



Clockwise from far left: High in the Pyrenees on the D428 road above Estérençuby. En route to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on day one. San Mateo Festival, Logroño. Joining the Camino Frances at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. Pamplona Cathedral



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ride over 12 days in September. At the age of 77, long cycle trips are the activity I like best. Three of us – me and friends John (74) and Jonathan (62) – crossed France by train, then rode through the Basque Country, Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla y Leon and Cantabria. John and I had electric bikes, Jonathan a conventional bike.

Taking an electric bike abroad has its upsides and downsides. For us older cyclists, it means you can enjoy a good, long bike ride, beautiful scenery and have help with the uphill sections. The downside is that e-bikes are heavier, so getting them on and off trains can be a task in itself. In some cases, one

has to hang them up on bike racks. This definitely takes two people.

I was pleased we were able to cover serious ascents and distances. The secret is to minimise battery use on level ground. If you get up to 16 or 17mph and stay there, you use no battery power since it cuts out at 15mph. Or keep the bike in economy mode as much as you can, then only increase the power assistance on hills when you have to.

There was a lot of climbing – 7,958m (26,109ft), all told. We travelled through some of the most beautiful and remote parts of the Pyrenees.

Then, once we turned north, we had some steep ascents through the Picos de Europa. The most challenging of these was over 960 metres

but it had stunning, wide-ranging views of valleys and mountains.

In between the big mountain ranges, the riding was very varied. In the sparsely populated area beyond Lugano, west of the Rioja wine region and before we got to Burgos, we had a very wet and windy day. It was made worse by



Trains through France

Planning a train journey with bikes that are fully assembled is a challenge. While some TGV trains will now carry them, on others your bike has to be packed in a bag no larger than 90x130cm. On previous trips I have learned to look out for the regional TER trains (Transport Express Régional), which allow fully assembled bikes; advance booking is required in the peak season. Intercités trains also allow fully assembled bikes for a fee. Check out the French national railways (SNCF) website for more info: [sncf-connect.com/en-en/help/travelling-your-bike](https://www.sncf-connect.com/en-en/help/travelling-your-bike).

It might sound like a lot of faffing around to get to the start of a journey. But we enjoyed the restaurants and hotels en route, as well as the countryside we sped through. To me it's part of the holiday and it's cheap, especially if you have a Carte Avantage Senior for over-60s ([sncf-connect.com/app/en-en/catalogue/description/carte-avantage-senior](https://www.sncf-connect.com/app/en-en/catalogue/description/carte-avantage-senior)), which gives you 30% off. The ferry crossing from Newhaven to Dieppe was cheap too, with 20% off for seniors.

