

Explore!

# The Explorer

Magazine Issue 09 — Autumn 2025

## Travel Tales of the Unexpected

The joy of trains ± First time in India  
Eclipse chasing ± Off-grid getaways



# SLOW DOWN,

# SEE MORE

For some travelers, the best way to explore isn't by car, plane, or train – it's by bicycle. We spoke to **Diana Ballon**, an experienced vacation cyclist and **Caitlin Overend**, a first-time rider, to uncover the passion for bike-based travel.



**Diana Ballon** went on her first bike tour a couple of years ago and hasn't looked back since. She shares her experiences of exploring the world on two wheels, one pedal stroke at a time.

**A**fter a knee injury left me unable to run long distances, I took up cycling. While it started mainly as a way to reduce commute time at home in Toronto, and get some exercise, it soon morphed into my favorite form of travel outside of Canada, and particularly in Europe.

I wanted to not just arrive at a destination, but to savor the journey, experience the shifting landscapes, and watch scenery gradually unfold. I decided to heed my neighbor Big Lou's advice, to "make the trip part of the trip."

In the olden days, transatlantic travel meant boarding a ship and passing days at sea, watching the clouds change shape, the water and sky shifting between shades of blue and grey, the horizon stretching endlessly before you as you contemplate your destination ahead.

Cycling offers that same slow-paced, gradual way to enjoy the in-between places. Without a pane of glass between you and your environment, you are part of the landscape. You can move through it, without harming or polluting or altering the terrain. Cycling is also a great way to get exercise, without the impact on body parts like knees, hips and ankles. Since the pandemic, I have cycled in France, Spain, Greece, Portugal and the Baltics as part of small group trips. I am a serious convert. In fact, I am not just a convert, I'm a poster child for group cycling.

Sometimes I've booked with a girlfriend. Other times I've gone on my own. Regardless, I've made friends along the way, and continue to stay connected with at least a couple from every trip I've taken. Maybe that's because intense bonding happens with a form of exercise that doesn't involve competition, and when you are sharing an experience that for many of you may be a bucket list trip.

It's now been six weeks since my last cycling trip, and I'm already surfing the net looking for my next destination. Scandinavia? Mongolia? Albania? No destination is off limits.

**Below left**  
Bikes are perfect to explore small villages – like this one here in Spain

**Below right**  
To e-bike or not to e-bike is a question you might want to ask yourself before booking your trip

## Diana's tips for cycling in Europe



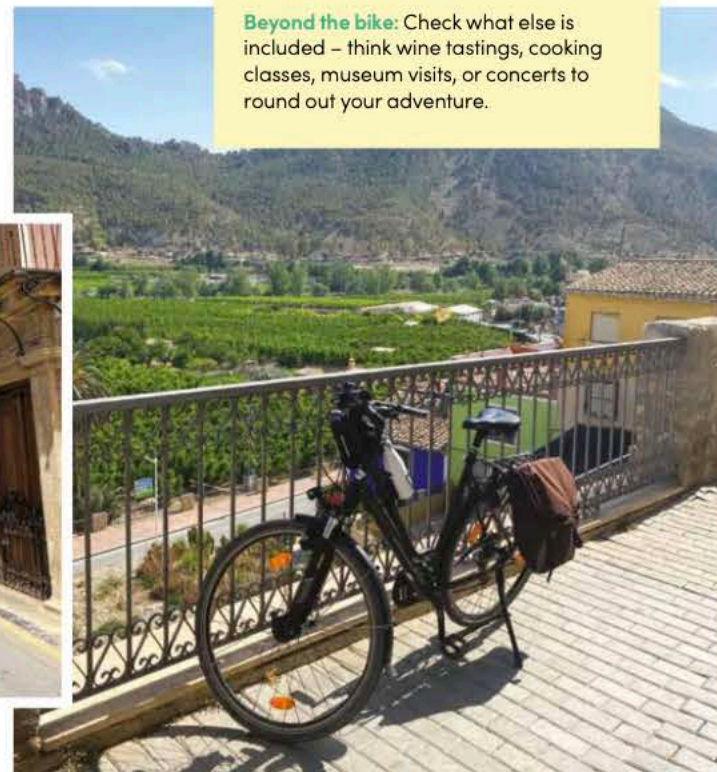
**Weather:** European cycling trips typically run from May to October, with some operators taking a break during the hottest summer months. If you're not keen on cycling in high heat, consider cooler regions like the Baltics or travel in spring or autumn.

