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**THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE
TO CYCLING HOLIDAYS**

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Beginner's Guide

Cycling holidays

What better way to explore the world's most beautiful places up close and at your own pace than atop two pedal-powered wheels? So, get on yer bike...



A cyclist ventures down into the Cumberland Basin on the Colorado Trail, USA



How do I get started?

WHAT TO RIDE? There's only one requirement for tackling your first cycling holiday: a bicycle that you can comfortably ride for several hours at a time.

Bikes come in many different shapes and sizes. Ensure that you're riding one that fits both you and the terrain you're going to tackle. Hybrid bikes are a cross between a road bike and an MTB (mountain bike), and can handle everything except hardcore off-road trails. Cyclo-cross bicycles, which look like a road bike but are designed to go off-road, are another good choice.

You should try out any bicycle before you buy, and a local bike store is the best place to do that and get specific advice about what's most suitable. Your second essential item is a well-fitting helmet.

If you're tempted to use the old bike gathering dust in your shed, a thorough service is essential to make sure that your brakes, cabling, chain and tyres are in good order. Before you commit to a few days in the saddle, ride your bike for a couple of hours, including up and down a hill or two. This should alert you to any mechanical problems.

Hiring a bike, especially overseas, removes the hassle of transporting your steed, but research in advance what types of bike are available and whether they have your size.

For a comprehensive guide to choosing the correct frame size, visit bikeradar.com.

AM I FIT ENOUGH? Yes. While you shouldn't jump straight on a Bradley Wiggins road bike and set off for a week climbing Alpine passes – at least not immediately – there are cycling holidays for everyone. Start conservatively and aim to cover between 30–60 miles a day, depending on the terrain, and bearing in mind that beginners will ride at between eight to 13 miles per hour. Build half-days of rest into your itinerary, or have lower-mileage days that you can take slowly.

A riding companion or two can help if the going gets tough, and you can split the gear that you need to carry. Evenings are more fun if you've shared the day's events with a group. A few days of riding together beforehand will tell you if you're a compatible crew. If you're looking for like-minded adventurers to travel with, there are websites dedicated to finding cycling buddies (try cyclingbuddy.com).

WHAT ABOUT FOOD? Pace yourself – you'll find it easier to cover long distances if you go at a steady rate. As Paul de Vivie, the founding father of French cycle touring, advised: 'Eat before you're hungry. Drink before you're thirsty. Rest before you're tired.' Carry two bottles, one with an energy drink that will keep you going, and plenty of fuel for the ride. →

What will I need?

Investing in a bike that is comfortable to ride, the correct size and appropriate to the terrain you will be riding on is vital to ensure an enjoyable cycling experience.

A tight-fitting safety helmet is also a must, and you should consider what type of tyres you will need, again depending on the terrain. Generally speaking, knobbly tyres are for off-road, smooth are for asphalt roads.



Cycling mitts (Boardman Men's Cycle Mitts; £19.99; halfords.com)



Lightweight pump (Topeak Pocket Rocket Pump; £17.99; wiggle.co.uk)

Panniers (Ortlieb Back Roller Panniers High Visibility; £162; wiggle.co.uk)



Hybrid bicycle (Specialized Sirrus Sport 2015 Hybrid Bike; £500; evanscycles.com)

Where should I go?



Newcastle to Edinburgh, UK

THE RIDE Cycling charity Sustrans' Coast & Castles South route links the Tyne and Forth estuaries, joining Newcastle and Edinburgh (sustrans.org.uk).

WHY GO HERE Despite the 200-mile distance, this is a relatively easy, flat ride. You'll be on the coast until Berwick-upon-Tweed, before heading inland, passing historic Lindisfarne and Bamburgh Castle on the way into the Scottish capital.

WHEN TO GO Aim for summer, outside of the school holidays if possible.

● Tour operator Bikecation offers a five-day Newcastle to Edinburgh itinerary, covering about 50 miles a day and staying in b&b's, hotels and pubs along the way (from £495; bikecation.co.uk).

