

FRANCE PYRENEES COAST TO COAST CYCLE SEE THE TOUR DE FRANCE ON A MOUNTAIN STAGE

Dates: 17 Jul – 25 Jul 2014

Duration: 9 days / 8 nights

Trip Grade: Extreme

Fundraising: Registration Fee £199
+ Fundraising Target £2,500

Cycle the mountains made famous by the *Tour de France* – and witness the great spectacle on a mountain stage en-route! This prestigious and extremely tough cycling challenge sees us riding the length of the Pyrenees from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean.

Our adventure starts with superb views of the Atlantic coast before heading inland – and up! The foothills provide us with a useful warm-up before we move on to the mighty, spectacular giants of the Pyrenees – including the legendary climbs of the Col d'Aubisque and the Col du Tourmalet.



On Day 6 we'll take a well-earned break from our epic journey and watch the Tour de France as it passes over the Col de Portet d'Aspet on its first day in the Pyrenees. Seeing the Tour on a mountain stage is very special, especially if it's your first one!

Inspired by seeing the pros, we'll whizz over the remaining peaks and arrive at the Mediterranean! Conquering these mountains will earn you a fantastic sense of achievement and give you something in common with the most elite cyclists in the past 100 years! This is a very strenuous challenge taking in at least two mountain climbs each day - you will need to train extremely hard to succeed.



Team Sky in the mountains, Tour de France 2012

ITINERARY

Day 1: Meet Hendaye

On arrival in Biarritz, you will meet our transfer to the seaside resort of Hendaye (approx 30 mins' drive). The most southwesterly town in France, Hendaye sits on the Atlantic Coast, overlooking the Bay of Biscay. On arrival at our hotel, we'll spend some time assembling and checking our bikes for tomorrow's ride. Any free time can be spent exploring the town, before we gather together for dinner and a trip briefing. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Day 2: Hendaye – Oloron-Sainte-Marie

Our exciting ride starts on the seafront and, after posing for a group photo, we cycle along the Basque Coast to the lovely old port of Saint-Jean-de-Luz. We then head inland, saying goodbye to the Atlantic. It's not long before we are among the foothills of the Pyrenees – within 20km we reach our first climb, the Col de Saint Ignace (169m). This is a relatively gentle climb, but it stretches our legs nicely. Cruising downhill into Sare, a typical Basque village with its painted half-timbered houses, we enjoy the mountain views which are opening up around us. Our route rolls along until we reach the colourful fortified



village of Ainhoa, where we begin our 5km ascent of the Col de Pinodiéta (176m). Our road continues to undulate as we pass through Louhossoa and Irissarry enroute to our last climb of the day, and the most demanding – the Col d'Osquich (500m). From Larceveau, the first part of the climb is relatively gentle and even has downhill sections, but the last half is steeper and a good practice for the more demanding climbs to come. We then ride along lovely quiet mountain roads – mostly undulating, though with a couple of steeper sections – to our night's stop at the old town of Oloron-Sainte-Marie, situated at the confluence of two rivers. Night hotel.

Cycle approx 138 km (86 miles)

Day 3: Oloron-Sainte-Marie – Col de Marie-Blanche – Col d'Aubisque – Argelès-Gazost

A shorter day, though this is little consolation when looking at the route profile! We tackle our first major cols today, and are in real Tour de France country! Heading south, we follow the course of the Aspe River for a few miles before we reach Escot and head west into the mountains. Our road takes us to the Col de Marie Blanche (1035m), which has featured regularly in the

Tour de France since its first inclusion in 1978, and winds steeply up to its summit in a relatively short distance. The achievement you will feel at the top is worth the effort, as is the long descent to Bielle! We cycle along the green valley floor towards the small town of Laruns: this is the last flat stretch of road we'll see today, as we tackle the start of the Col d'Aubisque (1709m). A true Tour legend, the Aubisque has featured in the race regularly since it was first used in 1910. The first few kilometres are relatively moderate, lulling us into false confidence, but as we reach the village of Eaux-Bonnes the gradient never lets up – and it's a long way to the top! The road affords plentiful views of the surrounding peaks and takes us through short sections of tunnels; the clearing of this road was paid for by the early Tour de France organisation. You may end up wishing they had left well alone – until you reach the summit, when you'll feel amazing! Our descent is steep initially, but levels out and climbs slightly as we reach the Col du Soulor (1474m), another legendary climb but one which sits off the shoulder of the Aubisque and is therefore part of our descent. The Soulor is the easiest col you'll encounter this week! We continue downhill through small villages and beautiful green pastures, all the way down to the lovely small town of Argelès-Gazost in the valley below. Night hotel.

