



Clockwise from above: Chenin blanc growing on the slope above Savennières. Chateau d'Angers. Riding the quiet streets of Savennières. Necessary cool refreshment for the heat! Fields south of Mauves-sur-Loire



Getting there

- We took an overnight ferry from Portsmouth to Saint Malo, returning via Caen, which cost £600 for two adults, including cabin, cot and car (brittany-ferries.co.uk).
- We drove to Angers (trains are available but multiple changes are required). The train between Le Croisic and Orleans is designed to carry from 50-83 bikes in peak season and up to 33 all year round (for timings see loirebybike.co.uk).
- If starting in Angers, change at Nantes for a local train to Le Croisic (approx 2 hrs, from €29 per person including bike; under twos travel free). On both trains, trailer dismantling is necessary – bungees will help make it secure.

find, as you journey between the vast fields of French farms and the smallholdings of locals. It is only when you hit wine-growing country after Ancenis that you encounter the short steep climbs you see rising above the vineyards.

It's also an excellent route along which to engage in the fine French tradition of 'le picnic'. All along the Loire, sun-sheltered spots, with benches and spaces to play pétanque, echo to the pop of the cork and the cheers of gatherings of friends and family. Even without the demands of a toddler wishing to stop and play, they encourage a more sedate and considered way of travel, where lunch is planned even as you finish breakfast.

This style of riding encourages people of all ages to visit the Loire. We were not alone in cycling with our lad. Other families rode in similar convoys, but so too did groups of older riders – often on e-bikes, taking advantage of the ability to charge along the way. Each day was a game of leapfrog, passing and being passed by familiar faces, and always with a wave and "bonjour".

STAGE ONE COMPLETE

Signs of the region's rich past abound. You pass typical French villages with well-heeled churches. Brooding chateaux in Ancenis and Angers were once sites for the fraught relationship between

“All along the Loire, sun-sheltered spots, with benches and spaces to play pétanque, echo to the pop of the cork and the cheers of families”

the kingdoms of France and Brittany. The one regret we have from this trip was not weaving in enough time to allow for off-piste exploration. For the rider with more time on their hands, there is plenty to see off the beaten cycle track.

Seven days and countless baguettes after starting, we rolled into our final resting stop: a small hotel with a pool just outside Angers. I couldn't help but think back to our shrimp-obsessed friend, and his efforts to share familial memories with his son to cherish over the years to come.

Without really realising it, our family tour had the same goal: to share with Cosimo our love of cycling and its ability to immerse you in unfamiliar locations. At 18

months, he will be too young to remember this trip but we now know touring isn't stopped but enriched by family. We hope eventually to get to the Black Sea, riding in stages as the years pass. That's if the terrible twos on tour don't put us off! ●

Keeping Cosimo cool in the shade of his trailer

