



EPIC PYRENEES CYCLING TOUR

Spain & France: San Sebastian to Toulouse



Meet your 'Epic Pyrenees' Cycling Tour Directors

Sierra Sports & Tours and Cycling-Inform are pleased to present two packages for cyclists wanting to crush the most epic mountain passes in northern Spain and cols in France. During 2024 we will kick things off with a Vuelta Peaks cycling adventure before moving immediately over to France to conquer the Pyrenees. The tour groups will be capped at 15 riders to keep the experience intimate and to able to provide excellent support to all our guests.



David Heatley & Paul D'Andrea

*This document focuses on the itinerary for the **EPIC PYRENEES** tour only!*

The Sierra experience in Europe and the coaching support from Cycling-Inform will help you go back-to-back over the northern Spain peaks and French Pyrenees! David from Cycling-Inform has 20 years successfully preparing recreational and age group riders for the challenges of their lives; getting riders over WTF corner at Peaks Challenge ride, 25 Bright Boot Camps in the Victorian High Country, training cyclists for the world's biggest gran fondos including Europe's famous Haute Route events and preparing hundreds of clients for their own European cycling adventure. Now combined with the logistical support from Paul and his Sierra team, their European base and equipment, plus 12 years of rolling out first class cycling tours this Sierra / Cycling-Inform joint venture is a match made in cycling heaven.

Our story dates back to 2014 where we met at Peaks Challenge to assess ideas for future collaboration. By 2015 Paul from Sierra was riding a Cycling-Inform Bright Boot Camp to kick start his European cycling guide training. Jodie and David in the same European spring were conquering the cobbles and pave at Flanders and Roubaix. In 2017 Cycling-Inform were back to Europe with Sierra on some the biggest alpine passes at La Vuelta a España. To follow the professional riders Cycling-Inform also joined Sierra at the 2019 Criterium du Dauphine. During 2023 Sierra and Cycling-Inform joined forces to roll-out the successful Epic French Alps and Epic Italian Alps cycling tours.

Now in 2024 we are pleased to present you all the **EPIC VUELTA PEAKS** and **EPIC PYRENEES** trips of your lifetime!

2024 Epic Pyrenees Cycling Tour

Cycling from the Atlantic to Midi-Pyrenees

Here is a classic cycling tour to challenge all recreational cyclists looking to tick off a full bucket list of epic climbs straight from the **Tour de France** pro-cycling race. This Pyrenees cycling tour starts from San Sebastian (Basque Country, Spain) and begins with no less than four Spain/France border crossings on the first day. The route through the Atlantic Pyrenees will take you to the pretty French village of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port which is the spiritual home of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route. From 'St-Jean' one of the most challenging climbs in the Pyrenees awaits 'Larra-Larrau'. It is full of history and intrigue as Spanish legend Miguel Indurain (5 x TDF champion) saw his rein unravel on this monstrous climb way back in 1996.