Cycle approx 89km (55 miles)



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



Today is the most demanding of them all – three infamous tour climbs all in quick succession. We’ll be feeling the effects of yesterday’s efforts so it’s important to take it steady and pace ourselves! Our day starts with a lovely flat scenic ride from Argelès, surrounded by granite peaks with picturesque castles and churches perched on the green slopes above us. This is the perfect warm-up to get our bodies pedalling smoothly again! The road starts to climb slightly as we ride alongside the river to Luz-Saint-Sauveur; once through the town we reach the official start of the climb of the Col du Tourmalet (2115m). First used in the Tour de France in 1910, it was an unpaved road which was in terrible condition. Many of the cyclists were nervous of riding because of the bears that frequented the area. Nowadays the road surface is smooth and the wildlife much tamer, but the length and gradient that make this climb so renowned are unchanged.



Leaving Luz-Saint-Sauveur, the gradient ramps up immediately. A small sign marks every kilometre as you ascend, counting you down to the summit – you may find yourself welcoming and

cursing them in equal measures! We pedal on through small villages and forest, until the vistas start to open up around us. The twisty hair-pin bends start in earnest halfway up; we wind our way up this steep and increasingly barren mountain until we finally reach the

top. 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 enjoying the views and posing for photos in front of the famous ‘silver cyclist’, the statue commemorating the first Tour cyclist to gain the summit, it’s time to get back on our bikes. A long, twisting descent takes us past the ski station of La Mongie all the way down to the valley below. At the tiny village of Saint-Marie-de-Campan we turn back into the mountains, heading up to the next climb, the Col d’Aspin (1489m). This climb is shorter and less steep than the Tourmalet, and we ride up through shady woodland; the last 5km of the climb are the steepest. A twisting descent – this side is steeper than the side we ascended – takes us down to the pretty village of Arreau. It’s not far along the valley to Avajanjan, where we start our last climb of the day. The Col de Peyresourde (1569m) is another legendary climb – also first climbed in the Tour in 1910 – and although we are climbing its shorter side, we’ll probably be feeling the strain of the day. The gradient soon ramps up and stays fairly steady, though it eases off a little as we get higher up. The road takes us through open pasture, which allows us to see the spectacular views all around. However tough you may find this last climb, it’s the last uphill of the day – after time at the summit, we have an exhilarating 15km descent into the lovely mountain spa town of Bagnères-de-Luchon. Night hotel.

Cycle approx 113km (70 miles)



Day 5: Bagnères-de-Luchon – Col de Portet d’Aspet – Saint-Girons

Today's route, though mountainous, is far less strenuous than yesterday's epic ride. We start with a smooth 20km downhill ride through the valley from Luchon, passing through small villages and farms. At Fronsac we start our first climb, the Col des Ares (797m); relatively short and with moderate gradients, it's a good climb to stretch our legs. After a wonderful descent with lovely views of the peaks and valleys around us, we start our ascent of the Col de Portet d'Aspet (1069m). Another Tour legend – again first featured in 1910 – it is a relatively moderate climb until the last

4km, which are particularly steep with tight hair-pin bends. This is the section which saw the tragic death of young Italian rider Fabio Casartelli, who in 1995 crashed while descending on a stage of the Tour. We pay our respects at his memorial on the mountain, and



continue to the summit. From here we have wonderful views to the east, which is where we are headed. Our descent is steep to start with, but then becomes a lovely rolling downhill through villages and green pastures, all the way down to the small town of Saint-Girons. Night hotel.

Cycle approx 82km (51 miles)

Day 6: Free Day to see the Tour de France

Today we're free to enjoy the spectacle of the Tour as it reaches the Pyrenees and passes through St Girons on its way to Luchon. You can watch it pass wherever you like, but the best place to see it will be on the slopes of the Col de Portet d'Aspet – heading back up yesterday's last climb. It's approx 32km to the summit, and 26km to the small village of Saint-Lary, where the climb gets steeper, though of course you don't have to ride that far to get a great vantage-point. By setting off fairly early you'll have plenty of time to get a good place on the mountain to see the obligatory escape group and peloton wind their way up the mountain – and you'll want to be there in time for the carnival-like *caravane* of freebies that precedes

the riders! Afterwards you can enjoy descending with hundreds of other cyclists back to St Girons. Night hotel.

