

TRANS EURO TRAIL **SPAIN**

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CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT IN LIFE

— HERACLITUS

In February of this year, my wife, Chantil, and I had reached a point in our lives where we could pull the plug on our professional careers, load our possessions onto a couple of aging BMW G650GS motorcycles, and begin full-time motorcycle traveling. Our plan was to spend at least a year in Europe. If we still enjoyed full-time traveling, then we would continue around the world, visiting the extensive list of push-pins we created over the years on a virtual Google map.

By March, we had reached Spain where we planned on spending a few weeks riding along the eastern and southern coastal regions. On March 14th, we reserved an Airbnb room that was in the countryside of the region of Murcia. Our plan was to spend a few days there, using the Airbnb as a base for exploring the restaurants, beaches, and museums of Cartagena.

Unfortunately, the world pandemic, known as COVID-19, had vastly different plans for us and the thousands of other full-time travelers throughout the world. The day before we checked into the Airbnb, the Spanish prime minister declared a country-wide state of alarm; putting all of Spain under a strict lock-down quarantine.

Spain was especially hit hard by the pandemic. It wasn't until after 56 days that most of Spain had contained the infection rate enough to start the deescalation phases. Phase I, which started on May 11th, brought the hope that we could once again start traveling. After nearly two-months of quarantine, we were desperate to ride again, even if we were restricted to the relatively small region of Murcia. Fortunately for us, there was a portion of the Trans Euro Trail that ran right through Murcia.

THE TRANS EURO TRAIL (TET)

The TET is a system of off-road oriented trails that wind through 33 European countries and total over 31,700 miles (51,000 km). "Linemen" from each country are designated to provide regular updates to the trail and the GPX route which can be downloaded for free at <https://transeurotrail.org/>

In July, the TET celebrated three years of operations and now has over 40,000 facebook members. It's a testament to the growing popularity of adventure motorcycling and the riders who want to enjoy experiencing the back-roads and trails of Europe.

The Spanish portion of the TET winds 4,600 miles (7,500 km) around the perimeter of the country connecting the Portuguese TET to the west and the joining the French TET to the north. The Spanish lineman, Fernando Gost Bellver, estimates that it would take 40 days to travel the entire Spain TET. As much as we would have liked to ride the entire Spanish TET, we were restricted to just a 119 mile (192 km) section that snakes through the northern region of Murcia.

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It felt liberating to be on the road again, especially after a 56-day lockdown. We packed the minimal: 5 liters of water, first-aid kit, a spare tube and pump, camera equipment, some hiking clothes, and a lunch with a small thermos so we could enjoy a meal and a cold drink halfway through the trail. The bikes felt spirited carrying this lighter weight compared to their typically overloading baggage with extra clothings, spare parts, and camping equipment.

After an uneventful hour of riding on the Autovia (freeway), we were enjoying the two-lane country roads that meandered through the beautiful vineyards being tended to by local farmers. It wasn't much longer, that the well maintained two-lane roads transitioned to pothole filled ones, then to gravel, and then to hard packed dirt. Perfect for our kind of motorcycling and perfect for a full day of social distancing.

With the TET route clearly displayed on our GPS receivers, we made our way to the border between the regions of Murcia and Albacete. We half expected to see that the border would be marked with some sort of security preventing traveling between regions. What we found was just a dirt road that is occasionally used by farmers going about their business of tending their fields. It was incredibly quiet and serene. There wasn't even the sound of passenger jets flying overhead. We took a moment to enjoy the solitude before turning the motorcycle around and heading southwest.

The first 22 miles (35 km) of Murcia TET, from the border to the town of Jumilla, were easily traveled dirt roads that wind through small vineyards, and crumbling abandoned farm homes slowly being taken back by nature and time. Spain was especially hit hard by the global financial crisis of 2008–2014. Nearly one in four Spanish citizens were unemployed in 2012 which forced many property and farm foreclosures.

After reaching Jumilla, we rolled up to the local Repsol gas station where we were greeted by a friendly service attendant. A quick "Llena con gasolina. Noventa y cinco por favor" and our tanks were filled with the least expensive gas we've come across in Europe – just 0.95 EUR per liter (4.25 USD per gallon). The lack of demand for gasoline, over the last two-month travel ban, had driven prices well below the typical cost of 1.30 EUR per liter (5.81USD per gallon). It seems riding in Europe was going to be a little less expensive for a short while.



After Jumilla, the TET reached the forested portion with wide gravel roads with steep climbs and descents. I found myself reminiscing; the smells, temperature, and terrain brought back summer memories of growing up in the mountains of northern Colorado. This was some of our favorite parts of the trail because travel was relatively fast and offered incredible views of the valley that would spring from between pine trees lining the trail. We were in our element – standing on our pegs once again, enjoying the perfect spring temperatures, kicking up dust from the wide-open gravel roads, and taking in the incredible views that stretched from horizon to horizon.

We timed our riding on a weekend, so we imagined that every dirt or adventure motorcyclist in the Murcia region would be out enjoying their new-found freedom. Not so - we didn't see one single offroad motorcycle or vehicle on the TET that day; only farmers, an older man riding his mobility scooter, and two hikers. As we passed the hikers, I thought I heard one of them speak in English. This surprised me because English is not spoken in these rural regions of Spain. A little further down the trail, and during a steep decent on hard packed gravel, Chantil accidentally dropped her motorcycle. As I stopped to help her pick up the bike, the hikers ran down to help and asked "Are you OK?" in perfect English! It turns out that one of them was from Miami and noticed our Florida plates as we passed by. We shared our stories, passed along a www.viajarMOTO.com sticker, and were on our way. I remember one comment after they learned that we had shipped our motorcycles from the United States to Europe via Iceland. "These motorcycle came all the way from the USA? You two are crazy." It's a small, and crazy world sometimes, for sure!

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The southwestern third of the Murcia portion of the TET continued to get more interesting. The wide gravel roads became narrower and more challenging with some short sections of single track and a few water crossings through some small creeks. There was even a nice rock garden area to make things interesting.

Overall, we had a great time on the entire Murcia portion of the TET and I would easily recommend this portion of the route to anyone riding any type of adventure motorcycle. You definitely don't need a lightweight dirt bike to enjoy the wide roads and beautiful views of this portion of the Spanish TET. A special thanks to the Spanish lineman, Fernando Gost Bellver, for mapping and sharing this route with the motorcycle community.

CARAVACA DE LA CRUZ

As a bonus, we passed through the historic town of Caravaca de la Cruz. Caravaca is the fifth Holy City of Catholic Christianity; a title it shares with Rome, Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela and Camaleñ. The town is dominated by the Roman Catholic Santuario de la Vera Cruz (Sanctuary of True Cross). This Catholic sanctuary houses a miraculous cross that Catholics believe came from the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified.

We enjoyed riding through the extremely narrow streets before parking the bikes, changing into some tourist clothes, and walking among the cobblestone streets and castle walls of this Middle Aged town. Sometimes you have to get off the motorcycle to experience the culture of a region. We wished that we could have explored and learned more about Caravaca, however our experience was limited since all the tourist sites were closed due to COVID-19.

MORE TRAVEL ON THE HORIZON

Although we were restricted to the region of Murcia for this trip, we have a lot more traveling plans in store. As of June 21st, the Spanish government lifted the travel ban and citizens were allowed to travel between regions once again. We definitely have more motorcycle overlanding and traveling to come...

Travis and Chantil Gill started full-time motorcycling travel in February 2020. You can follow them on their website www.viajarMOTO.com, and on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

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