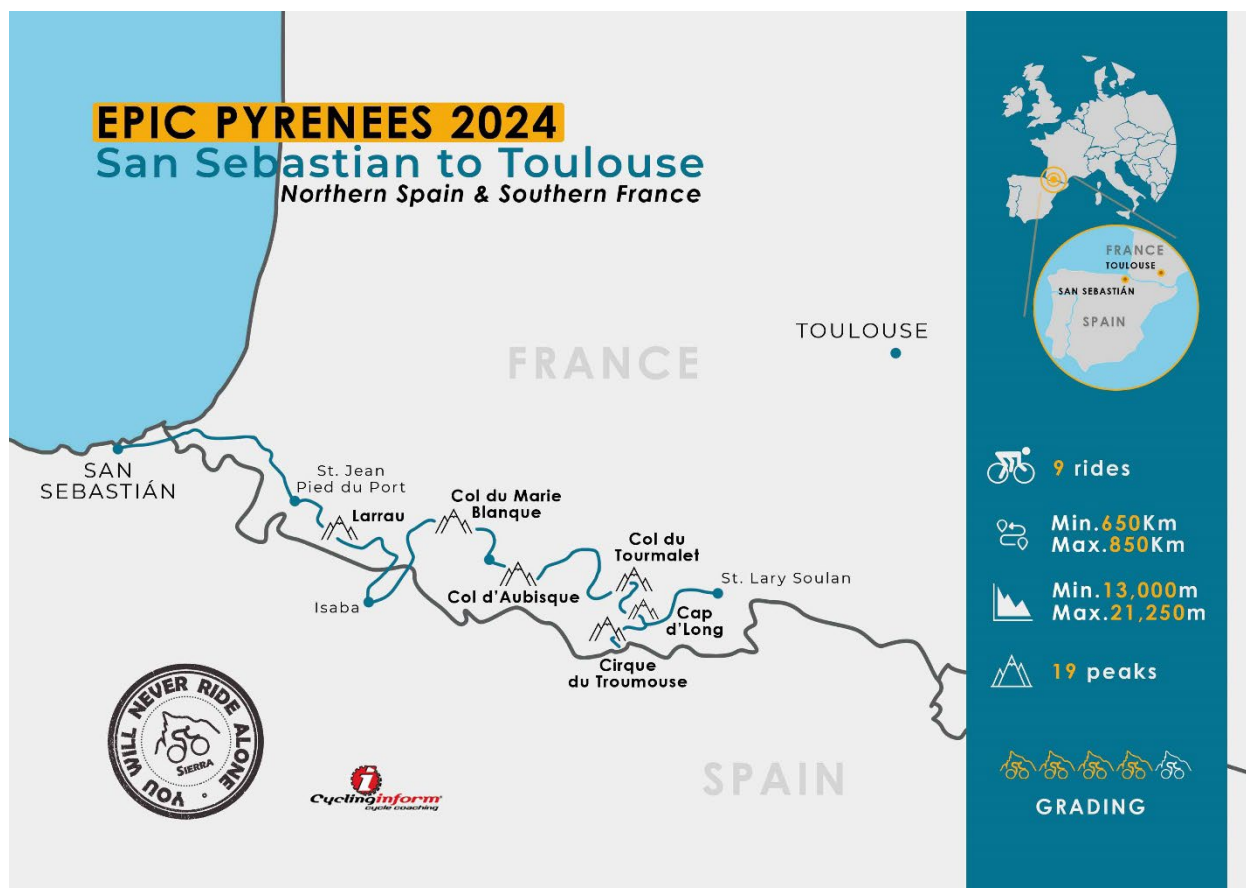
On the way to the Midi-Pyrenees this backroad cycling tour takes you over numerous classic TDF climbs including Col de la Pierre St Martin (Stage 10 summit / 2015 TDF), Col du Marie Blanque (Stage 5 / 2023 TDF) and Col d'Aubisque (Stage 18, hors categorie, 2022 TDF).

Once we arrive and base ourselves in the Midi-Pyrenees for three nights things start to become really exciting. The valley surrounding Argeles-Gazost has towering mountain peaks all around. Col du Soulor, Col du Spandelles, Hautacam, Luz Ardiden and that other climb that goes by the name 'Tourmalet' are all in easy striking distance. With the 20km designated bike path which meanders along the Ousse River it is the perfect place to ride and relax if you are looking for an easier day on the bike.

What makes this tour EPIC in our opinion is the great mix of cols which have never been used by Le Tour. The Pyrenees is home to several pristine national parks which the TDF is unable to access. You will be in awe of the gigantic landscapes as you ride to 'Cirque de Troumouse' and 'Cap d'Long'. Here we are talking about old glaciers and reservoirs which sit at heights hovering around 2000m elevation.

To round out what will be an amazing trip there will be a final stay in the quaint town of St-Lary-Soulan. The final climbs to be tackled include Horquette d'Ancizan which is perhaps our favourite valley in the entire Pyrenees and Col du Portet which was recently asphalted and is now the highest col for road cycling in the French Pyrenees.

What an amazing ten-day holiday through the best of the Spanish & French Pyrenees!



HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Cycle **Larrau** on the Spain/France border!
- ✓ Test yourself on **Col du Marie Blanque** one of the Pyrenees steepest road cycling ascents. Can you match Jai Hindley and his 2023 TDF Stage 5 win!
- ✓ Aubisque, Hautacam, Tourmalet & Portet – **4 hors categorie climbs!**
 - ✓ Be amazed as you ride the glacier to ‘**Cirque du Troumouse**’
- ✓ Spin the legs along the **bike path** between Lourdes and Pierrefitte
- ✓ Enter the **Irati Forest** and enjoy a taste of the **Spanish Pyrenees!**



ITINERARY

DAY ONE – Thursday 13 June 2024 – Atlantic Pyrenees

Pre-tour we recommend you spend a day or two enjoying everything that San Sebastian has to offer. This coastal town in Basque Country is beautifully positioned with the Conca beach lying between the Monte Igueldo and Urgell headlands. Visiting the Conca beach and the medieval old town is really something. In Basque Country tapas are called ‘pintxos’ and these elaborate bite-sized treats must be first seen to be believed and later washed down with a glass of beer or wine!

