ask that you notify us in writing either by post or email. Your cancellation will be considered effective from the date the notice is received. Registration fees and amendment fees are non refundable and, depending on your payment option and how close it is to your challenge

departure date, you may be liable for a cancellation charge.

Full details of all cancellation charges may be found in the Terms and Conditions of booking.

Passenger Portal

We have a Passenger Portal which will give you more details of the challenge itself. It also enables you to see any outstanding information we need, the countdown to your challenge departure, see your outstanding balance, make payments and update your contact details. You can access this via the following link - [Passenger Portal Log in](#).



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Discover Adventure reserves the right to change the route or itinerary for safety reasons should local conditions dictate.

Please note: This document was downloaded on 20 Apr 2024, and the challenge is subject to change.