



BEATRICE SEARLE

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“Keep right!” I shout to my nine-year-old daughter cycling up ahead. “I am right!”, she insists. “Your other right!” I yell. She and her bike veer over to the right of the cycle path as we encounter a group of extremely athletic looking people roller-skiing uphill towards us.

The path we’re cycling on is part of the Drauradweg (Drau Cycle Path). Like the river it’s named after, it starts in the Italian Dolomites near the border with Austria, crosses the border to run through southern Austria, then eventually heads into Slovenia and ends in northern Croatia.

We – my husband and I, and our kids aged nine and 11 – are cycling a 100-mile section of this route, starting near the River Drau’s source in Toblach, Italy (Dobbiaco in Italian) and ending in Villach, Austria’s most southern city. On the way, we’re picking up my parents, aged 74 and 75, ditching the bikes in a hotel’s bike storage room for a few days for a detour to do a three-day Alpine hut-to-hut hike. And we’ll be adding in plenty of rest time for lake swimming, castle visiting, high-ropes courses, roller coasters and good food and drink.

FAMILY PLANNING

We have planned our tour so that we’re riding only 20-35km per day. This means that the kids don’t

complain at all about the riding (in fact they usually want more), and that we have lots of time to enjoy all the other entertainments that the mountains in Austria have to offer. We are surrounded by majestic mountains on this bike tour, although you wouldn’t know it from the riding because the bike path takes us gently downhill as we follow the river on its winding course along the valley floor.

This makes riding this route with kids, or even with babies or toddlers in a bike seat or a trailer, very achievable. The other thing that makes this cycle route so accessible for families is that the vast majority of the route is segregated from traffic, and the bits that do have traffic are extremely sparsely used. There is usually a bigger road on the other side of the valley that all the through-traffic uses, so the roads the cycle route takes are only used for access (and by bike riders!). As a result, there are few motor vehicles, and most are slow moving and accustomed to cyclists. These small roads link tiny Austrian villages, full of wooden farmhouses with geraniums on every balcony, old barns and the occasional gasthaus (a traditional bar/restaurant).

We rent bikes in Toblach and plan to drop them off at the end of our journey. Italian company Papin Sports offers this service, and also has

Left to right: Three generations riding near Pobersach. The cycle path is never far from the train line and in some places runs alongside. Further down the valley it runs through woodland and then pastureland

No racks on the children’s bikes