If you are short on time though, our team will collect you from San Sebastian train station at 9:00am for a 20-minute transfer over the French border. After setting up the bikes we will then kick-off our Epic Pyrenees journey! 100km might sound like a big first-up ride but the four Spain/France border crossings will keep things interesting. FYI - in France the climbs are called ‘cols’ but in Spain you have ‘puertos’. The Pyrenees have plenty of climbs so there will be time to remember all of these new cycling terms!

Tonight we sleep in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port which is located at the beginning of the French Camino pilgrim route. Rest up as tomorrow, just like the pilgrims, we too ride into Spain. Brace yourselves for Larrau!

Why Epic?

There are not too many rides where you can criss-cross between the Spanish and French Pyrenees on four separate occasions. The climbs through the Atlantic Pyrenees never get too long so your ride will be full of flowing roads.

Meals

Dinner

Destinations

Hendaye

Today's Ride

100km cycling / 2000m elevation gain

Accommodation

St-Jean-Pied-de-Port (Atlantic, France)

DAY TWO – Friday 14 June 2024 – Larrau (Irati Forest)



Today we will roll-out from the front door of the hotel. Before long we are at the base of Larrau. The climb has been used on multiple occasions during both the Tour de France and La Vuelta a España. It was even scaled during Stage 14 of the 2023 La Vuelta pro race!

Larrau is a 14.8km climb with a 8.0% average grade. However, the ascent includes a difficult mid-section where for 7.3km the average grade is actually 10%. Towards the top you will welcome a 2.5km reprieve (2% false flats) before the 10% double digits return for the final 2km. The top of the climb is remote and one for those who love backroad experiences. After a fun descent civilisation returns and there will be time for a lunch break in Ochagavia. This medieval township in the heart of Navarra province (Spain) is a real treat.

During the run home we will get your heart rate up again as we continue over the ‘Lazar’ climb in the heart of the Irati forest. A classic hotel to hotel ride which finishes in Isaba and our home for the next two nights.

Why Epic?

Larra Larrau has only 2 TDF crossings, however, its first back in 1996 was full of intrigue. The climb was supposed to pay homage to local hero Miguel Indurain and his 5 consecutive TDF wins from 1991-95.

These plans though were dealt a heavy blow when 'Big Mig' spectacularly blew up on Hautacam the previous day. A tough climb in a beautiful part of the world! In

2023 the Larra Larrau gran fondo is celebrating its 28th edition highlighting its importance in the Spanish cycling scene!

