

SPAIN - CANTABRIAN MOUNTAINS & OLD CASTILE

Tour Organiser: Tony Gore

Sunday 14th September to Tuesday 07th October 2025

This tour explores the historic Castilian cradle of Spain, principally the provinces of Burgos, Soria, Segovia and Palencia, top and tailed by a day's traverse across the Cantabrian mountains (Cordillera Cantábrica) from and to Santander. Linking together rugged landscapes and historic towns and villages, it reaches as far south as the picturesque Roman city of Segovia. The long ferry crossings from Plymouth to Santander and back offer a chance for relaxation both before and after the tour. Please note that there is no vehicle back-up and you will be carrying your luggage on your bike.

Itinerary

Sunday 14th September 2025

Assemble at Millbay Docks, Plymouth by 15.00 for group check-in. Embark on Brittany Ferries service to Santander, with departure scheduled for 16.45. Dinner will be in the main restaurant.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Ferry, sharing two-berth inside cabin
- Meals: (D)

Monday 15th September 2025

After a morning at sea in the southern stretch of the Bay of Biscay (with possible dolphin sightings), the ferry is due to arrive in Santander at 14.00. Following a picnic lunch we navigate the cycle route southwards from the ferry port out of the city, past the airport to Astillero. We then head into the foothills of the Cordillera Cantábrica, through Solares to the spa town of Liérganes.

- Route distance: 27.3km
- Route altitude gain: 360m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (D)

Tuesday 16th September 2025

Our route through the Cordillera is one of the few that involve just one long but very scenic climb. It takes us gradually up the Miera valley through San Roque, with the spectacular ascent to the Portilla de Lunada snaking ever upwards at the end. From there it's almost all downhill to the small town of Espinosa de los Monteros, then a little further on to our crossroads hotel.

- Route distance: 55.3km
- Route altitude gain: 1640m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 17th September 2025

Today we meander through the hills bordering the Basque country, including a stretch along the Jarea gorge. After a stop in Pedrosa de Tobalina we join the Ebro valley, which here comprises a series of reservoirs overlooked by imposing crags.

- Route distance: 65.5km
- Route altitude gain: 810m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 18th September 2025

Initially retracing along the incised Ebro valley to the pretty village of Frías, we then turn south up and over the Montes Obarenes before some undulating terrain takes us to the broad valley of the Río Bañuelos.

- Route distance: 59.2km
- Route altitude gain: 1170m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 19th September 2025

After the historic town of Belorado with its distinctive main square we climb over to Pradoluengo and the Arlanzón valley, which we then follow downstream, past the Úzquiza reservoir to a short stretch along the main pilgrimage route to Santiago on its approach to the city of Burgos.

- Route distance: 69.8km
- Route altitude gain: 830m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 20th September 2025

A day mostly following the Camino del Cid, allegedly the Spanish national hero's route into exile and his renowned conquering exploits in the east. The route offers a good mixture of sharp climbs, more gradual inclines and a welcome dose of gentle valley riding, ending with scenic views of the Sierra de las Mamblas.

- Route distance: 67.3km
- Route altitude gain: 800m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 21st September 2025

Covarrubias is a small medieval town that is well worth exploring. Perched by the Río Arlanza, it has many distinctive half-timbered buildings and a fine collegiate church with a cloister and a collection of sacred art. For those wishing an easy ride, the old fortress town of Lerma, boasting a superb historical-architectural complex around its dominating ducal palace, is just 15 fairly flat miles away.

- Route distance: 48.2km
- Route altitude gain: 310m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 22nd September 2025

A couple of early climbs takes us to Santo Domingo de Silos, an old town that is dominated by a working monastery dating back to the 11th century (unfortunately closed to visitors on Mondays). We then traverse undulating countryside, with a stop in Huerta del Rey and a foray through the Sierra de Nafría, before dipping through the Río Lobos canyon close to the end.

- Route distance: 72.5km
- Route altitude gain: 1100m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 23rd September 2025

To start we return to the canyon of the Río Lobos, this time with a side excursion to see the tiny San Bartolomé chapel. From here the land flattens out as we approach the Duero valley along mostly minor roads. A shorter day allows plenty of time to explore the cathedral, city walls and other sights in El Burgo de Osma.

- Route distance: 51.6km
- Route altitude gain: 670m
- Accommodation: Hotel

- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 24th September 2025

Today the wide Duero valley provides an easy start as far as San Esteban de Gormaz. Turning south from there, we head into the remote Sierra de Grado, cresting a succession of low summits in an area with few facilities. The final section follows the 'Ruta del Color', past alternately 'yellow', 'red' and 'black' villages, the designated colour based on which local stone has been used in their building.