**Level of challenge:** Cycling trips are graded by difficulty with helpful numerical ratings. These tell you about daily distances, hills, and terrain – worth paying attention to unless you're going electric!

**The ride:** Think about what landscapes you love. Coastal views? A Porto to Lisbon ride delivers stunning Atlantic scenery. Prefer castles and vineyards? The Loire Valley is perfect. Want dedicated cycling paths through parks and quiet countryside? Head to the Baltics. Craving Italian culture, food, and wine (with some hills thrown in)? Consider Tuscany, Sicily, the Amalfi Coast, or Puglia.

**To e-bike or not?:** Whether you choose traditional pedal power for authentic adventure or e-bikes for effortless exploration, the choice is yours – though e-bikes require advance reservation to guarantee availability.

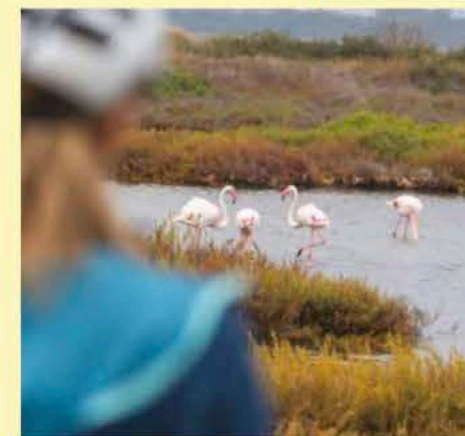
**Beyond the bike:** Check what else is included – think wine tastings, cooking classes, museum visits, or concerts to round out your adventure.



**“Without a pane of glass between you and your environment, you are part of the landscape.”**

**Below**  
Camargue flamingos are the largest European population of pink flamingos

**Right**  
When cycling, nothing stands between you and the places you visit



**Caitlin Overend**, Explore's Marketing Manager for Canada and the US, recently went on her very first cycling trip from France to Spain. She told us all about it.

**S**etting off on my very first small group cycling trip, I was nervous about keeping up, fitting in, and whether I'd chosen the right adventure – back then I didn't know yet that sharing handlebars and hills with strangers would be an amazing experience.

There's something magical about the rhythm of riding through a new landscape. We'd naturally fall into comfortable clusters, chatting easily during gentle stretches, then spreading out to energetic climbs at our own pace. Nobody was left behind and our Tour Leader Peter always ensured everyone felt supported and celebrated, plus there were plenty of rest stops and picturesque towns to check out on the way. One of my favorite cycling routes was in France. We were biking through the protected wetlands of the Camargue, far removed from any traffic and surrounded by nature. We saw lots of flamingos, too – it felt very magical!

The beauty of cycling tours isn't just the destinations; it's the shared journey that bonds you. One of my fondest memories from the trip was at our family-owned hotel in Figueres. The on-site restaurant was absolutely incredible – hands down some of the best food of the trip. We all loved the staff so much that the entire group chose to gather there for dinner together. They arranged a large circular table so we could all chat easily, and we spent hours eating, laughing, and sharing plates of incredible seafood, meats, and pastas. Even the hotel staff joined in the fun, and for one unforgettable evening, it truly felt like we were part of the family. ■

Would you like to experience Caitlin's cycling tour for yourself? She went on our Cycle Marseille to Barcelona trip [exploreworldwide.ca/CFS](https://exploreworldwide.ca/CFS)

## Cycling tours for first time cyclists



### The leisurely cyclist – Cycle Puglia

Discover the heel of Italy on our leisurely cycling tour through the hill towns, farmlands and coastline of sun-soaked Puglia. Along the way, sample Pugliese cuisine, tasting cheeses from a local 'caseificio', produce from a family-run bakery and tipples at local vineyards.

[exploreworldwide.ca/CIP](https://exploreworldwide.ca/CIP)

### The enthusiastic discoverer – Cycle Sri Lanka

Discover the Pearl of the Indian Ocean on two wheels. Taking a circular route around the island, you'll see ancient temples and fortresses, tea plantations and sprawling national parks. Pedal through the scenic Knuckles Range, around the ancient city of Polonnaruwa and search for leopard in Yala National Park before winding up on the white sand beaches of Koggala for a well-earned rest.

[exploreworldwide.ca/CSL](https://exploreworldwide.ca/CSL)

### The challenge seeker –

#### Cycle Nicaragua to the Panama Canal

Journey through Central America by bike, ticking off three Central American giants – Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama. Ride past volcanoes, through cloud forests and witness the famous Panama Canal.

[exploreworldwide.ca/CNCP](https://exploreworldwide.ca/CNCP)