Meals

Breakfast & Dinner

Destinations

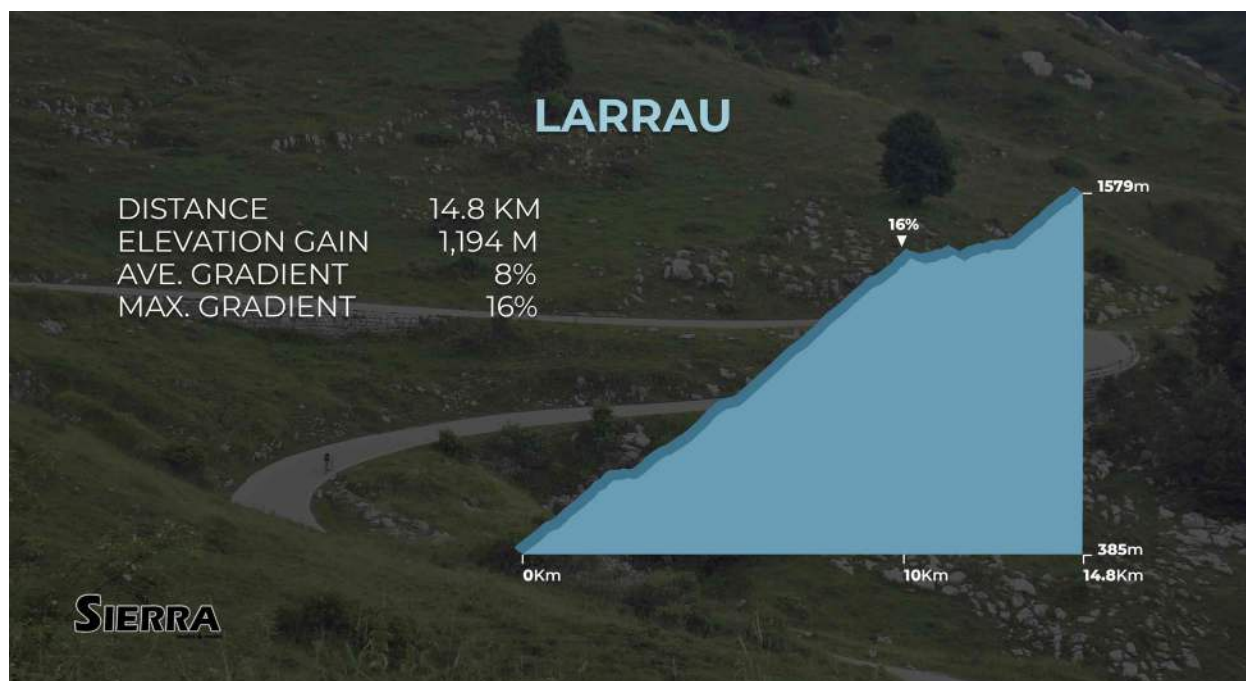
Ochagavia

Today's Ride

90km / 2500m elevation gain

Accommodation

Isaba (Irati Forest, Spain)



DAY THREE – Saturday 15 June 2024 – Irati Forest

The Irati Forest is one of Spain's best kept secrets! Wild mountains, gorges, fast flowing rivers and lush farmland provide the perfect backdrop for road cycling. After a day cycling through this region you will understand why we have brought you into this secluded section of the Spanish Pyrenees. For those wanting a relatively easy ride today there is a 55km hotel loop which in many ways resembles the Italian Dolomites for scenery. There are no household 'cols/puertos' on offer today but if there was a photo accompanying 'cycling' in the dictionary then this area would go close to winning. For those wanting to ride long the kilometres are endless and we would like to propose a testing undulating 125km route which accumulates a lazy 2000m of elevation gain.

Why Epic?

The Irati Forest is one of those relatively unknown pockets of the Pyrenees. It is a special place and the loop ride, which intersects beautiful rivers through quiet forests, will make for a truly memorable ride.

Meals

Breakfast

Destinations

Anso

Today's Ride

55km / 1200m elevation gain or

125km / 2000m elevation gain

Accommodation

Isaba (Irati Forest, Spain)



DAY FOUR – Sunday 16 June 2024 - Marie Blaque

Today we say goodbye to Spain as in 25km we have already cycled back over into France. The climb which will take us there is called ‘Piedra de San Martin’. Chris Froome took the only TDF stage summit finish win here back in 2015. As mentioned earlier, this also played centre stage for the Stage 14 summit finish at the 2023 La Vuelta a España. It is a long climb (26.7km / 4.1% average grade) which also includes a stretch of 9km at 8%. Once on the border there is a long descent to Arette which brings you to the feet of ‘Col de Marie Blaque’.

Over the last few years the run from the summit of ‘Marie Blaque’ to Laruns has created great TDF viewing. Aussies will remember Jai Hindley making a brave move on the steepest sections of Marie Blaque during Stage 4 of the 2023 TDF before time trialling his way to victory in Laruns. Emphatic! Laruns is a strategic location for an overnight stay as the hors categorie Col d’Aubisque rests only a few kilometres away and forms the gateway to the Midi-Pyrenees. Time to rest up as some big days are fast approaching!

Why Epic?

Col de Marie Blaque has been featured 16 times during epic TDF stages. It is one of the most feared climbs in the pro-peloton. It is not the distance but the exponential nature of the climb. The first 6km average 4.5% whereas the final 4km wall averages 11%. A stark contrast and this somewhat ‘easy’ start often catches cyclists well and truly off guard.

