

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

Tourmalet & Cycling's Greatest Challenges - The Easier Way



The peloton of the Tour de France has no time to enjoy the beautiful valleys and mountains of the central Pyrenees, or its authentic villages, great places to stay, and interesting regional cuisine. You will share their cycling challenges with the not insignificant help of e-bikes and travelling at your own pace, then be able to relax each evening in a way they can only dream of. If you love cycling and you love a challenge, but are not superhuman, this is the holiday for you - and one you will remember for all the best reasons.

7 nights - 6 days e-bike cycling

- Minimum required 1
- From point to point
- With luggage transportation
- Self-guided

Code :
FP9PUTF



The plus points

- **The major climbs and cols of the Tour de France**
- **Cycling made easier - and much more enjoyable - thanks to electric bikes**
- **An independent holiday - cycle at your own pace**

- **Good quality, comfortable accommodation - and good meals too**

Before departure, please check that you have an updated fact sheet.

The Tour de France's days in the Pyrenees are the most challenging cycling in the world. Now imagine you breezing up the Col du Tourmalet with a big grin on your face as you reach the summit of the Col d'Aubisque. You can now enjoy the most interesting and famous sections of the Tour de France route with the help of an electric bike - and Purely Pyrenees, the leading walking and cycling tour operator in the Pyrenees. Yes, you have to keep pedalling, but slowly and steadily. Yes, you will have the time and energy to enjoy the iconic mountain scenery, the green unspoilt valleys, the attractive villages, the warm welcome every evening at your hotel. Yes, you will have cycled the same route as Wiggins, Froome and Thomas. No, you don't have to tell everyone it was on an electric bike, unless you want to. But if you are up for a real cycling challenge that is possible for those of us who are not superhuman, this is it!

■ THE PROGRAMME

DAY 1

The holiday begins at your first night's marvellous accommodation in Marsous in the scenic and unspoilt Azun valley (the home of Purely Pyrenees as it happens), but for a supplement we can collect you at Lourdes airport or rail station for the 30 minute transfer to Marsous.

We love Maison Sempé, and we are confident you will too. Firstly, it's in the magnificent Azun valley. Secondly, it is a 17th century stone building with bags of character including a magnificent wooden staircase, panelled walls, lovely bedrooms, and views of the mountains. Thirdly, there are your most hospitable, interesting and English speaking hosts, Sylvie and Jean-Paul, who ply you with authentically regional dishes, home made digestifs, jams and home baked bread. This is what chambres d'hôtes are all about, and it will be your home from home for this holiday.

Transfer time (optional): 30 minutes.

DAY 2

So: you do the cycling, we do the rest. On this first morning, your electric bikes are delivered along with a cycle helmet, tyre repair kit, cleaning equipment, maps, detailed directions, and GPS tracking if you want it. We take your luggage to your next accommodation, so you only need carry a daysack - we supply picnics on cycling days. We also have a 24/7 English speaking service, and a support van available should you need one for whatever reason. Having been introduced to your bikes, and everything else, you are free to explore for the day - we'd recommend the delightful lac d'Estaing, but do ask Sylvie and Jean-Paul as they have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the area.

You'll be pleased - we are sure - to be staying a second night at Maison Sempé.

DAY 3

Right, it starts here! A glorious 22 mile route that first takes you on the Tour de France route gently up the side of the Azun valley via a series of bends and switchbacks to the famed col du Soulor. They can't, but you can, stop to enjoy the magnificent views south across the Pyrenees into Spain, including the eternally snow-capped 10,200 feet Balaitous, and north down the Pyrenean foothills to the Pau plains. You then cycle to the equally famous col d'Aubisque via a superb corniche road where you can stop to enjoy the exceptional panoramic views to the isolated skiing village of Gourette, and the lovely Ossau valley, renowned not least for its traditional farmers' cheeses. Thankfully, there's then a long, swooping descent into and across the Ossau valley to Laruns before a final climb up towards the col de Marie-Blanque. We think you'll agree that was something special - and it's only the first cycling day.