(Lunch and dinner not included)

Day 7: Saint-Girons – Col d'Agnes – Ax-les-Thermes

Today's route starts with a picturesque ride along the Gorges de Ribaouto, taking us south to Oust. Lovely green valley views accompany us as we climb gradually towards the spa village of Aulus-les-Bains, with its hot springs used as treatment since the early 19th century. Here we start the climb to the Col d'Agnes (1570m), a fairly steep climb which eases off a little towards the top, from where there are fabulous vistas of the surrounding mountains. The descent, after a few steep sections and a slight rise, becomes a long sweeping downhill towards Massat. Our road takes us through shady woodland as we start the climb of the Col de Port (1249m) – although fairly long, it never gets really steep. The descent is steeper in places, and takes us almost all the way to Tarascon-sur-Ariège, famous for its prehistoric cave paintings nearby. Here we join the wide main road and enjoy a flat ride to Ax-les-Thermes, another spa town, where we spend the night. Night hotel.

Cycle approx 117km (73 miles)

Day 8: Ax-les-Thermes – Port de Pailhères – Argelès-sur-Mer

Our final day of cycling is long, with the weighty challenge of the Port de Pailhères thrown in, but the last half of our day sees us happily coasting along towards the sea. Leaving Ax-les-Thermes, we immediately start the ascent



of the Port de Pailhères (2001m) – our second-highest col after the Tourmalet. It's a long climb, and the gradient gets more demanding in the second half; it's also barren and exposed. This mountain has been used a number of

times since its first Tour appearance in 2003 and is quickly becoming a classic climb. The descent to Mijane features tight hair-pin bends on narrow roads and requires your concentration! Having successfully descended to the valley bottom, our route continues over remote mountain roads, crossing the minor Col de Moulis (1099m) and Col de Garavel (1256m) on undulating roads though beautiful scenery. The Col de Jau (1506m), our last climb, is quite demanding, especially in the middle section; the gradient gets a little more moderate towards the top. From our last summit we can enjoy the views of the Pyrenees behind us and the distant Mediterranean Sea before us – we're nearly there! It's now downhill all the way to Prades; the villages and castles that we pass have a distinct Mediterranean feel to them, and even the air is warmer and drier. From Prades our route is downhill or flat as we ride through lovely countryside dotted with peach and apricot orchards; vines grow on sunny slopes. We cross the plain of Roussillon towards the coast, skirting Elne, an ancient hilltop town, before reaching our finishing point on the beach at Argelès-sur-Mer. We check into our hotel, tired but elated! After a chance to freshen up, we meet again for our celebration dinner. Night hotel.

Cycle approx 148km (92 miles)



Day 9: Depart Perpignan

After a leisurely start we arrange transfers to Perpignan (approx 30 mins' drive) in time for your flights home.

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

GENERAL INFORMATION

TOUR COST

All accommodation is included as well as transfers (see note below) and all meals except three as specified in the itinerary. It also includes full trip support of experienced Discover Adventure leaders, drivers and mechanics (see Trip Support below).

Transfers from and to the airport are included. We will provide at least one transfer (depending on group size) each way. If you are not able to arrive in time for the included transfer, transportation will be at your own cost.

The tour cost does not include flights (see information below), personal travel insurance, three meals as specified, or a bicycle. It also does not include entrance fees to any optional sites or attractions you may wish to visit. Bear in mind that airlines are likely to charge a fee for bike carriage.



Costs in France

We recommend you budget for the following costs in-country:

- Meals not included: approx £40

Remember to allow extra for drinks, snacks, souvenirs & other personal expenses. This recommendation is a guideline only. Please note that costs may fluctuate and we have no control over any changes.

We strongly recommend you carry a credit card in case of personal emergency.

FLIGHT & TRANSFER INFORMATION

We do not arrange group flights for this challenge, enabling you to take advantage of the many competitive fares between cities close to the route and different UK departure points. Airlines flying to Biarritz and Perpignan

include British Airways, Air France, EasyJet, Ryan Air and Flybe.



We recommend you book flights that arrive in the morning and depart in the afternoon. You should allow plenty of time as a buffer in case your flight is delayed.

The best deals are usually open to those who book early, but bear in mind that we do need a minimum number for this trip to run, and booking your flight

before you are advised the trip is guaranteed is entirely at your own risk. Please be aware that the best deals usually allow little flexibility if you need to change them.

Please ensure that you inform your airline that you will be travelling with your bike when you book. It may not be



possible for them to guarantee bike carriage at a later date. Most airlines charge a bike carriage fee, which you are responsible for paying. We can provide you with guidelines on packing a bike for flight, but it's best to check the airline's specific instructions.

We will arrange at least one transfer between the airport and Biarritz / Perpignan, depending on the group size. Exact time(s) may be determined by the times of the majority of the group and will be communicated nearer to trip departure.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is in 2-3* hotels, picked for their proximity to our route. The hotels are comfortable with en suite facilities; standards may vary between the hotels. Accommodation is on a twin-share basis.