Meals

Breakfast & Dinner

Destinations

Marie Blaque

Today’s Ride

100km / 2000m elevation gain

Accommodation

Laruns (Pyrenees, France)

DAY FIVE – Monday 17 June 2024 – Col d'Aubisque

Our fourth consecutive hotel to hotel ride is on offer today. Cycling from Laruns, one of the great Pyrenees climb doubles is calling us - Col d'Aubisque and Col du Soulor! The **hors categorie Col d'Aubisque climb** has been passed 45 times during the Tour de France making it the second most used climb in race history. The 17km climb with 7% average grade is a constant test but the oversized TDF commemorative bikes at the summit always make an excellent photo shoot!

After passing 'Aubisque' you will cycle the dramatic mountain road which links the Soulor and Aubisque summits. The road breathtakingly hugs the cliffs of the Cirque du Litor, passes two striking tunnels and is simply a balcony cycling road experience like no other. From Col du Soulor the standard descent into Argeles-Gazost has now been turned on its head with the nearby Col du Spandelles receiving its first spray of asphalt before Stage 18 of the 2022 TDF. Now with 'Spandelles' available for road bikes this optional extra creates an incredible challenge as both climbs on offer today are tackled from their most difficult TDF approaches. Please remember though there are always options and for those looking for an easier ride today you can enjoy Aubisque/Soulor and descend straight to the tour hotel.

Why Epic?

Col d'Aubisque is second to only the Tourmalet for TDF crossings. Combine that with the balcony road alongside Cirque du Litor and you have a match made in cycling heaven. The new Col du Spandelles climb measuring 10.3km and 8.3% average grade (max. ramps of 15%) will be the icing on the cake so to speak!

Meals

Breakfast

Destinations

Col d'Aubisque

Today's Ride

50km / 1350m elevation gain

70km / 2300m elevation gain

Accommodation

Argeles-Gazost (Pyrenees, France)

DAY SIX – Tuesday 18 June 2024 – Cirque du Troumouse

Today is one of those special days on the bikes where the Sierra peloton passes into the Gavarnie National Park and its quiet, remote and vast landscapes. The Tour de France would love to find its way up to Cirque du Troumouse but the pristine nature of this landscape means it is off limits. Thankfully for recreational cyclists it is ours for the taking and the final 3km are even closed to traffic. Even before making the turn off to Troumouse the roads have been tilting upwards for 18 km. The gradients are never too problematic (2.5% average) but patience is the name of the game as the final 17km climb on Col du Troumouse will test you all the way to the top.

Its 5.5% average grade hides up to five separate kilometres nudging 10%. The scenery is going to help you as the cirque (valley head formed by glacial erosion) comes into view and you battle it out with the final 3km to perhaps the most impressive summit you will ever encounter! At the top you will bask in the glory of arriving at one of Europe's biggest cirques. Road cycling does not get any better than this!

If you still have the legs for it a gentle ride down the valley to Luz Ardiden ski station awaits. This is a climb which is characterised by a series of switchbacks that compete with Alpe d'Huez over in the French Alps! The 12.5km climb to Luz Ardiden includes a 7.3% average grade, ramps at a maximum 12% grade and a total of 31 switchbacks. Yes, 31 switchbacks. Alpe d'Huez over a similar distance has 21. Just saying! This is an iconic mountain top finish which when employed at Le Tour is always a hors categorie climb!



Why Epic?

Since 1985 Luz Ardiden has played out some fierce TDF mountain stage finishes. Delgado, Virenque and Armstrong are just a few surnames which have featured strongly. One of the most dramatic images though dates back to 2003 when Lance Armstrong had his handlebars caught up in the bag of a spectator. Down he came and Iban Mayo also. With 9km still to go he pegged his way back to a strong Jan Ulrich. Love Lance or hate him this certainly marked a historic and entertaining moment in pro cycling in the heart of the Midi-Pyrenees!

Meals

Breakfast & Dinner

Destinations

Luz St Sauveur

Today's Ride

85km / 1850m elevation gain

110km / 2900m elevation gain

Accommodation

Argeles-Gazost (Pyrenees, France)



DAY SEVEN – Wed 19 June 2024 – Relax or Hautacam

After six consecutive days on the bike it might be time for some to take a rest. The valley that links Lourdes and Pierrefitte-Nestalas measures 20km and is flat meaning a very comfortable out and back 40km recovery ride is possible. If there is interest we can also guide you down into ‘La Grotte’ home to the Notre-Dame de Lourdes basilica. The church says that from 1858 there have been 70 miracles and it is a curious place even if you are religious or not.

