

Spain: **Catalonia Cycling**

Tour code: CSP

Revised: Nov 05

This is a self-guided hotel-based road and track cycle tour, exploring the interior of Catalonia (Catalunya) in the northeastern reaches of Spain. This is a distinct region in terms of landscapes and culture; offering some of the finest cuisine to be found anywhere on the Peninsular! The itinerary is purposely kept flexible, allowing plenty of time for sightseeing and side trips.

You begin at Ripoll a picturesque small town with a famous ninth century Romanesque monastery. It was here that Catalunya was officially founded. The tour starts following a former railway line route from Ripoll, which is now converted into a bicycle way called a "Bici Carril" for gentle cycling. You stay on this track until you reach the Mediterranean Sea at San Feliu de Guixols. On the way you pass through the largest former volcanic area on the peninsular, the forested Garrotxa, and the mediaeval towns Olot and Girona. It is said that Catalunya has the highest density of well-preserved Romanesque architecture in the World, and you will have plenty of time to discover some of the finest examples along the way.

The monasteries of Ripoll and Sant Joan de les Abadesses are among the highlights. In Girona you have a full day to enjoy this splendid city with its interesting Jewish quarter, Cathedral with its wide gothic nave and its ancient city walls that you can walk around and on top of. After finishing the cycling tour in San Feliu, you may wish to take a well deserved refreshing dip in the Mediterranean Sea. The Art Nouveau hotel you are staying at gives you a taster of what to expect the following day: The bikes are left and you transfer to Barcelona for two nights, one of the most exciting cities in Europe. Visit the Olympic village, The Sagrada Familia church and other Gaudi pieces of architecture. There are also nice parks and good shopping areas including los Ramblas.



This is an 8-night / 9-day tour. However, for those with less time we can reduce the time spent in Barcelona.

Season

April – Late November (not August). Starting is possible on any day, but travel on Sundays can be slow.

Level of Difficulty

Grade A-B (easy to moderate cycling). Day stages are 25 to 60km. The terrain is mixed, with very little uphill pedaling. A quarter of the tour is on small roads with good tarmac, the rest is on the "Bici Carril" a type of good quality forest trail with no cars to disturb you. This makes the cycling easy and enjoyable.

The Bikes

On this tour bike hire is extra - the cost is 70 Euros and is to be paid locally. The bikes are 21-speed hybrid bikes equipped with front suspension and a pannier.

Maps & Route Notes

We provide these, and we also provide specially researched route descriptions.

Accommodation & Meals

All hotels are usually equipped with en suite shower and WC. Dinner, bed and breakfast on 3 nights, and B&B only on 5-nights. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour but are available from hotels or local shops.

Night 1: In the center of **Ripoll**, our hotel is a pleasant 2 star medium sized family run hotel in the town, renovated in 2001. Dinner is included in the spacious restaurant.

Nights 2 & 3: We have two nights in **Olot** in a modern 2 star hotel with most rooms in an apartment style. It is approximately 2km from the old town center, but does good dinners and serves a breakfast buffet. The first night here is on half board and the second is on Breakfast only.

Nights 4 & 5: In **Girona** our standard hotel is a comfortable 1 star centrally located, and has been welcoming clients for 150 years! However it has been renovated and offers ensuite, sound insulated bedrooms with T.V and has a bar and spacious lounges.

Night 6: We stay at a modern hostel, but an "Architectural gemstone" in **Sant Feliu de Guixols**, just ten minutes from the finest beach near the town. There is a breakfast buffet and a swimming pool. In October and November this hostel is closed and we use another one in the old center of the village. Dinner is included.

Nights 7 & 8: Finally in **Barcelona** our accommodation is a modern two star hotel, only ten minutes walking distance from the famous Sagrada Familia church. Breakfast only is included.

Arrival

Most people will fly into Barcelona Prats airport for this tour. The starting point of the tour is at Ripoll, which is reached by a taking a train from Barcelona Sants and it takes a couple of hours (not included in price). It is also possible, but perhaps less convenient, to use Ryan Air flights into Girona and then use airport bus and rail connections from there.

Relevant Spanish National Railway timetables can be obtained from the Internet, either at www.renfe.es (text in Spanish or English), or at www.bahn.de (text in German).

