

Bike touring on your own is so much more fun

A self-guided and supported cycle tour that criss-crossed the Austrian Danube meant I could never get lost

DANIELLE MURRAY

For someone who has travelled afar many times on my own, that I should be anxious about going it alone is comical. The years have changed me. And I have become used to a certain companion by my side.

But my husband Dave is busy at work and casually mentions I might enjoy our annual bike holiday without him. There's immediate and tremendous guilt as I consider the idea but it passes.

Online, I stumble across self-guided, supported cycle tours and go for an operator with cherry red bikes. No guide, a set route, roadside help if needed and bags are taken from one hotel to the next each day.

As a pair, we are no strangers to long-distance cycle touring and often ride on our own, with beloved bikes and two panniers packed with the basics. Every nanogram counts. The idea of travelling solo with more than one pair of shoes, maybe even a handbag and room for stuff I might buy, is enticing.

Dozens of trails are on offer but I select the most well-known, most frequented and likely one of the best maintained cycle paths in Europe – Passau to Vienna on the double-sided Austrian Danube River Cycle Path.

I have considered tackling this route before, but it is a flat 324 kilometres and Dave prefers hills. I do not. Dave also finds rivers dull. I do not. Marriage means compromise and we take turns, but this is my trip now.

Within a week, I am all set – and suddenly apprehensive. It really has been ages since I went anywhere *toute seule* and unfamiliar.

My eight-day-seven-night journey begins at the confluence of three rivers, the Ilz, the Inn and the Danube in Passau. At my hotel check-in, I am provided with trip documents and told where to find my ride. But the sky is black, the rain torrential and I begin to wonder what I have gotten myself into. I loathe the wet weather cycling.

The next morning, the sun is on fire and I head off first thing. Low mountains hug both sides of the Danube and the path is wide, perfectly paved and without potholes or litter. If this is one of the busiest bike routes in all of



An eight-day journey begins at the confluence of three rivers, the Ilz, the Inn and the Danube in Passau, Germany, and ends in Vienna. In the UNESCO-listed Wachau Valley (above right) vineyards and orchards line the hillsides.

LEFT TOP AND BOTTOM: DANIELLE MURRAY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL; ABOVE RIGHT: EXTRAVAGANTNI/GETTY IMAGES



Europe, I cannot tell.

I arrive at the river resort in Schloggen well before my room is ready and decide from here on in that I might allow myself to leave later in the morning and fully partake in the lavish breakfasts included with my tour package. After all, I only need to ride an estimated 60 kilometres a day, and have a suitcase that need not be in the lobby for transfer to its next destination before 10 a.m.

Schloggen to Linz dazzles much like the day before: slopes on both sides, totally flat and largely people-free. Since I'm solo, I stop and take pictures every five minutes because no one tells me not to. In Linz, Austria's third-largest metropolis, I shop because no one tells me I can't and I eat ice cream for dinner because no one

tells me I shouldn't. Solitude is looking pretty good so far.

The next few days follow a similar pattern along the Danube – barges and river cruises pass me frequently and swans swim by the shore. From within the trees by the path, I hear birdsong. At lunch, I munch on kaiser buns, slices of ham and cucumber, conveniently stolen at breakfast, plus a not-stolen bag of chips from the supermarket. Park benches and picnic tables are everywhere but no toilets. Here, I assume, the goal is that cyclists leave the route and take advantage of cafés on the waterfront or in local towns on the way to Vienna. I do so on occasion and find prices reasonable.

Every so often, a bridge, dam or bike ferry allows cyclists to go from side to side and I switch back



and forth. When the low mountains disappear and the widening Danube gets dull, the path veers off now and then into the countryside, allowing cyclists a change of scenery.

In Krems, I leave the trail to check out the city and am reminded that as with all bike paths, directions always show you a way into a city centre but never back out. It is the only time I get lost. I marvel at the terraced vineyards and fruit orchards on the hillsides that line the once again narrow river in the UNESCO-listed Wachau Valley. Whereas I have heard mostly German for most of the route, now the main language in earshot is English, likely Americans taking day trips on tour buses from Vienna.

On my last evening in Traismauer, I take in a school performance in the town square and pretend like I understand and that I belong. I stay until they finish because I am not ready for my glimpse into Austrian life to end.

I arrive in Vienna the next afternoon with mixed emotions. I made it. As at every overnight stop along the way, all I have to do is lock up my cherry red bike on the company rack in the hotel basement garage. But this time it's for good and I am sad because I have become fond of it.

I do not leave Vienna straight away and instead add on two glorious days where I do what I

want and when I want. I am clearly getting used to solo travel. I long to be back on the road again. With or without my usual companion by my side – either way works.

IF YOU GO

The Passau (Germany) to Vienna (Austria) section of the Danube Cycle Path is open year-round. The flat route is best tackled in a west to east downstream and slightly downhill direction. Information can be found at Danube-cycle-path.com, Donauradweg-Etappen: Rad-Tourenplaner and EuroVelo.com.

I booked with Eurobike Cycling Holidays, and my 21-gear unisex rental bike cost \$160 with insurance. The cost for eight days/seven nights plus single supplement came to \$2,190 last summer.