FOOD

All food is included except 3 meals where specified. Lunches are generous buffet-style with plenty of energy food to keep you going or stow in your back pocket to see you up the next climb! Dinners are generally eaten in the



hotels.

Dietary Requirements

Being vegetarian or having other dietary requirements is not usually a problem provided you let us know well in



advance. Please do not expect as much variety as you would have access to at home. If you know there are plenty of foods you cannot eat

ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE!

Travelling, whether in the UK or abroad, is always unpredictable. Whether it's the varying state of public toilets, puncturing in the rain, quirky accommodation staff ... it's all part of the challenge you are signing up for!

We can guarantee that coming face-to-face with experiences outside your normal 'comfort zone' will help you bond with your fellow cyclists and provide you with plenty of things to laugh about! A sense of humour and sense of adventure are two of the most important things to bring with you!

you may wish to bring extra snacks from home so you can top up your energy supply. Please feel free to ask us for advice. Bear in mind that being vegetarian is not generally well-understood in France, so meals may not be as varied as you are used to.

Other Meals

Any meals not included are listed in the itinerary and are generally when we are in towns or cities and you are free to explore and try other culinary experiences! There is always something to suit every budget.

PASSPORT, VISA & VACCINATIONS

A valid ten-year passport is essential; it should be valid for at least six months after departure from France. There is currently no visa requirement for UK citizens. Other nationalities should check entry requirements.

We insist that you have had a Tetanus injection in the last ten years, and highly recommend protection against Polio.

You should always check with your GP or travel clinic for up-to-date travel health advice as it does change.

CYCLING INFORMATION

Terrain

We ride mainly on small quiet roads. Traffic is light most of the time but you must be vigilant for traffic and other cyclists, especially in poor visibility or on narrow mountain bends. Watch out for traffic overtaking on mountain descents as you are riding up – they may be on your side of the road. French drivers are generally far more



considerate to cyclists than here in the UK.

Cycling Distances

You cycle approximately 680km (425 miles) on this trip overall, though this can vary depending on exact hotel location and any necessary deviations. Because of the terrain, distance is

no indicator of how hard any given day may be!

The following table shows more detail on the main cols you will climb. Official figures vary depending on where

the start of the climb is counted from, so these are purely to give you an idea of the level of difficulty – and how magnificent the views will be!

FITNESS WARNING: DESIGNED TO BE CHALLENGING!

This ride is designed to be challenging for those of good health and fitness, and is achievable for most people provided they train well in advance. We will supply you with a thorough training guide when you have registered. Training for the challenge is all part of the preparation and requires commitment! Without it, you will find the ride less enjoyable – and we want you to have the time of your life!

The cycling is very challenging, and it is vital that you don't underestimate how tough this challenge is. Each day includes at least two mountain climbs; they vary in difficulty but each still presents a challenge. This terrain is not suitable for anyone who has not trained hard and is not used to cycling. Distances are fairly long considering the terrain.

*Mountain climbs are categorised in the world of professional cycling, based on length and gradient. They range from 4th Category (least challenging) to 1st Category and then Hors Catégorie ('beyond categorization' – incredibly tough!) Categorisation can vary but we have listed that most commonly listed in modern Tour history.

Col Name	Category of Climb*	Altitude	Average Gradient	Max Gradient	Length of Climb
Col de Marie Blanche	1st	1035m	7.5%	11%	9.5km
Col d'Aubisque	HC	1709m	7.2%	10%	16.6km
Col du Tourmalet	HC	2115m	7.4%	10.2%	19km
Col d'Aspin	1st	1489m	5%	8.3%	12.8km
Col de Peyresourde	1st	1569m	6.6%	11.3%	9.96km
Col de Portet d'Aspet	2nd	1069m	4.2%	11.3%	14.3km
Col d'Agnes	1st	1570m	8.1%	10%	10.2km
Port de Pailhères	HC	2001m	6.9%	10.4%	18.6km

We are always happy to talk through the trip in more detail with you if you are worried about your fitness at any stage.

Bikes

We strongly recommend that you ride a road bike/racing bike for this trip due to the long distances involved on well-surfaced roads. For a trip of this difficulty, it's really important that you ride the bike you have been training on so you are used to it. Although training in the gym is useful, there is no substitute for getting out into all weathers and really getting to know your bike – especially the range of your gears as you climb.

Bike Repairs

There will be a range of spares in the vehicle along with a full tool kit; however, it is impossible for us to carry spares for every eventuality. It is vital that if you bring your own bike it is in excellent working order before departure.

It is imperative that you supply your own helmet and wear it at all times while cycling, with straps done up.



