

Fact File: Along the Way

Route: Train from Dieppe to Bayonne in SW France. We cycled up into the Pyrenees and followed the Camino de Santiago. West of Burgos we turned north through the Picos de Europa to reach Santander and our ferry home.

Distance: 644km (400 miles) over 12 days, averaging 55km (33 miles) per day.

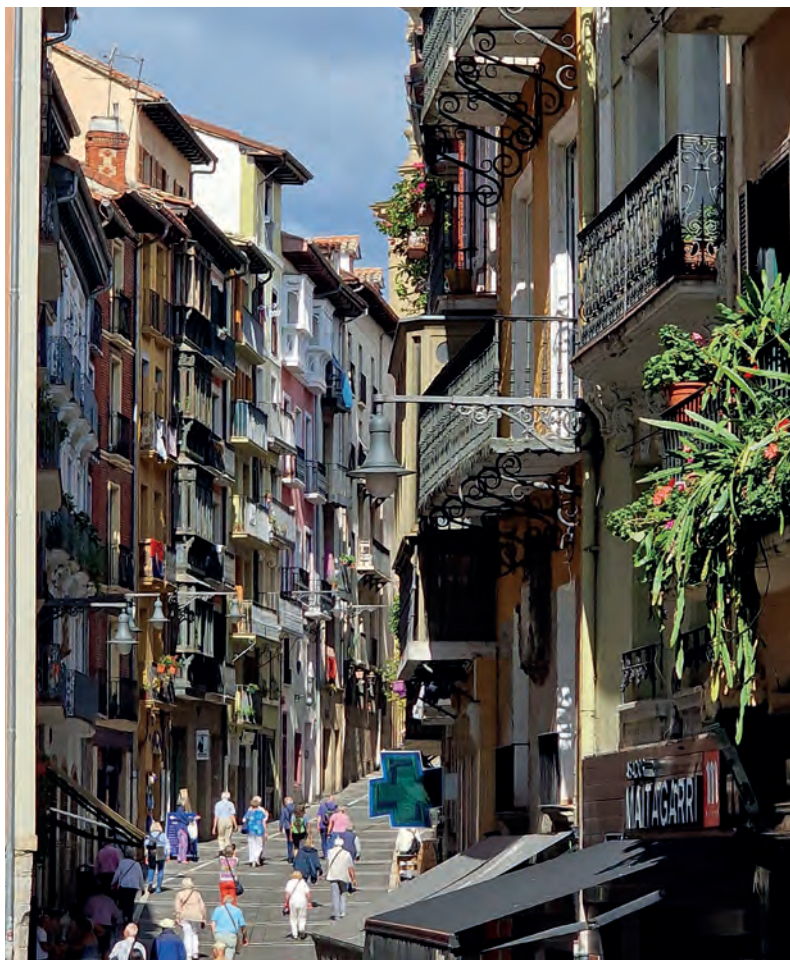
Ascent: Total 7,958m (26,109ft); daily average 663m (2,175ft).

Conditions: Mostly sunny and warm (20°C) but on two days we had rain. Roads were good, off-road tracks sometimes muddy.

Maps/guides: The Rother Walking Guide of the Camino de Santiago, plus Cicerone's Cycling the Camino De Santiago: The Way of St James – Camino Francés by Mike Wells. We used mapmyride.com for planning and Google Maps and Komoot for on-the-go navigation.

Accommodation: Reservations made with Booking.com
I'm glad I had... A lightweight cycling cape, a good-quality pump and two spare tubes.

Next time I would... Allow more time for sightseeing and meeting people.



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

our decision to come off the rural trackway (to speed things up), only to find ourselves on a very busy road with a headwind and driving rain! Conversely, the Canal de Castilla, an 18th century waterway that runs roughly north-south, was idyllic. We followed it for 200 kilometres.

SOCIABLE CYCLING

One of the great things about cycling journeys, whether at home or abroad, is the people you meet on the way when you take time to stop and have a chat. This especially applies to the Camino de Santiago. We met people from Australia, Germany, Holland and England. The cafés en route are a great place to start up a conversation; there's a special camaraderie among cyclists on this world-famous journey. You also meet plenty of people on the open road.

There was one chap doing the Camino de Santiago in a wheelchair. Bearing in mind the

route is over 700km long, he deserves a medal.

We met a couple pushing an old-fashioned pram with their belongings in that instead of two heavy rucksacks. We also met a couple from Oxfordshire who were cycling for charity on their Bromptons. They had cycled all the way from St Malo; their total journey would be over 1,500km (950 miles)! One of the most interesting conversations I had was with a hermit monk, who was gently hoping he would convert travellers to Christianity. I'm not religious but I had a most uplifting conversation with him.

It's not just the people you meet. At Logroño, in the centre of the Rioja wine-growing area, we arrived on the day of the festival of San Mateo. The atmosphere was lively and enjoyable, with impromptu street bands and singers. You naturally get into conversation with people in the bar where you're drinking or eating. I even found a bar called Casa Vic! We decided that we definitely had to eat there.

