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Bicycle & Train Transport in France

by [Teo Spengler](#), Demand Media



With the world's greatest picnic fare and endless kilometers of back roads, France is cycling heaven. Despite the popularity of the Tour de France, the French do not consider biking a rarefied sport. A typical cyclist might be 10, 40 or 70 years old, heading out for an all-day trek or down to the bake shop for a baguette. Americans biking through France often plan to take a train to the beginning of their cycling itinerary. Be warned: In addition to loving good bread, strong cheese and red wine, the French love complicated rules. Those planning to take bikes on a French train need to study up before they go.

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Basics

French tourist agencies and websites are quick to inform you that you can take your bike on any train in France. This is true as far as it goes. However, the whole truth is more complicated: You can take your bike on most trains in France if you dismantle it and pack it into a case that measures no more than 35 by 47 inches (90 by 120 centimeters.) You will generally need to remove the front tire and the pedals and turn the handlebars.

Exceptions

Exceptions exist to every French rule, and carrying your dismantled bike on a train is no exception. You cannot take a bike, folded or not, onto Paris Metro trains, or on the Paris Regional Express Railway (like the RER B that takes you from Charles de Gaulle Airport to downtown Paris) between 6.30 and 9.30 a.m. and 4.30 and 7.30 p.m.. You cannot take a tandem bike on any train in France.

Coming Into France

If you are coming from London on the Eurostar (eurostar.com) or from Switzerland on the Lyria (tgv-lyria.com), your train will have a luggage van that holds a limited number of bikes. Make reservations and pay the fee before your tickets issue. On the Eurostar from London to Paris or Lille you also have the option of using the registered baggage service. You hand over your bike before you go and it is delivered to the station where you arrive, although not necessarily on the same train. From Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany or Italy, you have no options but to transform your bike into hand baggage.

Traveling in France — TER

Almost all trains in France are operated by the national railway, the SNCF (voyages-sncf.co.uk). Those traveling with bikes will do best to travel on the SNCF's regional services, the TER or Train Express Régional (ter-sncf.com). On these trains, you can take your bike without dismantling it and without charge if you arrive early. The TERs have specially

designated spaces in the passenger cars for bikes on a first-come, first-served basis. Of course, there are exceptions. In Alsace, the TER 200 trains operating from Strasbourg, Mulhouse and Basel do not accept bikes during rush hours. The same is true in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. In Nord-Pas de Calais, no bikes are allowed on the high-speed TER trains called TERGV.

Traveling in France -- Intercites Trains

SNCF also operates Intercités trains (intercites.sncf.com) that do long-distance runs throughout France. The bike rules on Intercités are all over the map. Some of these trains have free space for up to 20 bikes in a special bike car, and some of the trains (and most night trains) have special cars for bikes but charge a fee. On other trains you are required to book in advance and pay a fee. Your best bet is to look up your train route on the SNCF website page that describes how to take a bike on an Intercités train and figure out which procedure applies.

Traveling in France -- TGV

The pride and joy of the French rail system are the TGVs (tgv.com), high-speed trains that run from Paris to most big cities in France. To ride on a TGV, you must reserve your seat in advance. Some TGVs allow whole bikes (bikes that have not been dismantled) on board. Look up your itinerary on the SNCF website to see if the train service has a little bicycle icon beside it; if so, bikes are allowed. However, you must reserve bike space at the same time you book your passenger ticket and pay a fee.

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References

- [Voyagesncf.com: Home \(http://www.voyages-sncf.co.uk/\)](http://www.voyages-sncf.co.uk/)
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- [Freewheeling France: Bikes and French Trains - A Guide for Cyclists \(http://www.freewheelingfrance.com/74\)](http://www.freewheelingfrance.com/74)
- [Fédération Française des Usagers de la Bicyclette: \(http://www.fubicy.org/spip.php?rubrique52\)](http://www.fubicy.org/spip.php?rubrique52)
- [SNCF: Making Bike and Train Easy in France \(http://www.bikes.sncf.com/\)](http://www.bikes.sncf.com/)
- [SNCF: Bringing Your Bike Into France \(http://www.bikes.sncf.com/your-bike-on-the-train/votre-velo-dans-le-train/\)](http://www.bikes.sncf.com/your-bike-on-the-train/votre-velo-dans-le-train/)
- [SNCF: Transporting Your Bike In France \(http://www.bikes.sncf.com/your-bike-on-the-train/expedier-son-velo/\)](http://www.bikes.sncf.com/your-bike-on-the-train/expedier-son-velo/)

Resources

- [Experience France by Bike: Home \(http://experiencefrancebybike.com/\)](http://experiencefrancebybike.com/)
- [Sheldon Brown's French-English Bicycle Dictionary \(http://sheldonbrown.com/eng-fren.html\)](http://sheldonbrown.com/eng-fren.html)
- [Daily Mail: On Your Bike: Five Great Cycling Holidays for Free-Wheeling Families in Northern France \(http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1314933/The-best-family-cycling-holidays-northern-France.html\)](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1314933/The-best-family-cycling-holidays-northern-France.html)
- [Crazy Guy on a Bike: Bikes By Train \(http://www.crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page_id=47970\)](http://www.crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?page_id=47970)

Bicycle & Train Living in France and northern California. Teo Spengler left the active practice of law for full-time writing in 2000. Her journalism appears in newspapers from Alaska to the Basque Country. Spengler earned a master's degree in creative writing from San Francisco State University and a Juris Doctor from UC Berkeley.

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