Eurobike provides a front bag and side pannier. Helmets are not obligatory and not provided, but I brought my own. Pedals did not require clip-on shoes. A chain lock was provided as well as a booklet with directions – although getting lost on this particular route takes real effort.

Though Europe seems to run mostly on credit and debit cards, cash was needed for the ferry boat transfers and encouraged in one or two smaller Austrian villages.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Fight or flight: How to quell air rage before it takes off

DIANA BALLON

If you're a frequent flyer, you don't need anyone to tell you flying these days can be both frustrating and, well, even infuriating. The cheap seats are cramped, carry-on rules keep getting more restrictive, and even basics, like water, will cost you on some budget airlines.

Take all this, combined with the stress of flight delays or cancellations, and what Gatineau-based etiquette expert Julie Blais Comeau describes as growing incivility and intolerance in society – and you have a perfect pressure cooker for tempers to ignite.

"People are quicker to erupt than ever before, and are generally less tolerant of each other," Blais Comeau said. "Angry outbursts have been normalized by explosive politics in social media, and people are less willing to consider and take responsibility for the ripple effects of their words and actions."

According to the International Air Transport Association, reports of unruly passenger incidents rose from 2023 to 2024. Based on data from more than 60 operators globally, there was one incident per 405 flights in 2023 but one per 395 in 2024. While "non-compliance with crew instruction" was most frequently described, disruptive behaviour

can range from yelling at crew or other passengers to physical assault.

Last month, the U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced a "civility campaign" aimed at reducing unruly passenger behaviour.

Long-time commercial pilot and captain David Culos, based in Toronto, said rage – which he describes as a situation where someone is on the verge of physical violence and loses all filters – is rare. But anger is not. "Any outbursts that may be a result of anxiety, mental illness or distress are potentially more consequential while in flight," he said. And they can be downright dangerous when you're flying at 40,000 feet.

Even behaviour that falls short of air rage or anger – like irritability and impatience – can be unsettling when you're thousands of feet in the air in a metal tube.

As we head into the busy holiday travel season, here's what experts say you can do to stay calm in flight and help others around you do the same.

MINIMIZE STRESS BEFORE YOU BOARD YOUR FLIGHT

"Arrive to the airport with enough time, especially during holidays," Culos advises. "Track the status of your flight, and be aware that often the cheapest fares may be

subject to bumping or rescheduling if flights get oversold or cancelled."

Ensuring you're well rested and fed, and have enough snacks and ways to pass the time can set you off on the right foot. If possible, Culos adds, "consider paying to select seats that have more room like emergency exit rows."

BE CONSIDERATE

It should go without saying that you shouldn't clip your toenails on the plane (it's been done). But there are other, more common behaviours that can aggravate the people around you and potentially inflame tensions.

Blais Comeau says simple steps such as wearing your backpack on your front when walking to your seat to avoid hitting people, remembering to check behind you before reclining your seat, avoiding smelly food or loud devices in flight, and waiting your turn to disembark can go a long way to keeping the peace. As for your socks? Keep 'em on.

ASK NICELY, OR ASK FOR HELP

If you want a fellow passenger to turn down their music, or you're hoping to switch seats, try to gauge if they would be approachable, advises Blais Comeau. Make

warm eye contact, smile and then if the person seems friendly, politely ask for what you need. If a child is kicking your seat, alert the parent, rather than correcting the child yourself.

If your fellow passenger seems unapproachable, a crew member can help, Blais Comeau says. They are trained in de-escalation, and are better equipped to assist when emotions are rising or the conversation is getting tense.

MANAGE YOUR OWN ANGER

What should you do if you're the one getting hot under the collar, not your fellow passenger?

"Simple tools like counting backward from 300 by threes or talking yourself through the upset [phrases like 'it will pass'] can help you calm down if you're feeling a bit miffed or frustrated," said registered psychologist Dr. Lorne Korman, clinical director of VanPsych mental-health clinic in Vancouver.

But, he added, "if you are completely dysregulated and raging, and emotional intensity is high, cognitive or thinking strategies are actually ineffective." Instead, Korman recommends other ways to counter an extreme emotion, such as acting opposite to how you feel as a way to moderate the emotion's intensity. Small acts of kindness, for example, offering

someone your place in the washroom line, generate the experience of warmth and may interrupt or prevent an emotion like anger from escalating.

Sensory strategies can also work. Splash water on your face in the washroom or take an ice cube from your drink and put it on the back of your neck as a way to calm your nervous system.

AVOID ALCOHOL

If drinking alcohol tends to make you angry or short-tempered, Korman says, you should avoid it. "Dysregulated anger is never your friend," he says. Unlike "regulated" anger, which can help us stand up for or assert ourselves, rage overwhelms people and prevents them from thinking clearly. Because alcohol disinhibits us, people are more likely to act on their anger.

PRACTISE SELF-CARE

Even in budget economy, there are simple, inexpensive ways to make your flight more bearable. For me, that means bringing a cashmere sweater, cozy socks, an eye mask (for overnight flights) and protein snacks like granola bars to prevent becoming hungry.

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