

El Transcantabrico Gran Lujo, May 2022

Some information that we could not find in advance:

Our experiences:

Check-in: The travel documents that arrived with our tickets provided a phone number that you are supposed to call 24 hours in advance of your departure to confirm that the location of check-in shown on the ticket has not changed. We phoned many times throughout the day yet the call was always answered with a message that there was no one there to help. Later onboard we found out that the rail company would have contacted us if there had been a change.

Our check-in was indeed at the hotel shown on our documents yet we anticipated seeing a clearly marked desk or kiosk for that purpose. Once Bill showed a bellman our ticket, he led us to a non-descript room far from the entrance where check-in was already underway.

Tips for the staff: I asked the train manager about tips and she said that no one would be anticipating them; however, if a staff member did an outstanding job, then a modest tip handed directly to that person would of course be appreciated. The amounts we gave to selected individuals were 20€, 40€, or 50€ depending upon how much contact we had with them during the week and their outgoing personalities. Passengers from outside the Euro Zone withdrew cash from an ATM to avoid using their own currency that the staff member would later have to convert to euros.

At the spa: We had about an hour to change into the provided swimsuits (one-piece for women and trunks for men), bathing caps, flipflops, and robes, and to try, at our own pace, all the various water sprays, jets, showers and baths built around a large pool (about 4 feet deep), plus the sauna, aroma therapy and steam room. We were given a towel for drying off before changing back into our street clothes to be ready for lunch in the same building. Unlike French pools that generally require men to wear Speedo-style suits, we were lent more modest trunks. Some passengers brought their own suits but then had to carry damp clothing back to the train.

Excursions: The motorcoach used for the excursions off the train seats 55 people but there were only 28 passengers so we had room to spread out. Some seats on the righthand side (passenger side in a car) had more legroom. There was a toilet onboard but we were asked to use it only in emergencies. There was one bathroom break in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Umbrellas: Although it didn't rain much during the week, umbrellas were available whenever we got off the train or the bus. The staff was always there to hand them out and collect them upon our return.

Beverage prices: Soft drinks and fruit juices in our cabin's minibar and the bar car were free. Glasses of wine from the bar were 4€ while mixed drinks were 10€ although the cash register receipt separated the alcohol shot from the soft drink making it appear that you were paying separately for the mixer. All pours from the bar were very generous. We settled our drinks bill directly at the bar on the final night of the trip.

Meals: All breakfasts were taken onboard the train at tables for two while all lunches were in local restaurants (including one at a Michelin starred restaurant) at tables for four, six, or eight people. All dinners except one were back on the train. Both red and white wine was freely available at dinner plus a small choice of after-dinner drinks and breakfast even included glasses of cava, if you wished. At lunch we sometimes had to ask for more than the initial bottle of wine provided on the table as well as the coffee and after-lunch drinks.

We easily adjusted to Spanish meal times of 8 AM, 2 PM, and 9 PM without feeling hungry even though for all meals that was 2 hours later than we are accustomed. Fresh fruit was available at breakfast while other meals depended heavily upon fish or meat and potatoes, reflecting the local cuisine. Since meals were copious, some passengers requested salads for many dinners and were pleased with their choice.

Attire: For most of the day passengers wore casual clothing while dinner became slightly more formal with sport coats and slacks (or suits) for men and dresses or business attire for women. We did not see any tuxedos or evening gowns. Staff wore dark suits during the day with white coats and gloves for dinner service.

Luggage storage: We found ample space under each bed and under the sleeper sofa in the living room area for our empty suitcases and plenty of cabinet and hanging space. It took some effort to begin to lift the mattress but then the spring mechanism engaged to make it much easier.

In-room TV: We had a screen in the bedroom for watching movies and one in the living room for accessing the in-room computer. The movies were stored as files on the computer. Most passengers, including us, used their own mobile devices to access the Internet. Because of movement and tunnels, the train's wi-fi service was best when we were stationary.

Cabin location: There are 14 cabins, 2 per car, so the higher your cabin number the further you are from the lounge, bar, and dining cars that you access at least twice each day. Since the cabins are spacious the corridors you walk through the cars to reach the public areas are narrow and can be mildly challenging when the train is moving. When the train was parked at a station platform that could accommodate its length, we could exit our car, walk along the platform, and then reenter the train at the appropriate public car.

Cabin security: Our door was equipped with an anti-pick lock and key although we did have to request that our cabin be locked by the cleaning crew after they were finished. The very small in-room safe was only large enough to hold our wallets. Whenever the train was parked overnight a security guard patrolled the exterior while we slept to ensure that no one would graffiti the train.

Train layout: Behind the engine was a storage/service car followed by the kitchen, the entertainment/pub car, dining car, bar car, lounge/library, seven passenger cars beginning with cabin number 1, staff accommodation, and a generator car. We were in cabin 10 and heard no noise from the public areas nor from the train machinery.

The ride: The rail route is narrow-gauge, unwelded tracks so you hear the classic "clicity-clack" while traveling in rebuilt cars from the 1920s. There was some swaying and a few bumps but we only traveled, at most, a couple of hours each day and never during sleeping hours. If you drove the highway that parallels the entire route from Ferrol to San Sebastian it would take about 6 hours while we had an entire week to make the journey by train.