León to Santiago de Compostela, Spain

THE RIDE Join pilgrims on this 203-mile stretch of the Camino de Santiago, an historic path traversing northern Spain.

WHY GO HERE To experience the trail's beautiful rolling countryside and ancient villages. With some steep ascents, it's ideal for those looking for a moderate challenge.

WHEN TO GO Aim for early summer (May–June) and autumn (September–October) for mild weather and fewer crowds

● Tour operator Explore (explore.co.uk) offers a self-guided 10-night León to Santiago itinerary (from £965, excl flights, incl bike hire, luggage transfer, accommodation and some meals).





Bib shorts (Altura Progel Shield Bib Shorts; £69.99; wiggle.co.uk)



Waterproof gloves (SealSkinz All Weather Cycle Gloves; £40; halfords.com)



Helmet (Kask Rapido Helmet; £65; wiggle.co.uk)



Cycling sunglasses (Lomo Elite Cycling Sunglasses; £10; ewetsuits.com)

Energy gels (SiS GO Isotonic Gel 60ml Six Pack; £8.40; scienceinsport.com)



Waterproof jacket (Endura Convert Softshell Red 2015; £84.99; jejamescycles.co.uk)



Edam to Amsterdam, Netherlands

THE RIDE Cruise the cobbles in Amsterdam and head north of the capital to explore classic Dutch countryside, dotted with windmills, farmhouses and rural villages

WHY GO HERE Amsterdam and the surrounding countryside offer easy, flat

routes through picturesque landscapes

WHEN TO GO Summer offers the most reliably good weather, but if you're keen to see tulips, head out in April or May

● Tour operator Intravel's four-night A Taste of Holland trip includes a day exploring the capital, plus time in the 17th-century town of Edam and surrounding countryside (from £615, incl bike hire, luggage transfer and maps; intravel.co.uk).

Hanoi to Phnom Penh, Asia

THE RIDE Sixteen days and 1,000 miles through Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

WHY GO HERE See rural villages and national parks up close on this moderately difficult route along secluded country lanes and the mighty Mekong River.

WHEN TO GO Tours tend to operate from late October–mid December.

● Tour operator Tour d'Afrique offers the Bamboo Road Shanghai to Singapore epic (Hanoi to Phnom Penh from £2,335, excl flights; tourdafrique.com).





Colorado, USA

THE RIDE Wheeling along creeks, canyons and urban paths in and around Boulder, a mountain town on the edge of the Rockies.

WHY GO HERE Boulder has more than 300 miles of cycle trails winding through scenic parks with fine mountain views.

WHEN TO GO Summer brings sun with cool mountain air – consider May or September to avoid peak crowds.

● Tour operator Finish Line Cycling offers itineraries in the area, including Beer, Bikes and Boulder, a six-day trip exploring the area, via canyons, mountain villages and microbreweries (from £1,320 excl flights; finishlinecycling.com).

South Downs, UK

THE RIDE The South Downs Way is a 100-mile trail from Winchester to Eastbourne – a two–four day trip by bike.

WHY GO HERE Snaking over rolling hills and winding river valleys, the trail leads past white cliffs, Roman villas, country parks and great pubs.

WHEN TO GO The trail is at its colourful best in spring and autumn.

● Tour operator Walk & Cycle offers tailor-made assistance, with options including bike hire, trail support and accommodation (from £130 for four day's luggage transfer and bike hire; walkandcycle.co.uk).



My first cycling holiday...



My husband and I went cycling on a series of mapped routes while staying near Banyoles in Catalonia, Spain. I was four months' pregnant and not the fittest person in the world, but even so, they weren't too challenging. The foothills of the Pyrenees were so beautiful – remote villages, winding roads, and gorgeous scenery. On a bike, you pass everything at a slower pace. You can sense the countryside, its sounds and smells. And you feel like you've achieved something at the end, which is exhilarating.



Zoe Marshall and her husband went on a cycling holiday with Girona Cycling (gironacycling.com)

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