- Route distance: 74.7km
- Route altitude gain: 1260m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 25th September 2025

An easier if still undulating day, the main attractions are two historic but distinctive towns. Just past the midway point, Sepúlveda sprawls across a rocky hillside between the Duratón and Caslilla rivers, and is a jumble of narrow streets, odd shaped squares, ancient mansions and historic churches. In contrast, the fortified Pedraza (our destination) occupies the whole of a mini plateau, with the old walls and crags defining its delightful medieval core into a strictly unified whole.

- Route distance: 63.1km
- Route altitude gain: 670m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 26th September 2025

Another undulating day, we head first through the Sierra de Monteagudo en route to Turégano, with its unusual castle and church conjunction. From here we wander in a south-westerly direction to the historic city of Segovia, marking our arrival by riding underneath its world famous Roman aqueduct.

- Route distance: 61.0km
- Route altitude gain: 800m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 27th September 2025

Segovia is a UNESCO World Heritage Site containing breathtaking monuments of Roman, Gothic, Mudéjar and Jewish origin. These can be busy with visitors, especially at weekends, but they can also be enjoyed simply by wandering the city streets and parks. For those still with some energy to spare there is a short optional ride to San Ildefonso, where the French-

style gardens surrounding the former summer palace of the royals are dotted with fountains and are well worth exploring.

- Route distance: 33.5km
- Route altitude gain: 470m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 28th September 2025

Today we begin the return leg of our trip, heading north through alternately rolling and flat country, featuring open fields, big skies and distant vistas, and ending with a fast descent into the Duero valley. En route we pass through a series of well-kept but quiet villages, with the largest (Aguilafuente) boasting a large Romanesque church and other fine buildings.

- Route distance: 85.0km
- Route altitude gain: 650m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 29th September 2025

Peñafiel is the centre of the renowned wine-producing area of the Ribera del Duero, characterised principally by robust and classy reds. It is home to a number of 'bodegas', where the wines are produced, matured, bottled and sold. We will have a guided tour of one of these, including a sample of its wares. The historic medieval core of the town sits on the banks of the Río Duratón just before its confluence with the Duero, and it is a jumble of narrow streets, broad squares and fine buildings. The whole town is dominated by the superbly renovated castle that sits on the rocky outcrop that gives the town its name.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 30th September 2025

After crossing the Río Duero our route takes us along and across the Valles de Cerrato, an unexpected series of pretty limestone valleys separated by wide plateaux. Although it is the longest day of the tour, the climbs are well-graded and not too long. Our main stop is in Baltanás, the capital of the Cerrato area, a town containing many baronial houses and surrounded by underground wine stores with their distinctive chimneys.

- Route distance: 86.1km
- Route altitude gain: 860m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 01st October 2025

Apart from a rather lumpy start, today's ride mainly involves a steady plod up the broad valley of the Río Carrión. There are three main features to visit: the remains of the quadruple locks on the Canal de Castilla; the lovely Romanesque church at Frómista; and the Olmeda Roman villa, with its wonderfully detailed mosaic floors.

- Route distance: 82.1km
- Route altitude gain: 650m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 02nd October 2025

Now heading generally in a north-easterly direction, we traverse a transitional area between the tablelands to the south and the high mountains to the north. This is focused around a series of north-south valleys, with of course interfluves to climb between each. We pass a number of hamlets with small but distinctive Romanesque chapels, with the pick of these at Vallespinoso.

- Route distance: 74.3km
- Route altitude gain: 930m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 03rd October 2025

Though dominated by its biscuit factory, Aguilar de Campóo has a host of old churches, chapels and other historic buildings to admire. The castle ruins on the crag immediately to the north are known as the 'eagle's nest', reputedly giving the town its name. An optional ride around part of the 'Ruta Románico' visits several of the celebrated ancient churches and chapels in the vicinity.

- Route distance: 48.9km
- Route altitude gain: 720m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 04th October 2025

Now heading east, we descend alongside the Mardancho river, which then joins the Ebro valley towards the small town of Polientes. After 40 kilometres we turn northwards again, climbing out of the valley and across a lumpy plateau before skirting the eastern end of the Embalse de Ebro (one of the largest reservoirs in Spain). We stay overnight in a spa hotel on the northern bank.