L'Arrajou is delightful and high quality chambres d'hôtes in a house that is most like a Swiss chalet in a privileged position with amazing panoramic views, yet close to the mountain village of Bilhères - well worth a stroll around. For sure, you'll get a stylish room, good food and genuine hospitality.

Distance: 22 miles. Elevation: + 1800m / - 1600m.

DAY 4

Less up and down altitude today, so a longer distance, but no change in the superb cycling and magnificent scenery made all the more enjoyable knowing that a gourmand experience awaits you in the evening. The first mile or so is a fairly steep climb (made so much easier by your e-bike) until you reach the Bénou plateau with its Alpine meadows, stone barns, pine forests, and, dominating everything, peak after Pyrenean peak. From the col de Marie-Blanque, you descend into the Aspe valley, one of the most attractive in the Pyrenees (and in our view anywhere in Europe), partially shaded by the lovely Bager woods, before crossing the Ossau river. From there you make your way back into the Ossau valley (just a few hills to keep you fit) to arrive near Sévignacq-Meyracq for the night.

If you've got aches and pains, this is the place for you - for hundreds of years (not least when it was fashionable in the 19th century) people have come a long way for the thermal baths with its supposed cure (at least relief) for rheumatism. Today, there's also a nearby spa. If you're in need of comfort, this is the place for you: traditional and contemporary, stylish yet authentic, this is a great place to stay. If you're in need of a good meal, this is the place for you with its restaurant much more famous than its accommodation thanks to chef-patron J P Paroix, his mother and their family farm. We need say no more.

Distance: 31 miles. Elevation: + 800m / - 1150m.

DAY 5

Today, you begin by exploring the lower altitude pleasures of the Bearnais - once the hunting grounds of English monarchs and aristocracy, now truly French in culture and character as the facts that Bearnaise sauce and the Musketeer D'Artagnan is said to come from here. It has a beautiful foothills landscape with woods, valleys, rivers streams, small villages and large panoramas up the the Pyrenean peaks. Great cycling country too: quiet roads, easy cycling, plenty of places to stop whether for photographs or coffee. Your route loops back to the Azun valley, and you can choose a longer lower altitude route, or take one of two cols up and down into the Azun valley, the col des Spandelles being what the French call "sauvage et sportive", and we would describe as challenging, seriously challenging. A very good day's cycling, though, whichever route you choose.

It will be a pleasure to be back with Sylvie and Jean-Paul at Maison Sempé, and we expect you'll have plenty to tell them.

Distance: 40 miles or 30 miles. Elevation: + 900/1600/1800m / - 400/1100/1300m depending on the route you choose.

DAY 6

This is a wonderful day's cycling that positions you ready for the ultimate col du Tourmalet ascent tomorrow. You begin by gently descending down the Azun valley to Argeles-Gazost (an unpretentious but attractive Pyrenean town that rewards a stop for a stroll and a coffee) before enjoying easy cycling along the banks of the Pau river ("gave"), then discovering the lesser known delights of the unspoilt Castelloubon valley with its traditional villages like Zoum sur Ouste and Ossun-es-Angles, its churches, oratories and roadside crosses, its rolling hills and tumbling streams. You then come into the Adour valley reaching Bagnères-de-Bigorre, which despite its violent history (conquered by Julius Caesar, vandalised by Visigoths, destroyed by earthquakes) is a peaceful town renowned for its thermal baths. From there, it's all up hill, but, today, only as far as Sainte-Marie de Campan - visit Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption, and discover what mounaques are.

The three star Hotel Chalet is superbly located, well managed, and has recently been completely refurbished resulting in bedrooms and restaurant (good, hearty food) that are a real pleasure to be in. There are also terraces to relax on, and a tennis court and covered swimming pool to be active, but everywhere there are Pyrenean peaks all around you, not least the magnificent Pic du Midi de Bigorre.

Distance: 36 miles. Elevation: + 850m / - 750m.

