

Hire bikes in Paris

Cathy Gaulter-Carter and family explored the French capital via Velibs

We were en route to the Costa Brava by train for our family holiday and had a few hours in Paris. Perfect! We could take some 'Velib' bikes from a street corner and go on a cycle ride.

My daughters are teenagers so I was prepared for some reluctance to the idea of cycling round Paris. None of us had enjoyed the Metro ride across Paris, however, and the girls didn't fancy walking anywhere. My suggestion of taking out hire bikes was received positively. The Velib bikes were all lined up and ready. The late Sunday afternoon weather was fine so, after taking some time to master the system, we adjusted the saddles, put bags in the baskets and were on our way.

Having cycled in Paris before, I knew that the easiest way to navigate was to use the river as a point of reference. We were heading for the Eiffel Tower – south of the

river and on the other side of Paris.

The cycle lanes were excellent and the French drivers considerate. We could stop and look at anything interesting along the way. My husband and eldest daughter had never seen the Eiffel Tower, so it was amazing to catch glimpses of it on the way. When we arrived, we slotted the bikes into nearby stands and went to admire the tower. (You are only charged for the time that the bikes are away from the stands and the first half hour is free.)

Later we headed back. It was getting dark but the Velibs were equipped with dynamo lights. The one-way system beside the river meant that we couldn't retrace our outward route but, after cycling as fast as possible and asking directions, we eventually managed to get back in time to start our next adventure – the sleeper to Spain.



Follow me to the Med

Bob Norton led a CTC Cycling Holidays tour through France last May



It was my first time leading a CTC tour: 10 days, carrying luggage, graded 'strenuous'. But I had a good mentor in Gerry Goldsmith, who led this tour in 2007 with me as an assistant.

Thirteen of us got off the European Bike Express in Bordeaux. We cycled 100k to Arcachon to dip our toes in the Atlantic. We were expecting weather 'similar to a good English summer'. In fact, the first

few days were cool and had some rain, but I suppose that is an English summer!

From the Atlantic coast, we rode through the flat, forested area of the Landes into one of the most famous wine-growing regions of the world, the Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrenees. We rode together as a group and everyone was very supportive, to me and each other, especially when a traffic accident blocked our route, causing some hurried map consultation. I earned the temporary nickname 'dead-end Bob'.

When we reached Languedoc we found wilder countryside: lakes, rolling hills, and towns with a faded charm. We were based in Aniane for three nights, where we enjoyed a couple of days without luggage. On one 'rest day' we

rode to the Cirque de Navacelles and Gorge de la Viz. The scenery was stunning and the weather hot and sunny. 'The best day's cycling of my life,' one participant told me.

The final stage of our journey to the Mediterranean at Villeneuve-les-Maguelone, for a dip in the sea, was our last day before catching the bike bus home. It was a really enjoyable trip, and I'd like to thank my assistant leader and all participants. I look forward to leading the tour again in 2009.



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