- Route distance: 70.7km
- Route altitude gain: 770m

- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 05th October 2025

This is a day devoted to ascending and descending back through the Cantabrian mountains to our first hotel. The three main climbs are generally steady, with just the occasional steep ramp. Your efforts will be rewarded with spectacular views of the surrounding peaks, crags, valleys and meadows. The hay from many of the latter is still mown by hand and gathered into distinctive rounded stacks.

- Route distance: 78.5km
- Route altitude gain: 1640m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 06th October 2025

Today we return to Santander via Astillero and the cycle route into the city (including a one-way section around the periphery of the airport). There will be time to explore other sights around the city's waterfront, including the Pereda promenade, the beach and cafés at El Sardinero and the old lighthouse and headland at Cabo Mayor. We reassemble by 15.30 in the ferry embarkation space for group check-in, with a scheduled departure of 17.00. Dinner will again be in the main restaurant.

- Route distance: 41.0km
- Route altitude gain: 340m
- Accommodation: Ferry, sharing inside two-berth cabin
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 07th October 2025

In the morning we sail along the western approaches to the English Channel, before a scheduled arrival in Plymouth at 14.00. The tour ends after disembarkation.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: None
- Meals: Self-Catering

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £2300

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £200 per person is required as soon as possible once the Tour Organiser has processed your Booking Form (see below), with the final balance of £2100 per person to be paid no later than ten weeks prior to departure, by 06 July 2025.

Price includes:

- 21 nights hotel on half board basis, sharing room.
- 2 overnight ferry crossings with dinner, sharing inside cabin.
- Guided tour at Ribera del Duero bodega, including wine tasting.
- Some drinks with some evening meals.
- Bikexplore costs.

Price does not include:

- Travel to and from Plymouth.
- Drinks with most evening meals.
- Lunches or refreshments during the day.
- Breakfasts on board the ferry.
- Any extra travel costs due to inclement weather or sickness.
- Entry fees at attractions visited (apart from the bodega).
- Any other personal expenses.
- Travel and personal health insurance.
- Single room occupancy (£600 supplement, subject to availability).

Cancellations

Written Notice Received	Cancellation Charge
Up to 06 July 2025	£200
From 06 July 2025 to departure	£2300

The price of £2300 (land only) is based on a minimum number of 9 people taking part in the holiday and is calculated at a rate of 1.172 Euros to £1 Sterling (based on exchange rates published <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/travel-money/euros> on Wednesday 29th January 2025; please note Booking Conditions). If there are insufficient bookings by Sunday 06th July 2025, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

The Area Covered by the Holiday

After a couple of days traversing the rugged Cantabrian mountains that fringe the north coast, this tour explores the historic Castilian cradle of Spain, principally the provinces of

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Burgos, Soria, Segovia and Palencia. From the 9th century these formed the Christian stronghold from which the gradual reconquest of the southern Muslim taifas was launched. This is the birthplace of legendary El Cid, part of whose path into exile we shall follow. The region is marked by a series of distinctive old towns and a multitude of fine vernacular architecture. Foremost amongst this are the Romanesque chapels, churches and monasteries, with their impressive rounded arches and carved capitals. Our outward route begins in a south-easterly direction, threading along the edges of the sierras that divide Old Castile from the Basque Country. We then tack south-westwards to the World Heritage city of Segovia, where we spend two nights to allow for sight-seeing and exploration of the surrounding area. Heading back northwards, we pass through the renowned Ribera del Duero wine region, with the possibility of visiting a local bodega or wine cellar. We then cross or follow a series of limestone valleys, including a short stretch sharing the Camino Francés pilgrimage route to Santiago. From there the route visits a well-preserved Roman villa and passes a clutch of Romanesque chapels before following a rugged part of the upper Ebro valley. A night at a spa hotel then prepares us for a final push over the mountains back to the port city of Santander.

Accommodation & Meals

Overnight stops will be mainly in family-run or small chain 2- and 3-star (and occasional 4-star) hotels, in twin or double rooms. Single occupancy may be possible, but this will have limited availability and is subject to the payment of a supplement. Breakfast and evening meal will be provided on most days, usually in the hotel but occasionally elsewhere. Vegetarians can be catered for if the request is made on the Booking Form, but options may be limited. Non-meat eaters should indicate if they will eat fish. If you have any other dietary requirements, please note them on the booking form under 'special requests'.