DAY 7

It's finally time for the Col du Tourmalet, but first we'd strongly recommend taking the cable car from La Mongie upto the observatory on top of Pic du Midi de Bigorre. At 9,350 feet, the views are simply staggering, and you really do feel on top of the world. It's now just a few dozen zigs and zags to the almost 7,000 feet summit of the col. Thank goodness for that extra e-bike help! Your rewards are the self-congratulatory photographs, the panoramic views, and the wonderfully effortless - and pleasingly long - descent down into "Pays Toy", and the once royalty-favoured thermal spa town of Luz-saint-Sauveur. Your final section is along your old friend the Pau river before passing through the pretty village of St-Savin (atmospheric abbey), and along the Azun valley to Maison Sempé for a final time. However, you can alternatively (with a supplement) ride up to the UNESCO Heritage Cirque de Gavarnie, and stay in a three star hotel nearby. Either way, a great way to end a great holiday.

It's hello and goodbye to Sylvie, Jean-Paul and Maison Sempé unless you choose the Gavarnie option.

Distance: 41 miles. Elevation: + 2,050m / - 1,950m.

DAY 8

The holiday ends after breakfast in Marsous (or Gavarnie), but for a supplement we can take you back to Lourdes airport or rail station.

Elements beyond our control (the weather, fitness levels, logistical risks, other miscellaneous reasons) may lead our team to modify the programme. We aim to please, but your safety will always be our priority.

■ PRACTICAL INFORMATION

DATES

15 May to 15 October.

MEETING POINT

The holiday begins in Marsous, but for a supplement we can collect you at Lourdes airport or rail station for the 30 minute transfer to Marsous.

END OF YOUR TRIP

The holiday ends in Marsous, but for a supplement we can take you back to Lourdes airport or rail station.

PARKING

There is free parking in Marsous for the duration of the holiday.

IF YOU WISH TO BOOK EXTRA NIGHTS

You can stay extra nights in Marsous, Luz-Saint-Sauveur and/or Gavarnie. Do ask us about these options.

DEPARTURE GUARANTEED FROM (NO. PERS)

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LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

This holiday features some challenging climbs, but they are made much easier by e-bikes. However, this particular cycling holiday is best suited to people who are reasonably fit, and used to all-day cycling. We offer other holidays that are based on much more comfortable cycling than this one. It can get fairly hot in July and August (but nothing like as hot as the Mediterranean) as well as a little more crowded. We would recommend from mid May through June, and from mid August through September as the best months.

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LUGGAGE TRANSFER

We transport your luggage for you, so all you need to carry when cycling is a daysack (or put it in your pannier) with whatever you regard as essentials, and your picnic.

GUIDE

This is an independent, unguided holiday so you can travel at your own pace.

ACCOMMODATION

5 nights in high quality chambres d'hôtes; one night in charming rural hotel with a gastronomic reputation; one night in a three star hotel.

MEALS

Dinner bed and breakfast is included for each night.

THE PRICE INCLUDES

Electric bikes delivered and collected; cycle helmet; tyre repair kit; bike cleaning equipment; maps and detailed directions; GPS tracking if you want it; luggage transported; 24/7 English speaking service; dinner bed and breakfast each night.

THE PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE

Transfers at the start and end of the holiday; picnics, drinks with meals; lunches, non-standard menu items; entry fees; booking fee, personal and travel insurance.

FORMALITIES

You need to keep your passport with you at all times, and ideally insurance information. You need to make your own arrangements to claim local healthcare. There are requirements in France (and Spain) for all vehicles to carry safety equipment.

■ EQUIPMENT

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

For your upper body: in all countries and in all seasons, the principal of wearing 3 breathable layers works well in most situations (T-shirt - warmer layer - waterproof and windproof outer layer). Choose clothes that dry quickly (synthetic fibres) and avoid cotton (dries too slowly => discomfort). Wool is a natural fibre that also has excellent properties and has recently made a great comeback in the outdoor clothing industry due to new manufacturing processes. Make sure you cover up before you get too cold, but above all make sure that you take layers off before you get too hot - sweat should be seen as an enemy for a cyclist (especially in winter) as it dampens clothing which can later freeze or cool too quickly. Avoid anoraks - they can turn a pleasant ride into a absolute nightmare!