Those who are also looking for more kilometres today (climbing kilometres that is) have another big ride up to Hautacam programmed. From Argeles-Gazost the 16.5km at 7.5% average makes for a testing climb.

Why Epic?

Hautacam is a relative newcomer to Le Tour having only 6 summit finishes since its arrival during 1994. Bjarne Riis, Vincenzo Nibali and Jonas Vingegaard have all taken line honours above this colossal climb. The climb starts out in the busy valley floor before arriving to what are peaceful mountain meadows. We actually think it is a more difficult climb than Aubisque and Tourmalet!

Meals

Breakfast

Destinations

Lourdes

Today's Ride

40km / 350m elevation gain

100km / 2350m elevation gain

Accommodation

Argeles-Gazost (Pyrenees, France)



DAY EIGHT – Thursday 20 June 2024 – T is for Tourmalet



A route for the cycling purists – a double climb ride straight from the TDF route book! Col du Tourmalet is a challenging climb (18km / 7.2% average grade) but the most famous of all TDF ‘cols’ with over 100 race route passings! A highlight for everyone is greeting the giant structure (‘Geant’) dedicated to Octave Lapize the first cyclist to cross the Tourmalet during the TDF over a century ago.

The first half of the climb from Luz St Sauveur is relatively uneventful as you make your way towards the mid-level chairlift station. There are few steep sections to contend with through the Bareges township but the epic mountain road in our opinion starts when there is 8km to go. A number of sweeping switchbacks will get you going and these continue all the way to the summit. With 2km to go the going gets tough as you contend with 9/10% slopes up to the notorious rock-cutting finish line. What a journey, what a climb!

To cap off a magical day on the bike the ride descends past La Mongie ski station and through to the base of Col d’Aspin. After a few soft kilometres we now intersect ‘Horquette d’Ancizan’ which is one of our favourite valleys. Its green lush pastures provide a pure delight and the back road to St Lary Soulan is a fantastic way to round out a fun and historic day on the bikes!

Why Epic?

With over 100 TDF race appearances this is the jewel of the Pyrenees. Sweeping switchbacks and expansive views will leave memories for a lifetime. The road recognition will keep you captivated for all future TDF race viewing. As you near the final kilometre the view of Le Geant statue (recently moved) will act as motivation to reach the top. Now you have reached the heights of your cycling heros!

