

El tren Correo, the mail train, Barcelona-Pamplona on July 5th. I am now speaking 1960's. This was a complete adventure. One could NOT call somewhere and have a ticket reserved, NO, one had to get it in person from the taquilla at the station and not until on the very day of departure!

Barcelona in those days was THE hot spot of Spain with entertainment day and night, especially night, some of the best restaurants in Spain, the best flamenco, the best JAZZ!, in the summer some of the most outstanding bullfights of the temporada, nearness to beach, La Barceloneta, great small pensions in the Casco Viejo but also on the very Ramblas!

I used to stay in one called Pensión Parisián where I became friends with the family of the guy who ran it. It cost almost nothing! The bedbugs were free! B-lona was the place where I used to spend time before and also after SF. Go to the bullfights, on Sundays at the Monumental, on Thursdays at Las Arenas, museums, beach, eat and drink well have fun in the redlight district at night etc.

Back to the train biz. In the morning of July 5th, the day of departure I went by taxi to the railway station, and generally there was not much morning left of the day, rather afternoon, all in relation to number of hours slept, or even not slept at all. The taquilla for Pamplona wasn't open yet BUT a large line of people was standing in front. Over the years we developed a strategy in order not to have to stand on foot for too many hrs without a break. Upon arrival one introduced oneself to the person in front and, when next person appeared behind, to him too. SO, when I felt it absolutely necessary to go to the nearest bar for a jar and visit to WC, I asked either one of my neighbors to watch my place and bag in the line. It worked perfectly. I also developed a technique to sleep, *standing* on line because as long as the taquilla hadn't opened yet, the line didn't move at all!

If my memory doesn't fail me, the taquilla opened at 5 p.m., the correo train's ETD was 8 and something. Coming back into the line, one always brought some provision from the bar to hand over to the watchmen.

At last, with ticket in hand, it was btw 30 to 60 mins to departure but the train already was there, so one could board it, find a seat (not numbered) and wait for departure. The reader may imagine what kind of ambiente there was!

The majority of the passengers were young people like myself and of various other nationalities than Spanish. They were all going to SF! The train's ETA was 6.40 in the morning on the next day. It didn't take many stations until the train had become a rolling Fiesta! People were eating, drinking, singing and dancing. "Tren correo" means that it stops at all stations to deliver and collect mail, which meant that there was just about time enough to disembark, run to the platform bar for refill of food and beverage and run back and board the train again. If someone was late, the train waited, merrily whistling.

The train was long and there were many conductors. The one who was in charge of your wagon became very familiar after a while and happily accepted wine and food offered. Twice during the ride, serious grey plain suits appeared in pairs and with the characteristic pin of Franco's Secret Police on their jackets. People who couldn't show a valid passport – and there WERE a few – immediately were 'lifted' off the train, their destiny unknown. The best part of the ride was this:

When the train reached the hills of Navarra, the rail was not like in our days, plain, but the steam engine train had to start struggling up hill! Generally it was very heavily loaded and would more or less stop. Then, we found out that the Secret Police also had another mission - they forced all male passengers to disembark, in order to PUSH the train up hill! Hilarious, of course and everybody loved it! One wouldn't believe it but we ARRIVED at Pamplona, always on time – 6.40 in the morning of Day 6. Taxis hadn't been invented yet and there was no bus line from the station. Most of the local people had friends with cars meeting them and we others started to walk into town. Singing.

Those were the best years of all my SF's! Later, in the 1970's I and many other friends flew to Biarritz, St. Jean, Donostia or Bilbao and took a taxi (!) to Pamplona. If you were say 3-4 people it really was worth it.

More later, in the 1980's we, myself and a few friends from the peña, drove by car to Pamplona, because we always wanted to go to the novillada in St. Sévère (Les Landes, France) on Midsummer's Day and then La Feria de Burgos. Unlike many other international pamplonicas, we always wanted places with bullfights, since we were all aficionados a los toros.