

POSTCARD

Emilia Romagna

New flights to Rimini and new biking routes are putting this Italian region, better known for its food, firmly on the cycling map, finds **Amy McPherson**

I'll admit it – before last year, I hadn't given the Italian region of Emilia Romagna much thought. What I knew about it was mostly down to its edible attractions – Parma ham, balsamic vinegar of Modena and spaghetti Bolognese.

Then along came the Tour de France, which made a historic Grand Départ from Italy in 2024, kicking off in Florence then sweeping through the length of Emilia Romagna. "The Tour de France made a big impact here," says Andrea Manusia, cycling project manager at Emilia Romagna Tourism, which reported a 15% year-on-year rise in cycling tourists in September 2024. "We predict there will be even more enthusiasm for cycling this year," he adds.

For UK-based bikers, access to the northern Italian region is now easier than ever, thanks to a new British Airways summer route from Heathrow to Rimini launching on May 15.

As a cycling fan, I wanted to be part of the pedal action – but that's easier said than done. Though the region boasts a flat stretch of glorious Adriatic coast near Rimini, the interior of Emilia Romagna (near the Apennines) is scattered with rolling hills featuring steep gradients and sharp corners.

Huffing and puffing my way up towards Montefiore Conca, one of the region's hilltop medieval towns, I was overtaken by trains of other cyclists who had also had their enthusiasm fanned by the Tour. Yet when I reached the top, the exertion was worth it – I looked back to a green horizon of hills that rolled down towards the sea, shrouded in a white-blue haze.

Emilia Romagna has an impressive 5,560 miles of bike routes. Recent investment means more bike lanes are being built in towns and cities such as Bologna, scenic low-traffic routes are being mapped as demand increases, and bike-friendly hotels with storage and repair rooms are springing up.

New infrastructure also includes a stretch of cycle paths being constructed along the Ciclovia del Sole route on the leg from Verona to Florence. The paved trail follows an old railway line for nearly 40 miles between Bologna and Mirandola, past rivers and canals that make for easier, flatter cycling. Because as I can attest, cycling in Emilia Romagna isn't just for the professionals. **TW**



BOOK IT

Inntravel offers a six-night self-guided Cycling Emilia Romagna tour from £1,150 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes accommodation with breakfast, bike hire, luggage transfers and a balsamic vinegar tasting, but excludes flights. Based on departures in October. inntravel.co.uk



TOP: Cyclist in Emilia Romagna **ABOVE:** Chunks of regional cheese Parmigiano Reggiano dipped in balsamic vinegar

PICTURES: Shutterstock/barbojones