There are three things that you should note about meals in Spain. First, evening meals are not usually served until 8:00 pm at the earliest, and in traditional rural areas like the ones we'll be visiting it's more likely to be 9:00 pm. For many Britons this is very late and difficult to adjust to. The long wait can be eased by adopting the habit of having a snack in the late afternoon or early evening. This might be from your own provisions or you could go to a bar to try out its tapas. Secondly, it is not always easy to cater for vegetarians (and even harder for vegans), though it has improved in recent years, and our hosts will be forewarned of the need to provide something suitable. However, it is always useful to know whether or not those requesting vegetarian meals are occasionally prepared to eat fish. Finally, while the majority of the hotels serve buffet breakfasts, the offering at those that don't can be rather meagre. In such cases I will ask if extra items can be provided. As interpretation of this request varies widely, you should make sure you have extra rations with you from the start of the day, just in case your energy levels need an early boost.

Rides & Rest Days

Starting times each day will depend on when the hotel serves breakfast and how far we have to ride. The general aim will be to set off between 9:30 and 10:00 am. On the first day



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after disembarking the ferry, the Tour Organiser will lead the group on the road to help us navigate along the cycle route out of Santander, and for participants to gauge their 'fit' within the group. However, the expectation is that from the second day people will 'team up' to ride together in smaller like-minded groups. Given the potential diversity of ability and interests amongst participants, plus the taxing nature of the terrain in the initial part of the tour, it would be unreasonable to expect us to ride as a single group all day, every day. In this way, faster riders can forge ahead without feeling held back, while those who like to take time to see the sights or take lots of photos can do so without feeling pressurised to keep up. Smaller groups on the road make sense in safety terms too, even where traffic volumes are light. However, I will ensure that no-one is left riding on their own all day, unless that is their preference. Each day there will be cafes and other sites of interest marked on the route sheet where we can regroup. I will also try to keep tabs on where people are during the day, but remember that, without a support vehicle, there is a limit to what help can be given.

The tour has been designed so that a reasonably fit regular rider should be able to complete the route. Daily distances and altitude gains have been deliberately varied to allow for a more leisurely pace, or longer recovery time after arrival. There are also four possible rest days when you can take the opportunity to recharge your batteries. If you like the look of it but are unsure about your ability to undertake the tour, then please consult with the Tour Organiser before booking.

Travel and communication

We will be travelling to and from Santander in northern Spain on Brittany Ferries' flagship cruise vessel the MV Pont Aven. Both crossings start and finish in Plymouth. Our meeting point is close to the vehicle check-in point at Millbay Docks at 15:00 on Sunday 14 September.

Options for travel to and from Plymouth include:

- Take the train: Plymouth can be reached on trains operated by First Great Western from London and the South East and South Wales, and by Cross Country from Scotland, the north of England and the Midlands (some of these may require a change in Birmingham or Reading). Remember that these services have limited spaces for conveying cycles, and that these should be reserved well in advance.
- By car: you can access the M5 link to South West England from the rest of the motorway network near either Birmingham or Bristol (and points in between). However, the final stretch of the journey from Exeter is on the busy A38 trunk road. Non-reservable long stay parking is available at the ferry terminal, at a cost of £11 per day (at the time of writing); a cheaper alternative might be to use one of the secure facilities in the city centre (the options are summarised on <http://en.parkopedia.co.uk/parking/plymouth/>).

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As we are departing on a Sunday it is advisable for those travelling long distances to reach Plymouth the day before, staying overnight in one of the many hotels or guest houses in the city and enjoying its ambience in the morning.

Please note that you should not make any travel and accommodation arrangements for reaching the start until you receive confirmation that the tour is definitely running. It is very important that you note that neither your Tour Organiser nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group.

Should there be insufficient bookings or pandemic travel restrictions are re-imposed, we reserve the right to cancel the tour at any time. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation or wait until you have been told that the tour will go ahead. In the event of the tour being cancelled we will not be responsible for any losses incurred outside what you pay us.

Assuming that the tour does proceed, I will set up a WhatsApp group to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any unforeseen difficulties during the day. Ideally everyone will have a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group. Otherwise I will only be able to communicate with you indirectly.

Weather & Clothing

The weather in this part of Spain in early autumn can be very variable. It can be sunny and warm one day, but wet and miserable on another. We will also be staying at some fairly high altitudes, so it may be a little chilly in the evenings and early mornings. However, on previous visits the bad days have been few and far between, and daytime temperatures have in general been pleasantly warm. In view of the likely variety you should carry a range of clothing (including an effective set of waterproofs, gloves and an appropriate base layer) to ensure that you stay warm and dry in bad conditions, but don't overheat when the sun is out. Even in October the sun can still be powerful in these parts, so a high factor sun cream is strongly recommended. A windproof jacket or gilet might be useful in case of windy conditions. A set of lightweight 'off the bike' clothes for the evening and on rest days will also be required. It is also a good idea to bring some comfortable shoes and a small rucksack for carrying essential bits and pieces for exploring on foot.

