

Cycle touring in Northern Europe

In case you have not sampled the delights of cycle touring in Northern Europe this article will (hopefully) whet your appetite. Most years I manage a tour in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark or Austria. Not having cycled in France I will focus on these other European countries, especially Germany.

While the Netherlands and Denmark are well known as cycling countries it is perhaps not so well known that in Germany there is also excellent provision for cyclists. In all these countries cycling is much more accepted than here; there is an extensive network of quality cycle paths and cyclists are treated with respect by motorists. The picture, taken in Holland, illustrates the continuity of cycle paths across junctions. This is the norm in these countries.

What tour options are there? These can range from a d.i.y. camping holiday where you plan your own route and load your bike with camping gear, to led rides with bikes provided and your luggage transported between pre-booked hotels.*

Where to go? Almost anywhere will be a great experience. Popular routes are along the main river valleys: the Rhine, Danube or Elbe. There are excellent off-road paths usually on both sides of these rivers. There are also cycle paths along many other lesser rivers, but, be warned, the routes along these are not necessarily flat! The Netherlands are, as is well known, flat, as is also much of Denmark and North Germany. The rest of Germany is mixed. Perhaps surprisingly there is flat terrain in Bavaria, and even in Austria. Again this is mainly in the major river valleys.

Accommodation in Germany and Austria is significantly cheaper than in the UK and generally easy to find. This makes a B&B style tour in which you arrive in a village or town around, say, 4.00pm and then look for a B&B (*Fremden Zimmer*) sign or a tourist information office. Comfortable en-suite accommodation can usually be found at a reasonable price. Last year, cycling by myself up the Elbe valley, I was averaging about €30 for B&B, say €50 for a couple. Germany and Austria are the cheapest countries, Denmark is more expensive.

You can feed well in Germany at a price a little less than over here. I found the beer on tap (*vom Fass*) very acceptable, particularly if you're hot and thirsty. There are also some good local white wines; a good red, however, is less likely to be local.



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* My wife and I have enjoyed tours in this category with *Mercurio-bike-travel*. They are a small German company which caters for English speaking participants.