For your lower body: shorts and trousers made from tough, synthetic fabrics that dry quickly and therefore allow for greater comfort. Be particularly careful in your choice of socks: bring tough, reinforced cycling socks with flat seams (to avoid blisters). In winter, choose warm socks. You should also avoid cotton socks (even if they have been blessed!).

LUGGAGE

You should bring:

- 1 travel bag per person (or suitcase with wheels). Make sure they are not too big in order to avoid logistical problems (taking up too much room in transfer vehicles, for example). On holidays where you move from one hotel to another during your stay, try to keep the weight down to 10-12kg (the extra weight can make it difficult to get all the suitcases to certain hotels that are difficult to get to). Be certain not to leave any fragile or valuable objects in your main luggage.
- 1 rucksack (around 30-40 litres) with integrated water-bag (e.g. Camel-Back). These bags are more practical than carrying bottles. The rucksack should also have a waist belt and allow your back to be well ventilated for extra comfort. Keep the total weight of your rucksack plus belongings down to a maximum of 10kg.

CLOTHING

- 1 set of cycling clothes: cycling shorts, breathable T-shirt (long-sleeved or short-sleeved depending on the time of year)
- 1 other pair of shorts or trousers for cycling (padding essential)
- cycling shoes
- comfortable clothes and shoes for the evenings
- underwear
- spare long-sleeved breathable T-shirts (1 for every 2_3 days) and 1 or 2 short-sleeved T-shirts
- 1 warmer layer (a fleece or water-resistant "softshell"jacket). Or a "primaloft" jacket (warm and easily compacted down to fit into rucksacks).
- 1 breathable, windproof and waterproof out layer (e.g. Gore-Tex) with a hood

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- 1 large plastic bag to be used as a rucksack liner for protecting your belongings from the rain and/or 1 waterproof rucksack cover
- 1 waterproof bag containing: travel insurance contract, ID or passport, health card, and all other documents mentioned in the "formalities" section.
- 1 pair of good quality sunglasses (protection factor 3) plus high-factor sun cream and sunscreen for your lips (should always be carried in your rucksack)
- 1 folding pen-knife (Swiss Army knife or similar)

- For lunches: cutlery and 1 plastic/tupperware container (0.5 litres minimum). You may end up not using it but it is important to have it just in case
- washbag and 1 quick-drying towel (try to bring only essential items that don't take up too much space, biological soap...)
- 1 swimming costume / pair of swimming trunks
- ear plugs (to protect you from snoring neighbours or other annoying noises)
- 1 sleeping-bag liner if spending a night (or nights) in dormitory accommodation (hostels or refuge huts)
- handkerchiefs
- toilet paper
- 1 cigarette lighter (be careful not to provoke a fire - always use responsibly and not unless you have to)
- 1 torch or head-torch plus a survival blanket: always put this in your rucksack as set-backs due to accidents are always possible, even on easy rides
- spare glasses (if you wear glasses)
- camera, binoculars, paint brushes and canvas... (optional)

Depending on the characteristics of the holiday you are going on (if bike hire is included or not, or if you have indicated that you wish to bring your own bike anyway), it may be a good idea to bring some (or all) of the following cycling kit (please also check in the "bicycle hire" section to see what kit is already provided on the holiday you have chosen):

- cycling gloves (normal or fingerless depending on the time of year)
- 1 bike helmet (legal requirement in most countries)
- 1 or 2 cycling bottles or a hydration system such as a Camel-Back (1.5 litres), whichever you prefer
- 2 inner-tubes
- a few spare spokes (especially on mountain-bike tours)
- 1 spare derailleur
- 1 set of spare brake pads
- 1 spare cable for derailleurs or brakes
- 1 spare chain
- any other kit that you deem to be necessary...

