SPAIN - EL COMTAT (SELF-GUIDED) - £450

5th September 2020 - 12th September 2020 (8 days)
This is a centre-based holiday, staying in the County Town of Cocentaina in the Sierra Mariola. This relatively unknown area is frequently used by some professional cycling teams, partly because there are some tough climbs up from the coast for them to practise on.
Cycle deep into the Sierra Aitana, journey along an ancient trading route from the Mediterranean and through remote landscapes unchanged for centuries. On some days you could go all day and hardly meet another cyclist, but there are a few places where you are certain to meet others - Coll de Rates and Port de Tudons being two of these.
Mostly hilly terrain with largely good quality roads and a change of scenery with every turn. Explore the ancient town of Cocentaina during the evening. In September you are likely to find wild figs and almonds to forage.

HOLIDAY TYPE: Guided
TOUR MANAGER: Marjorie South
GRADE: Challenging
BOOKING STATUS: Places Available
ACCOMMODATION: Guesthouse
BOARD BASIS: Half Board
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS: Land Only
ROAD / OFF ROAD: Road
HOLIDAY STYLE: Centre-based
VEHICLE SUPPORT: Carry Own Luggage
HOLIDAY REF NO: 03480

Holiday Itinerary

Saturday 5th September
Meet at the guesthouse (or at Alicante airport if a transfer has been pre-booked) with the chance of an afternoon ride (depending on arrival time) to Beniarrés with its spectacular lake for a coffee in one of the villages. This ride serves as an introduction to the area as it provides a little bit of everything, apart from big climbs. 43km. Stay 7 nights. Meals: D

Sunday 6th September
This mainly out and back route will give you a taste of the week to come. You cycle round the turquoise lake of Guadalest then visit the amazing architecture and scenery of the town, with the chance to buy souvenirs and visit the incredible castle with its breathtaking views into the valley towards the Mediterranean. 74km. Meals: B D

Monday 7th September
Today's ride is longer and takes you through the Val d'Ebo and down the very twisting road to Pego with spectacular views down to the Mediterranean before returning along the gently ascending Val de Gallinera, which was the ancient trading route used by the Moors, passing through many small villages with plenty of places for refreshments. 99km. Meals: B D

Tuesday 8th September
Today you can have a day off the bike and maybe walk up to the imposing castle overlooking the town, or possibly have a day trip to Valencia by bus or train. Or a stunning cycle ride to take in the Col de Rates via Castell de Castells, Parcent and Tarbena -106km, or the shorter, easier option to the lovely old town of Bocairent on the northern flanks of Montcabrer. 45km. Meals: B D

**Wednesday 9th September**

Today you cycle deep into the Sierra Aitana to climb the famous Port de Tudons (Vuelta a España climb) followed by a long, wonderful, swooping descent to Sella and lunch at Relleu. Return via Benifallim after passing a safari park with a chance to see some tigers. Some of the steepest roads are on this ride with a 20% down immediately followed by a 20% up. Both are short. 88km. Meals: B D

**Thursday 10th September**

Cocentaina has its market this morning which is worth a visit just to see the variety and size of the fruit and veg. A shorter day to rest the legs a bit and to visit some of the more remote villages: Almudaina with its tower, Millena, Balones, Tollos and others. Some steeper hills but they are very short ones! This shorter day allows for having a menu del dia lunch in the bar at Millena. 55km. Meals: B D

**Friday 11th September**

Today you cycle over the Port de Benifallim, and after that effort enjoy a wonderful descent to Torremanzanas for coffee and cake. You then carry on towards Dijona (Xixona in Valencia) and climb the very spectacular Port de la Carrasqueta which used to be the main road inland, with views down to the Mediterranean and Alicante. Lunch could be in one of the many old coaching inns such as Venta Teresa, which has retained much of its original character. Descend towards Alcoi before the final run in to Cocentaina. 80km. Meals: B D

**Saturday 12th September**

Tour ends after breakfast. Meals: B

**Holiday Summary**

**Accommodation & Meals**

This is in a pleasant, good quality guesthouse geared up to take care of cyclists, located in the heart of the old town. Rooms are based on two people sharing twin or double rooms. There are also two single rooms that share a bathroom (single occupancy supplement applies). Breakfasts and dinners are included. Vegetarian and most other dietary requirements can be catered for if pre-booked. Please indicate your requirements on the Booking Form.

**Vehicle Support**

No vehicle support is provided.

**Passports, Visa & Health**

EU citizens must hold a passport that is still valid on the date of their return to their home country. Holders of non-EU passports are advised to check whether they require a visa.

There are no compulsory health related requirements for UK residents, but you are strongly advised to check that your tetanus protection has not expired. You must also carry your European Health Insurance Card.

**Travel Insurance**

Our Booking Conditions stipulate that, for holidays outside the UK, travel Insurance is mandatory. Details of the level of cover needed and other conditions you should check are stated in the Booking Conditions. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours Ltd cannot accept responsibility for any costs that may be incurred due to insufficient insurance cover.

**Price**

The price of £450 is based on a minimum number of 4 people taking part in the holiday; please note Booking Conditions, clause 3. If there are insufficient bookings by 27th June 2020, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

**Price Includes**

- Transfers from and to Alicante airport
- 7 nights guesthouse, sharing room
- 7 breakfasts, 7 dinners
- Drinks with dinner (water, local beer, wine)
- Maps and route sheets
- CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours costs

**Price Does Not Include**

- Travel to and from Spain
- Lunches or refreshments at morning and afternoon stops
- Entry fees at any attractions visited
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel Insurance
- Single occupancy supplement (£5 per night, subject to availability, not en-suite)

**Payment Schedule**

A deposit of £45 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £405 per person to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 27th June 2020.
Area Covered By The Holiday

You will be staying in Cocentaina, county town of El Comtat region in inland Costa Blanca, 70kms from Alicante airport and 110kms from Valencia, between the valley of the River Serpis and the Sierra Mariola Natural Park. Explore the Sierra Aitana, the Vall de Gallinera and the Vall d'Ebo. Cherry, almond and olive plantations dominate the landscape.