Cycles & Equipment

A touring, expedition or gravel bike would be suitable for this tour, with hard-wearing tyres of at least 28mm (or equivalent) and at least a rear rack for affixing your panniers. The vast majority of the route is on tarmac roads (mostly of decent quality), with a few short stretches of other materials (a little bit of gravel, plus flags, cobbles and occasionally concrete in towns and villages). A bottom gear of between 25" and 30" (small chainring in front smaller (or no larger) than large cog in the rear) is recommended, to make the climbs less of a strain. Bikes should have mudguards to protect both yourself and others in the



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group should we encounter rainy conditions. Before departure your bike should be given a full check-up and service to ensure that it is roadworthy and in sound mechanical order. You should also test ride your cycle fully laden before the tour to ensure that it handles as you would wish.

Bikes with electric assistance (e-bikes) can be brought on the tour as long as the power is activated by pedalling, the battery is detachable and the maximum assisted speed is 25 kilometres per hour (15.5 mph). All of these will apply if there is a sticker noting that the bike complies with European standard EN15194. Please note that you are prohibited from recharging the battery on board the Plymouth-Santander ferry, so you'll need to ensure you have sufficient juice in the tank to complete the half-day ride after arriving in Spain. Hotels may also have restrictions in place, so you may need to ride the bike on some days with limited or even no power.

You should not need lights, though having them with you is always useful in case the ferry is delayed or other emergencies arise. You will also be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs.

Spanish law requires cyclists to wear helmets when riding on the road. Therefore, you should bring a helmet with you and be prepared to wear it if requested by traffic police or Guardia Civil. Otherwise, they are entitled to impose an on-the-spot fine of around 100 Euros or to confiscate your front wheel if you are unable or unwilling to pay.

It is now also a legal requirement for cyclists in Spain to wear a 'hi-viz' yellow top when cycling at night, but it may be that rainwear with reflective trim is sufficient. However, as we are unlikely to be still on the road after dark, this rule should not affect us.

Maps & Guides

Although detailed written route instructions and GPS files will be provided, you should also bring a suitable map (or maps) with you in case you lose your way or become separated from the group. The main ones that cover all or part of the route are:

- Michelin 1:250,000 Regional Map series No. 572 - Spain North West: Asturias-Cantabria
- Michelin 1:400,000 Regional Map series No. 575 - Spain North West: Castilla y León-Madrid
- CNIG 1:200,000 series Nos. 10 - Burgos Province; 13 - Cantabria; 20 - Palencia Province; 39 - Segovia Province; 41 - Soria Province; and 46 - Valladolid Province.

These should all be available online from suppliers such as Stanfords and Maps Worldwide.

Travel insurance advice

Spain is in Europe, but Britain is no longer in the EU. Your EHIC card is valid until its expiry date, but it cannot be renewed. Instead a Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) has been





introduced (see <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/>). However, at present Britain no longer has a reciprocal health agreement with Spain, though this might change before the start of the tour. Appropriate travel insurance is therefore essential; please check with your provider to ensure that they cover the revised conditions in Europe and also they cover touring by bike. Although most travel insurance policies do not cover cancellation due to pandemic restrictions, the money you pay to us for the holiday is fully protected until we depart.

Current Covid and Influenza vaccinations are recommended for participants of 75 years of age and over and those deemed medically vulnerable.

Passport and visa advice

UK citizens must hold a passport that is still valid for at least six months at the end of the tour.

The European Union is introducing two important changes for travel to Europe (including Spain). These are:

- EU Entry/Exit System (EES) - on arrival and departure you should present your passport for checking as normal. You will also need to have a photo of your face taken, and your fingerprints scanned.
- European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) - you will need to apply for this new travel authorisation document well ahead of your first visit to Europe following its introduction. It will then be valid for three years.

The introduction dates for the launch of these two systems are yet to be confirmed. EES will start at least six months before ETIAS. I will provide tour participants with a more detailed update once the situation is clearer.

About the Tour Organiser

I have been combining my love of the outdoors and fascination with different places through cycletouring for nearly 45 years, exploring many parts of the British Isles and Europe, as well as further afield in South Africa and the Americas. I was a CTC Tour Leader for over 20 years, running more than 40 tours, 15 of which visited different parts of Spain. I have also organised several holidays in Britain, both fixed centre and moving on, and currently I am keen to explore different areas of both countries that are not especially well known to me.

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