

# Bébé à bord – part 2

This month the Browns continue on into Spain and further perfect family living in a Van

Words and photos Chris and Olivia Brown



Collioure quayside

Burgos Cathedral



Looking down over Collioure



“a nature reserve that used to be a dynamite factory”



Above left: the Chateau Comptal at Carcassonne; Above: Gorge De Galamus



Salamanca cathedral

Hiking with Luca – tiring but good fun



Having been on the road for a month by this point (see part one last month in VWt 66), we were well into our stride, and looking forward to reaching the Cévennes National Park – somewhere we had been eager to explore for a while. It didn't disappoint. The scenery is stunning, and we found a lovely campsite on the banks of the Tarn river, which we had almost to ourselves.

We spent the days hiking under the autumn sun, and sampling the fare from the numerous local farmers' markets. As always, the Campervantastic-supplied T6 California proved to be faultless for our family adventure.

Carcassonne was next on the itinerary, but the French unions had other ideas. We arrived at the chateaux to find it closed due to a strike! Not to worry, we had a wander round the rest of the walled city and then set off to explore the Cathar castles of Quéribus, Peyrepertuse and Termes. This turned out to be another highlight of the trip. The Cathars perched their hideouts precariously on hills and ridges to give themselves vantage points over their enemies, and today to provide us with incredible views right over the Pyrenees to Spain.

We were also given a tip by one of our France Passion vineyard owners to drive

through the Gorges de Galamus, which turned out to be an exhilarating journey along an extremely narrow, windy, balcony road hovering above a narrow gorge. We were almost put off by the 2m height warning on entering the gorge road (our Van was 2.1m wide with the bike on the back) but decided to give it a shot, and luckily our gamble paid off, though it was a bit tight through a couple of the tunnels!

### Treat time

By this point we had been on the road for almost six weeks and decided that we had earned a treat. So, as a belated wedding anniversary celebration, we decided to stay one night at a fantastic hotel with a Michelin starred restaurant – it was a wonderful dose of luxury, which gave us an injection of energy for another few weeks of camping.

We then headed almost to the eastern end of France and spent a few days near Collioure, a pretty seaside town with a nature reserve that used to be a dynamite factory. From there, we did one day's long drive west to cross right to the other

“the Gorges de Galamus... an exhilarating journey along an extremely narrow, windy, balcony road”





**“the T6 California proved to be faultless for our family adventure”**

The famous aqueduct of Segovia – one of the best preserved roman aqueducts in existence

With DSG at his disposal there was no need for Luca to worry about the clutch pedal



**“We’d definitely recommend a trip like this to any other new parents”**



**Be inspired...**

- Where we stayed:**  
 Camping Bio Verdon, nr. the Verdon Gorge  
[camping-bio-verdon.blogspot.co.uk](http://camping-bio-verdon.blogspot.co.uk)  
 Le Chant d’Oiseau, Loire Valley  
[www.loire-gites.com/accommodation/camping/](http://www.loire-gites.com/accommodation/camping/)  
 Camping Lou Labech, Bouzigues  
[www.loulabech.fr](http://www.loulabech.fr)  
 Mille Etoiles, Ardèche National Park  
[www.campingmilletoiles.com/en/](http://www.campingmilletoiles.com/en/)  
 Camping Chantemerle, Cévennes National Park  
[www.camping-chantemerle.com/en/](http://www.camping-chantemerle.com/en/)

**Miles:** 4,010 in total  
**Fuel:** £625  
**Camping costs:** £670  
**Bilbao to Portsmouth ferry:** From £289

side of France. We had originally planned to drive over the Pyrenees to Spain, but by now it was mid-October and the nights were already pretty cold, so we decided to have a few days in the French Basque country instead, before heading into Spain by the north.

This turned out to be fascinating – the villages of La Bastide-Clairence and Espelette were very pretty, with red and white timber buildings, and we stayed on a sheep farm where we saw lambs being born and stocked up on delicious cheese.

Luca was fully adapted to life on the road by this point and had become a pro at devouring galettes, goats cheese and croissants, whilst charming the locals with his cheeky smile. Our vocabulary was expanding, too. They kept calling him ‘sage’, which initially we were confused by as he didn’t seem very wise to

us, but it made more sense when we were told it meant he is calm, as he certainly was very chilled out about his new nomadic life.

**Tapas or bust**

After an amazing seven weeks in France we were sad to be leaving, but Spain awaited us so we had a fun day watching the surfers in Biarritz and a lovely evening camping overlooking the sea in a pretty village called Guéthary, and then crossed the border.

We had been invited to stay with friends who lived in a town called Irura, just outside San Sebastián, and we all loved staying in a real house after so long in the Van. We had been worried it might be tricky to appreciate the local tapas bars with a baby in tow, but it worked out brilliantly as people tend to eat tapas in the day rather than the evening, so we put Luca in the trusty sling and he loved sampling the tapas and smiling at our fellow customers.

The final 10 days of our trip were spent visiting some amazing Spanish towns and cities. Burgos, Segovia, Salamanca and León were all absolutely beautiful, with grand gothic cathedrals and bustling plazas. For these places we decided not to waste time travelling



**Top tips for Van life with a baby**

- Do a practice trip before your big trip (we didn’t!). That will help you hone your packing and give you a chance to test out sleeping arrangements, rather than doing that on the first night when you are tired from travelling
- Think about your essential equipment – we took a pram, but only used our sling / baby carrier. A clip-on high chair was invaluable, too
- There are baby baths in lots of campsites, and self-service laundry facilities at many large supermarkets in France – both very handy
- Headtorches are invaluable for reading without disturbing kids when they’ve gone to bed
- Eat lunch out instead dinner
- Ensure your Van has a fridge so you can cook fresh and healthy meals, rather than having to shop daily or rely on tins / jars of ready-made food
- Don’t miss out on the fun stuff just because you’ve got a baby
- Finally, treat yourself to occasional hotel stays. Because you’re worth it!

in and out of cities to campsites (plus it was also very cold by this point) so we stayed in a few hotels.

Our final hike was near Portugal, where a huge gorge runs along the border and griffin vultures swoop overhead. From there, it was time to head back towards Bilbao for our ferry home, stopping along the way at a pretty town called Comillas del Mar for a final night next to the sea. It was Luca’s first birthday on the overnight ferry from Bilbao to Portsmouth, so not a traditional first birthday celebration but a very fitting one for our intrepid little traveller.

We had more reasons to celebrate too – we’d made it! We’d not only survived nine weeks in a Van (and what a Van) with a baby, we’d loved every part of it.

We’d definitely recommend a trip like this to any other new parents. It might not be the most conventional use of parental leave [should you be fortunate enough to have a job that affords you such an opportunity! - Ed] but it turned out to be a fantastic bonding experience for us all. In particular, it gave Chris the chance to be more hands on with Luca than he’s able to be when he’s at work, and their relationship became so much closer as a result. 📍

**We want your trips!**

Have you been on a great trip in your Van or are you planning to get out there soon? We’d love to hear about it and so would other readers. We’re looking for adventures big or small, near or far, and if we feature you, we’ll even pay a few shekles for your words and pictures. So take some snaps of you and your Van next time you go and email ‘em to: [james.wallace@kelseymedia.co.uk](mailto:james.wallace@kelseymedia.co.uk)