Meals

Breakfast

Destinations

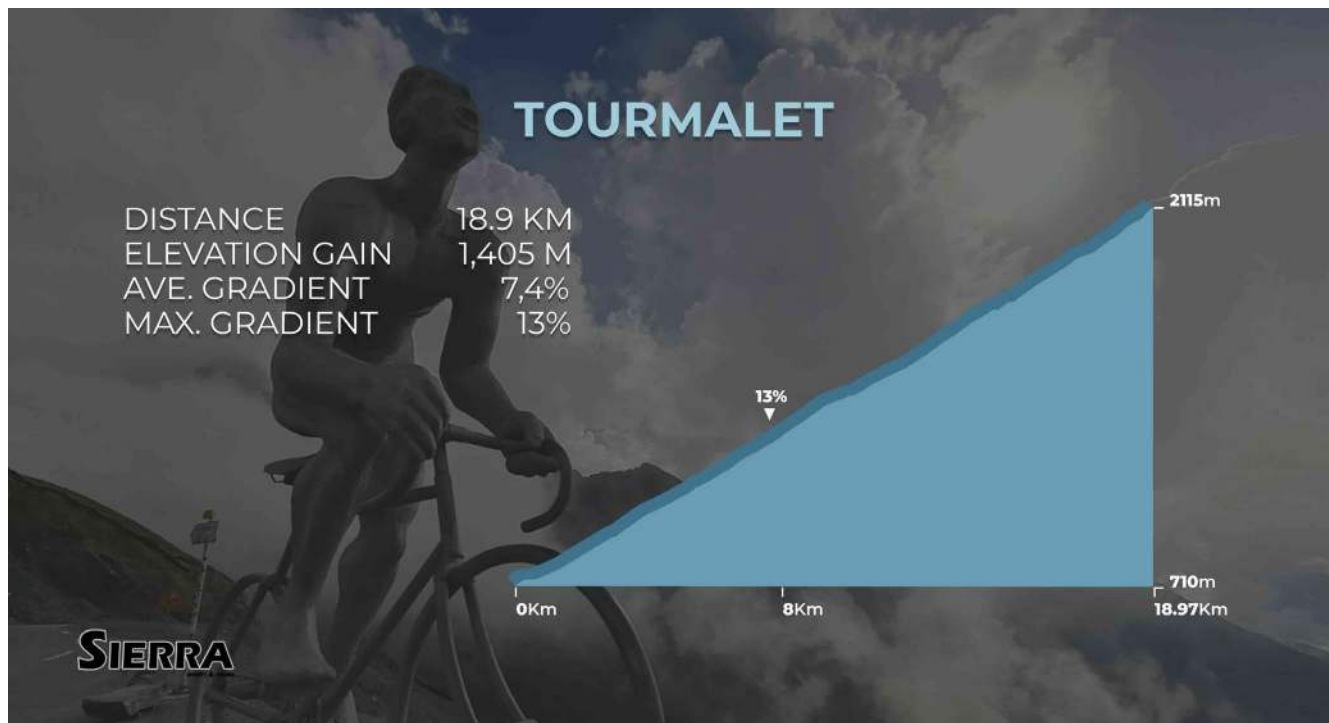
Ancizan valley

Today's Ride

80km / 2400m elevation gain

Accommodation

St-Lary-Soulan (Pyrenees, France)



DAY NINE – Friday 21 June 2024 – Mountain Reservoirs

The cycling route on offer takes our cyclists up to Cap d'Long with this mountain reservoir hovering at an astonishing 2160m altitude (France's second highest reservoir). The Tour de France would also love to have a stage finish here but the logistics just do not allow access for such a big event.

Once back down in St Lary Soulan you could enjoy a long lunch OR finish the tour with a bang on Col de Portet. What was recently a gravel access track was asphalted specially for the 2018 TDF. It is a hostile climb but one which takes you up into the clouds which hover high above the adventure township of St Lary!

Why Epic?

It is the final ride of the tour and one of the most majestic. In fact, if ridden in full today's ride is a serious contender for the Queen Stage of this tour. Col de Portet standing at 2215m is now the highest paved road in the Pyrenees, a full 100m higher than Tourmalet. Its 16km at 8.7% average grade means you will have to fight all the way. What an epic finish to what has been an epic tour!

Meals

Breakfast & Dinner

Destinations

Cap d'Long

Today's Ride

50km / 1350m elevation gain

80km / 2800m elevation gain

Accommodation

St-Lary-Soulan (Pyrenees,
France)

DAY TEN – Saturday 22 June 2024 – Goodbyes

Following breakfast our guides will be available to transfer you to Toulouse Blagnac Airport (2hr). We can have you at Blagnac airport by 12:00 noon so please keep that in mind when organising any onwards flights. We trust you have enjoyed your Epic Pyrenees cycling experience and we look forward to seeing you again soon!

Meals: Breakfast



WHAT'S INCLUDED

Tour Package:

Epic Pyrenees (13 – 22 June 2024)

Tour Inclusions:

9 nights accommodation (twin share), 3/4 star hotels
All breakfasts included, 3 picnic lunches & 5 dinners with beer & wine
9 epic guided rides (includes support van & mechanic)
Food and drink during rides
Commemorative cycling jersey
Comprehensive tour booklet (ride maps and profiles)
On-road climbing & descending classes

Price: 3975 Euro (Payment in \$AUD available)

Minimum 6 participants / Maximum 15 participants

EXTRAS

Cycling-Inform 24 week training package (includes coaching & mentoring): \$AUD 2800

Premium tour pack: 1350 Euro

(Includes daily bike clean & tune, 4 laundry services, daily 30min massage & all dinners)

Single room supplement: 750 Euro

Carbon road bike hire (Orbea Avant M30, 105, compact, 11/32 cassette): 325 Euro

Carbon road bike hire (BMC Road/Teammachine, Electronic, 11/32 cassette): 550 Euro

2 nights Transition Package (San Sebastian): 1250 Euro

CONTACT



Sierra Sports & Tours specialises in European road cycling tours with annual trips through France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Slovenia & Switzerland. Cycling is our life, bike travel our passion and our number one priority is to support you in your quest to cycle the very best of Europe!

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Cycling-Inform has nearly two decades of cycling coaching experience in customising training plans and master classes for recreational riders and racing cyclists. Our focus is on effective training so you achieve real breakthroughs with your cycling performance.

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