You should try to be self-sufficient for all minor cycling breakdowns typical of these kinds of cycling tours (tyre-lever, puncture repair kit, multi-tool, quick-fix chain link...). If you have disk-brakes or high-tech bikes, be sure to bring the necessary kit for repairs.

FIRST AID KIT

Let us know about any illness, treatments or allergies that may complicate things should you have a problem or an accident and need taking to hospital during your stay.

- personal medication
- painkillers: preferably Paracetamol
- medication for indigestion
- throat tablets
- elasticated sticky bandage (e.g. Elastoplaste): 2.5m long and 5/8cm wide
- strip plasters (e.g. Steri-Strip)
- set of smaller sticky plasters plus some sterile compresses
- blister plasters (e.g. Compeed)
- hair tweezers (can also be used for extracting splinters and thorns)

- small scissors
- vitamin C tablets
- small bottle of bacterial hand-gel (e.g. Sterilium)

■ INSURANCE

According to the regulation of our profession, Purely Pyrenees is covered by a Civil Professional Liability. However, each client must hold an individual civil liability as well as an individual multi risk guarantee in order to protect themselves from incidents or accidents that may occur before or during their hiking trip.

We remind you that a credit card covers, in general, only assistance in repatriation and not the cancellation of your trip, and this only provided you use the card to pay for the total of the trip.

We offer a choice of three insurance options which you can purchase at the time of booking.

Package 1: simple cancellation insurance at 2.5%

This insurance provides reimbursement of the amount incurred (excluding fees and the cost of insurance) in case of cancellation due to one of the following causes: serious accident, illness or death of insured, spouse or person accompanying them, and certain family members.

Package 2: simple cancellation insurance and assistance / repatriation at 3.7%

This insurance allows, in addition to the benefits described in the plan No. 1; - To benefit from assistance in case of illness or injury during the trip and covers your return home if necessary. - A reimbursement paid on a pro rata basis (excluding transportation costs and with a waiting period) in the case of an interruption of your trip following an accident, the death of a loved one or other specified accidents.

Package 3: Package "super multi-risk": 4.8%

This insurance offers, in addition to the benefits described in the packages No. 1 and No. 2, - A wider cancellation insurance with the repayment of amounts incurred (net of deductible) in case of cancellation for any justifiable reason including an exceptional and unexpected event. - The management of some of the costs incurred at the time in case of return not linked to an exceptional and unexpected event. - Compensation (capped) for loss, theft or destruction of baggage. - Payment of compensation for delayed baggage delivery of more than 48 hours.

The rapatriation is not valid for all countries, please check with us before subscribing the insurance.

You will receive with the confirmation of your booking an extract of the general conditions of contract chosen (in french). Take this document with you on your journey. The validity of all guarantees corresponds with the travel dates indicated on the invoice and applies only to services sold. For departures and returns postponed, please contact us. Warning: If you buy only the contract No. 1 (simple cancellation insurance), this means that you need to have your own insurance, repatriation assistance (related notably to certain credit cards). We advise you to check your contract and cover guaranteed. In this case, we ask you to tell us when you book the name of your insurance company and your policy number. You will assume, therefore, the responsibility of certain risks, especially in the advance payments of certain costs.

Important: If you must use the assistance during the trip, you must obtain the prior consent of Europe Assistance before taking any action or incur any expenditure by telephoning: 33 1 41 85 85 85 and quoting the number of contract: 58662860

■ ACTING FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Purely Pyrenees is a founding member of Action for Responsible Tourism.

The label "Action for Responsible Tourism" was awarded Purely Pyrenees in 2009. It is controlled, every year, by ECOCERT.

Based on common values of respect, solidarity and quality, ATR aims to harmonize professional practices of its members.

To win the confidence of customers, it focuses on four key commitments, which arise from many activities in the field and at home.

- Clear information and awareness of responsible tourism given to the traveller.
- Selection of providers in the spirit of responsible tourism.
- Setting up of a transfer of competencies to the providers.
- Commitment in relation to the tour operator's own structure.

More information on the label ATR on /www.tourisme-responsable.org

■ CONTACT US

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