

GO FAST

THOMSON BIKE TOURS A fusion of Scottish and American ownership, this company has cut back live viewing on its four Tour trips from four to two days (and that's only for critical mountain stages) to stay true its motto, "less van, more bike." For 2011, Thomson has organized a "Centenary Alps Celebration" with a focus on the Col du Galibier and L'Alpe d'Huez. The day 4 itinerary clears L'Alpe d'Huez, Col du Lautaret, Col du Galibier, and L'Alpe d'Huez again, over 121km with 3,200 meters of climbing. Participants are grouped into eight- to 10-person ride teams according to performance level. Accommodation is on racecourse, 1km from the L'Alpe d'Huez finish line.
www.thomsonbiketours.com \$\$\$

"SCREW AUTOGRAPHS AND WAITING AROUND FOR HOURS TO SEE THESE GUYS FLASH BY FOR A SPLIT-SECOND, I WANT TO SPEND AS MUCH TIME AS POSSIBLE IN THE SADDLE, HAMMERING THE TOUR'S BIGGEST DAYS."

RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE LOCALS THIS IS YOU:

"I WANT TO SOAK IN THE CULTURE OF THE EVENT AT MY OWN PACE. I'M AN EXPERIENCED CYCLIST BUT PREFER NOT TO CHAIN GANG WITH AGRO WEEKEND-WARRIOR TYPES."

ADVENTURE TRAVEL GROUP Enthusiastic owners Lise Fleury and Gary Bezer are known for personal attention and small group tours, with a 16-person cap. Their 2011 trip, during the third week of the Tour, is designed for "strong and avid cyclists" and climbs 14 classic Alpine cols, with three stage-viewing stops and a 50-70 mile daily distance average. Two riding groups, "fast-paced" and "leisurely" make this trip popular for couples or groups with mixed riding thresholds. Lodging is in three- and four-star inns and hotels. www.adventuretravelgroup.com \$\$\$

CICLISMO CLASSICO For those with limited time, Ciclismo Classico's seven-day and six-night Tour trip runs Monday to Sunday and minimizes your out-of-office vacation penalty. Climbs include the Col de l'Agnel and Col de l'Izoard with three stage-viewing days. www.ciclismoclassico.com \$\$\$



COURTESY THOMSON BIKE TOURS (3)