Weather

It can be very hot cycling in the Pyrenees, and very cold! Rain is always a possibility and it may be windy in the valleys; the weather can change rapidly. As you climb a mountain you may start with a tail-wind and end with a head-wind! The weather and temperature at the foot of a climb can be dramatically different to the top, where it may be foggy, in cloud or much colder. It can be very cold when descending.

Average temperature for this region (min/max):

June / July	14 - 28°C
Aug / Sept	16 - 32°C

Clothing & Equipment

We could be exposed to bad weather at any time even in the height of summer. The information below gives you an idea of the climate, but be prepared for all weathers and temperatures and remember that weather conditions can change quickly in the mountains. We provide you with a detailed packing kit-list on registration, as well as details on useful discounts you are entitled to as a Discover Adventure customer. We are always available if you need advice.



Fitness Levels

Our challenges attract people of all levels of experience and fitness, all ages and backgrounds. We expect all participants to train hard in advance to achieve this challenge, but we

respect everyone's limits. We design our challenges so that everyone can go at their own pace: this is not a race.

For logistical and safety reasons we sometimes need to re-group, so the front-runners will find themselves waiting for the slower ones. Please relax, and remember that this is a team effort that enables people to achieve their personal goals and earn sponsorship.

TRIP SUPPORT

Discover Adventure Crew

Your trip will be led by experienced Discover Adventure leaders. Our leaders are selected for their experience in harsh wilderness environments, knowledge of travel in remote areas, friendliness and approachability, sense of humour and ability to safely and effectively deal with any situation that arises. They are also trained in expedition first-aid. You are in very safe hands with a Discover Adventure leader.

All our leaders are from the UK or other English-speaking countries. Most work for us on an ad-hoc basis and have 'real' jobs in-between trips! We never send our leaders to

TRAINING WEEKENDS

SPECIAL OFFER: £150

Only when you book at the same time as registering for your main challenge

Discover Adventure Cycle Training Weekends in the New Forest & Wiltshire are designed to help you prepare for your challenge. Whether you use the weekend to gauge your fitness, get your training back on track, boost your confidence, get advice or meet other cyclists, you're bound to find it incredibly useful!

For dates and further information see our brochure or website.

the same destination for months on end – we want them to be as enthusiastic about your trip as you are.

The number of crew and support vehicles looking after you will depend on the final size of your group, but the team will be looking after every aspect of your trip whether that's transporting your luggage, ensuring your route is well-marked, making you lunch and sorting out any mechanical problems. At Discover Adventure we pride ourselves on our high leader: cyclist ratio and believe it leads to greater trip enjoyment as well as excellent trip safety.

Luggage

Support vehicles are with the group all the time. All luggage, spares, food and water is carried by them.

Space is limited and hard-sided luggage is not suitable, so it is essential that your kit is packed in a soft sailing bag, rucksack or expedition kitbag. Ask us about our specially-designed low-cost kitbags if you don't have one already. You should also bring a small daypack or large waist-pack for items needed during the day as you will not have access to your main luggage until the evening.

Bikes can be transported on flights in bike bags or – a much cheaper option – cardboard bike boxes: ask your local bike shop if they have any. You should also bring a small daypack or waist-pack to carry items needed during the day as you will not have access to your main luggage until the evening.

Please note there will be no vehicle support on the Tour de France day because of closed roads, though your crew will still be on hand to advise and support you.

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 radios and mobile phones, first-aid kits, and other safety apparatus where necessary. They always have access to our 24-hour emergency back-up in the UK. Our leaders 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 compulsory medical questionnaires and travel insurance – is all done with your safety in mind.

WORLDWIDE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Long before 'Responsible Tourism' became a recognised phrase, we designed and ran our trips to ensure they made minimum impact on the environment and a positive impact on the local communities we pass through. AITO, our Trade Association, has recognised the work we do in this area and has awarded us 5 stars as a Responsible Tour Operator.

Discover Adventure Projects

We are supporting a tree-planting project in Peru and a children's home in Tanzania on a long-term basis. If you would like to 'give something back' please consider donating £5 to our projects



when you sign up. Please see our website for more details.

Carbon Offsetting

We encourage all our customers to offset emissions connected with their trip. You can offset at any time in the lead-up to departure by visiting Climate Care via our website and making a donation to a worthwhile project supported by them.

Alternatively, if you wish to take more practical action in the UK you can volunteer for a day with The Conversation Volunteers and work on an environmental project local to you. Work may include construction footpaths, dry stone walling, creating wildlife habitats or planting trees in your community. Volunteer today at www.tcv.org.uk or call 01302 388883.

