

**Fact File:**  
**Traffic-free touring**

**Distance:** 165km

**Route:** We cycled from Toblach (Dobbiaco) in the Italian Dolomites, over the border into Austria, through the medieval town of Lienz and finished in Villach, following the River Drau.

**Conditions:** We had a mix of weather, from drenching rain and massive thunderstorms to 33°C sunshine! The cycle path itself is excellent – mostly tarmac, mostly traffic free and well signed.

**Bikes used:** We hired adult trekking bikes and children's mountain bikes from Papin Sports ([bit.ly/cycle-papinsport-bikehire](http://bit.ly/cycle-papinsport-bikehire)) in Toblach, and dropped them at the end in Villach.

**Maps/guides:** I used the Drau-Radweg Bikeline guidebook published by Verlag Esterbauer. This is in German but the maps are excellent (and indicate riding surfaces and traffic levels). It also highlights excursions and swimming pools and lakes. In addition, I used the Drauradweg collection on Komoot and customised the days and distances to suit our group ([bit.ly/cycle-drauradweg-komoot](http://bit.ly/cycle-drauradweg-komoot)).

**I'm glad I had...** Straps and dry-bags so we could attach extra carrying capacity to the adult bikes. Rain coats. Our own helmets.

**Next time I would...** Be more ambitious with daily distances

**Further info:** [drauradweg.com/en/](http://drauradweg.com/en/)  
[drauradwegwirte.at/en/the-drau-cycle-path](http://drauradwegwirte.at/en/the-drau-cycle-path)



various shops and affiliated drop-off points all along the route, so you can be really flexible with where you start and end. The bikes are fine for our use – fairly standard trekking bikes for the adults and 24in-wheel mountain bikes for the kids. We're able to rent bike locks and panniers, too. We have our own helmets, although you could rent these as well.

Unfortunately (for us adults) the kids' bikes are not equipped with pannier racks, so we have to carry the luggage for all four of us on two adult bikes. We knew this in advance, so had spent many hours planning what we needed and making sure we packed light. In reality you don't need much, as long as you don't mind doing a bit of hand-washing every now and then. We have brought a few extra dry-bags and straps, so we add a handlebar bag to each of our bikes and also manage to strap a dry-bag to the top of each pannier rack. The panniers hold about 40 litres per pair so, with the extra bags we've brought, we have plenty of space for everyone's stuff.

**DOWNHILL ALL THE WAY**

The first section of the cycle path, from Toblach to Lienz, is incredibly scenic. It sets the tone for the entire route, with the granite-topped Dolomites towering over us as we ride next to the small train line and the River Drau,

and between meadows of wildflowers. The path at this point is well used by pedestrians and cyclists (the vast majority on e-bikes), as well as roller-skiers clearly training for the winter.

Aside from getting used to riding on the right (and plenty of left/right confusion from the children) it's a lovely ride. It's always fun to cycle over a border between two countries, even if the border crossing is less exciting than the kids were hoping for. We stop in the Austrian town of Sillian along the route to enjoy an adventure playground and high-ropes course, and then continue the ride to Lienz. We freewheel most of this section, dropping almost 600 metres in elevation by the time we reach Austria's 'Sunshine City'. Ironically it's raining.

Here we meet my mum and dad, who arrive on the train in the middle of a very impressive thunderstorm. We leave our bikes to undertake a three-day, two-night hut-to-hut hike in the Gail Alps. On our return, and after

an exciting ride on "one of the longest and most spectacular roller coasters of the Alps", my parents pick up their bikes from the well-organised Lienz outpost of Papin Sports, and we continue our Drauradweg journey.

The route is really well signposted. It is very rare that I need to get the map or my guidebook

