



**Clockwise from second left:** Carrelets (fishing huts) on the mouth of the Loire, overlooking the Pont de Saint-Nazaire. On the road from Ancenis to Chalonnes-sur-Loire. Making the most of Angers' shaded roads. The free ferry across the Loire into Nantes at Indret



but never really camped with him (apart from one windy night in my mum's garden, which he hated). That would probably not have changed had we not been incentivised to take on this journey after being awarded a travel grant from Tim Moss's The Next Challenge ([thenextchallenge.org](http://thenextchallenge.org)).

Still, how hard can combining the two activities be? Turns out our nomadic ancestors were heroes beyond modern man's fathoming! I've no idea how they coped with toddlers refusing to sleep until darkness descended and insisting on waking with the lark. Then there's the difficulty of prepping something suitable for a developing palette in a camp kitchen. All of which meant that, despite the leisured nature of the riding along the Loire, this trip looked like it would rank more difficult than the ride that Daria and I made into 70mph headwinds across Iceland's interior.

Unlike Iceland, however, the French invented baguettes and croissants, saving the day and our sanity. We realised that the trick to survival on tour with a toddler – and on tour in general – is to adapt. It was a lesson we relearned from watching our son settle into our tour's rhythms. Each day brought new discoveries, new sights, sounds and sensations and he took them all in his stride, with a dummy in one hand and a battered bit of bread in the other. Yes, there were tantrums and contrariness but no more than to be expected than when at home.

### SAVOURING SLOW TRAVEL

Despite taking our cue from Cosimo, it took us a bit longer to set aside our anxiety and begin to appreciate and adapt to his style of more relaxed travelling. When we did, that's when the

**“We'd been on the road for two days, covering little more than 70km in all. It felt like much further. Travelling with a toddler will do that”**

pleasures of cycling along the Loire as a family truly began.

For those looking for a relaxed ride, the Loire à Vélo provides it in buckets along its 900-kilometre length. It's part of EuroVelo 6, which crosses France and then continues through Europe to the Black Sea – a 4,700km journey all told, and our final destination for many years down the line. Shorter sections are perfect for riding along with a small person. It's well waymarked, largely traffic free and has interesting stopping points, a good cycle-friendly train service and accommodation options to suit all types of tourist.

Riding along by the Loire – sometimes to our right, sometimes the left – simple joyous cries of “boat”, “bird” and, of course, “bread” would come from our trailer. Occasionally our chatter would be silenced by the snores of a nap. It's hard not to delight in such simple pleasures, when all the cares of the world can be seen through the perspective of an 18-month-old. As the great dub pioneer Lee Scratch Perry said: “All things are possible, nothing is impossible.” It just comes down to perspective.

Such a philosophy is easy when the riding is stress free and requires no navigating skills. The lower reaches of the Loire Vally are largely flat. Your only concern is how much shade you can ▶

### Fact file Toddling up the Loire

**Distance:** 206km (128 miles).

**Route:** Starting on the Atlantic coast at Le Croisic, head east and follow the Loire à Vélo (which is also the beginning of EuroVelo 6) to the medieval town of Angers.

**Conditions:** Heatwave! Off-road tracks were in a good state. Frequent watering spots were much needed.

**Bikes used:** Dawes Galaxy (Daria), Surly Disc Trucker (Sam), Burley D'Lite trailer (Cosimo).

**Maps/guides:** The route is well signed but we used a combination of Komoot and a Wahoo Roam for navigation.

#### I'm glad I had...

An extra roll-mat and enough spare bungees to make a bigger sunshade for the trailer. Oh, and a bucket – thanks for that tip, Josie Dew!

#### Next time I would...

Keep an eye on the forecast and pack appropriately, while also factoring in more time for exploration off the route.

#### Further info:

Cicerone's guidebook, The River Loire Cycle Route, and the website [loirebybike.co.uk](http://loirebybike.co.uk). Sam's exact route is here: [bit.ly/cycle-komoot-loire-sj](http://bit.ly/cycle-komoot-loire-sj)