



Classic Cols of the Tour de France

Day 1: (Transfer Day)

Fly from London to Toulouse on the scheduled service of British Airways. Transfer to Ax-les-Thermes (1hr, 45 mins). Ax is a lively thermal spa town on the banks of the river Ariège surrounded by roads heading up in all directions - the perfect place to start our Tour. Clients with their own travel arrangements will join the group at the hotel in the early evening. We stay in our hotel here for tonight and tomorrow.

Day 2: Warm up Day - Round trip from Ax (Basic route is 50km with 830m of ascent)

After breakfast there will be plenty of time to assemble your bikes or make any necessary adjustments to your hire bike. It is important that we warm up gently and the **Col du Chioula** (1431m, 830m climb over 18km, 3rd Category) from the west provides us with the perfect gradient (max 5%) on a beautifully quiet back road linking together ancient villages. The view from the Col makes the effort well worthwhile and plate of pasta in the mountain top restaurant is sure to restock your fuel reserves for the second part of the day. After lunch we return to Ax where we have the options of relaxing, riding the beautiful Orlu valley (a further 200m of ascent) or taking on the challenging TDF stage ending of **Ax Bonascre** (1380m, 670m climb over 8km, 1st Category).

Day 3: Ax to Lorp Sentaille (Basic route is 109km with 1411m ascent)

Today's ride starts along the 'Route de Corniche' which undulates its way along the south facing side of the valley of Ax with constant views to Tarascon. From here our basic route takes us over the **Col de Port** (1250m, 770m climb over 15km, 2nd category). Those with a bit more energy to spare have the option of detouring from the route de Corniche and taking on the much feared TDF stage ending of the **Plateau de Beille** (1800m, 1250m climb over 16.5km, H Category). From Massat we follow the river down to our hotel near St Lizer whose hilltop monastery is well worth a visit.

Day 4: Lorp Sentaille to Luchon (Basic route is 79km with 1585m ascent)

With two days under our belt our legs are now ready to take on two of the most popular cols in the Pyrenees. Climbing gently through ancient farmsteads, we barely notice the incline to the **Col du Portet d'Aspet** (1075m, 535m climb over 5.8km, 2nd category). A short descent through mixed forest (past the memorial to Fabio Casertelli) prepares us for the never-ending **Col de Mente** (1345m, 716m climb over 7km, 1st category). After a pleasant winding descent we can stretch our legs with a very gentle (almost flat) finale into the bustling spa town of Luchon. There is, however, an option of heading into Spain and ticking off the **Col de Portillon** (1293m, 630m of climbing) before rolling into town. We stay in our hotel here for tonight and tomorrow.

Day 5: Free Day in Luchon

A free day in Luchon, giving us an opportunity to rest aching limbs in the thermal baths. Alternatively, why not try paragliding, 'Le Hot Dog' (inflatable canoe) or mountain biking. The die-hard tour enthusiasts and those who can't bear to be separated from their road bike for the day can take in the stage-end of **Superbagnères** or the recently surfaced **Port de Bales** (both 1200m climbs).

Day 6: Luchon to Campan (Basic route 64km with 1700m ascent).

Possibly the toughest day of our tour in terms of ascent (depending on how many extras you have already fitted into your week!). We start with the Col de Peyresourde (1565m, 829m climb over 13km, 1st category), even the support bus struggles up this one! The incentive to get to the top comes in the form of a café selling fantastic pancakes. Those that really want to abuse their bodies could take in the **Col D'Azet** (615m climb 7.8km, 1st Category) or even the **Pla d'Adat** (900m climb over 11km, H Category). On the basic route, next up is the beautiful



Col d'Aspin (1490m, 789m climb over 12.1km, 1st category) where large-horned goats have been known to charge flagging cyclists! A spectacular downhill takes us to the small and quaintly bizarre town of Campan.

Day 7: Campan to Argeles Gazost (Basic route 60km with 1515m ascent)

The big boy - it just has to be done! The punishing **Col du Tourmalet** (2115m, 1515m climb over 23km, H Category) - it's worth it for the photo!! From here we can enjoy a 35km downhill all the way to our finishing line at Argelès-Gazost. Those with some energy could always make a slight detour up to **Luz-Ardiden** (1735m, 1000m climb over 13.4km, H Category).

Day 8: Transfer Day (but still some time for more cycling...)

A free morning to take it easy, visit the marmot sanctuary and pack up the bikes. However the really keen would have time to take in the stage end of **Hautacam**, (1618m, 1200m climb over 13.5km, H Category) or the good old **Aubisque**. After lunch we transfer 2.5 hrs to Toulouse, arriving in Gatwick in the early evening full of admiration for the 'real tour' cyclists, who cover our entire route in one day!!