Included

Information pack with a road book and detailed maps for the tour; 8 nights accommodation in: Ripoll (1 night), Olot (2 nights), Girona (2nights), San Feliu (1night) and Barcelona (2nights). All breakfasts and three dinners. Luggage transfers from Hotel to Hotel (Ripoll – Olot, Olot –Girona, Girona - Sant Feliu).

Note that from S. Feliu, you will need to travel with your baggage from that point on into Barcelona.

Not Included

All lunches and dinners other than those specified. Bike hire (70 E). Transfers on public transport: Barcelona – Puigcerda, Alp - Ripoll and Sant Feliu – Barcelona

Itinerary Guide

Day 1: Arrive at Barcelona Prats airport and make your way to Barcelona Sants station, from here take a direct train to Ripoll (approx 2 hours).

Check into your hotel and collect bike. You will then be able to spend time looking around the stunning Romanesque monastery in the town.

You may also fly into Girona Airport (also known as Girona- Barcelona) but it is quite a way from Barcelona. From Girona airport, you will need to take an airport bus into the city (hourly, taking 20 minutes) to catch the train to Ripoll.

Day 2: Ripoll to Olot (36km & 395 m of ascent and 670m of descent). Join the "Bici Carril" bike trail to Olot. Or if your feeling fit, you can extend the tour and cycle into the Garrotxa going to Santa Margarda and Croscat (25km extra). Overnight in Olot.

Day 3: The Garrotxa (25km+). Cycle around Olot and the Garrotxa, a fascinating ex volcanic region of conical hills and forests, with kites and eagles wheeling their way around the sky. Return to Olot.

Day 4: Olot to Girona (63km & 140m of ascent and 550 of descent). Cycle once again on the Bici Carril from Olot to the splendid city of Girona, and to your hotel.

Day 5: Free day for visiting Girona or nearby Figueres with its Dali Museum, or just have a rest. You stay in the same hotel in Girona. The town was founded by the Romans and later inhabited by the Moors. It also withstood three invasions by Napoleon's troops. Because of this Girona is known as 'The city of a thousand sieges'. It is split by the Onyar River, which is best viewed from the ancient footbridge. Many tourists head here on day trips in the summer from the coast.

The only way to see Girona is by foot and the best part to see is the Call, the old quarter with it's narrow streets and steep alleyways. Explore the cathedral free of charge or once inside you could pay 400pts to see the cloisters and museum. The way to the cathedral is up a 17th century staircase of 90 steps.

The museum of art is worthy of a visit, located within a Gothic palace, next to the cathedral. In Girona you will discover 12th century Arab baths which, although restored, give a good impression on how the ancient baths would have looked. Carrer Santa Clara, a very busy shopping street and there is a good selection of restaurants.

Girona offers pleasant nightlife with endless tapas bars and cafes in the centre and scattered along La Rambla on the outskirts. Many people spend the evening hopping from one to another.

Day 6: Girona to San Feliu de Guixols (40km & 80 m of ascent, 95m descent). Today you follow the Cycle path to San Feliu de Guixols. The city is situated in the middle of the Costa Brava and has a large sea-promenade surrounded by pine trees and palms.

There is an open market place where fresh vegetables and fruits are sold and an indoor fish market –fish are caught the previous night by the small fishing fleet. The town officially dates from the 12C and stands on the site of the Benedictine Monastery of Sant Feliu.

From the observation platform of Sant Elm, the whole bay can be overlooked. It had a lot of maritime traffic and cork industries, which made it important in the 14C. The church and other elements of the old Romanesque monastery are worth a look, with the famous Porta Ferrada, a beautiful, perhaps Arab portico from the 11C.

There should be enough time for a relaxing swim, a rest on the beach, or maybe just a walk. There is also a pool at the hostel where you stay for the night.

Days 7 & 8: Drop off the hired bikes and catch the local bus to **Barcelona** - a great Mediterranean urban centre, cosmopolitan and full of contrasts. Founded by the Romans, elements of its past live side by side with the most beautiful examples of contemporary architecture inside the city. You are free to roam the city. The chance you have been waiting for to see those “wonderful” buildings by Gaudi, including the Sagrada Familia. Or just soak up the atmosphere of this exciting city. Two nights are spent in the Catalan capital giving you time to ramble down the Ramblas and make use of the city’s extensive metro system to see all of the sites.

Day 9: Depart from Barcelona. Train every 30 minutes from Barcelona Sants station to the airport; journey time 25 minutes. There are also buses, which connect with Girona Airport, which take a bit over an hour in reasonable traffic