This tour uses what looks on the map like a very small area, but each valley is different and the rides will take you through very varied terrain. The area is hilly. Just a few minutes cycling takes you out of town and on to very pleasant roads, most of which are well surfaced and smooth but there are a few short sections of lanes that will remind you of roads back home. There are climbs almost every day, some long and gently graded but also the odd sharp sting-in-the-tail. Of course you are also rewarded with fabulous descents, some of which enable you to swoop down through wonderful scenery for kilometre after kilometre. None of the rides are ever very far away from civilisation, but they won't necessarily feel like that as the roads are so quiet and some of the valleys have a wildness about them. Most of the villages you will go through, or skirt around, have at least one bar and usually a water fountain too.

Prices for drinks and meals are all very reasonable as this really isn’t a tourist area, yet. Being based in a town means that you have all its facilities at hand - banks, several supermarkets, including a large Carrefour on the edge of town and even a Decathlon. There are numerous bars open all day with pavement seating and very reasonable prices. Cocentaina has distinct old quarters, some dating back centuries when the Christians, the Moors and the Jews all lived separately but part of the same town.

Rides & Rest Days

Each day’s ride allows plenty of time for sightseeing and exploration. There is an optional rest day in the middle of the week, although two rides are on offer if you prefer to stay awheel. Most of the roads are of excellent quality though can be slippery after rain. Participants ride at their own pace, but it is hoped that the group will stay loosely together and meet up at refreshment stops. The hilly nature of the terrain means that speeds will vary greatly. It is important that you are fit enough to undertake each day’s ride as there is no backup vehicle. There will be an emergency pickup available, but only for genuine significant emergencies, not punctures or small mechanicals.

Accommodation & Meals

Breakfast is typically at 8am, ready for a 9am start and this will set you up for the morning. You should still carry snack food as lunch (not included) can be later than you would expect in the UK, typically 1.30pm at the earliest. Most rides have coffee stops as well as a recommended lunch stop. Tap water is safe to drink as is water at the many fountains in villages unless there is a sign saying ‘no potable’. Dinner is at 7.30pm but will be delayed if necessary. Ground floor secure bike storage is available along with a small selection of tools and spares.

Travel

There is no travel included in this tour, thus it is very important that you note that neither your Tour Manager nor CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours 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. Before finalising travel arrangements to meet the tour, you should ensure that you have read and understood our booking conditions. Should this tour not attract sufficient bookings to reach the minimum operating size, we may cancel the tour at any time up to 10 weeks before departure. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible transport and accommodation or wait until you have been informed that the tour is going ahead, as in the event of the tour being cancelled, we will not be responsible for any losses incurred.

Transfers from Alicante airport are included in the price of the holiday. Transfer arrangements will be made available when you book. Your flight must arrive at Alicante by 6pm on the Saturday, otherwise a further charge (70 euros) may be incurred. Your return flight should be no earlier than 10.30am and booking a late flight may mean a long wait at the airport (so please check with the Tour Manager before you book your flights). It is possible to fly into Valencia airport (110km away) but transfers are not available. However, please don’t book any travel arrangements until the tour is confirmed as running.

Group Information

The maximum number of participants will be 8 excluding the Tour Manager.

Weather & Clothing

The weather can be variable as it can be affected by continental and Mediterranean systems. It will never be very cold but could be hot or cool. Rain is very possible and a light waterproof, at least, is essential. Sun cream is also needed as the sun can be very strong. If you carry the same clothing as you would for a normal British summer this should suffice. Cycle shorts are permissible at breakfast but normal street wear would be more appropriate at dinner.

Cycles & Equipment

A touring cycle, road bike, hybrid or lightweight ATB is suitable. You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. Tandems should have at least one hub brake. A low bottom gear (e.g. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended; if unsure about gears, please talk to the Tour Manager. Mudguards are optional but show courtesy to those who are following you in wet weather. Lights are a legal requirement in poor visibility, at night and in tunnels and you should carry these. New tyres are recommended of at least 25mm diameter. Participants will be expected to carry each day sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs.

You will not need to carry luggage, but a rack top pack or bar bag will be useful for carrying wet weather gear, spare clothing needed for the day, camera,
snacks and your map. You are advised to do some riding before the tour with a similar load to that which you will be carrying during the tour to get a feel for how your bike will handle.

Helmets are a legal requirement in Spain, but may be removed whilst climbing in hot weather. A hi-vis jacket/gilet is also a legal requirement in the dark or in poor visibility and you MUST carry one of these at all times. An equipment list will be included with the final documents.

Maps & Guides
Route sheets and maps will be sent out several weeks before the tour and you will be expected to carry these at all times. GPX files are also available if requested. If you wish to purchase a better map of the area, Michelin Zoom series (Costa Blanca) is recommended. The address, phone number and location of your accommodation will be provided, which you should carry each day along with a mobile phone, if you use one.

Travel Insurance & Advice
In addition to travel insurance, EU nationals should carry a European Health Insurance Card, obtainable from www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/. This enables you to take advantage of emergency medical services free or at a discount under a reciprocal provision that exists between EU member states. Your travel insurer may refuse to meet the extra costs of medical treatment if you do not carry this card.
Before booking you should check the latest travel advice from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office including security and local laws, plus passport and visa information, at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or on 0845 850 2829.

Tour Manager's Contact Details
If you require any assistance, or have any queries, please don't hesitate to contact the Tour Manager using the information provided below.

Marjorie South

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