

# Cycling GUIDE



# Vacation Cycling

**P**lanning your next vacation? Spending a day on a bike is a great way to see a new area with all the flexibility you need while getting some exercise. Being on a bike allows you to move around more quickly than you would on foot and with more options than using public transit or driving. Plus, sightseeing is just more fun on a bike.

**Know the laws for cycling at your destination.** A number of states and cities have laws about children wearing helmets while cycling, so plan ahead to ensure you're cycling safely. The League of American Bicyclists suggests looking up whether cyclists can ride on the sidewalk, whether cyclists are required to yield to pedestrians and where it's legal to ride. Also ensure you have a lock if you want to leave your bike at any point.

**Incorporate biking into the rest of your sightseeing.** If you don't want to bike all day, you can transport your bike around the city via car (with a rack on top of your car or a rack you can attach to your trunk). You also can take bikes on most cities' bus and light rail systems, allowing you to move around the city and use your bike through the parks and quiet neighborhoods but not relying on it as your sole form of transportation.

**In large cities, look for community bike rentals.** Many larger cities in the United States have bike-sharing programs that allow you to rent a bike on the street with a credit card and return it there or at another station after using it as long as you want. Portland, Phoenix, Boston and Fort Worth are among the cities with programs, and com-



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panies such as Zagster offer bike sharing throughout the United States.

**Look up guided bike tours.** While planning, look up bike

tours in the area where you'll be traveling. These can include easy bike tours that last only a few hours, allowing you to go at your own pace

while picking up information about the city from your tour guide. For those who are looking for a more intense trip, look for local outfits offering

multi-day trips that move through cities or mountains. These tours are more expensive, but the company takes care of all the arrangements.



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# Commuting By Bike

**R**esearch has shown that the longer American workers spend sitting in traffic during their morning and evening commutes, the less happy they are. One way to avoid that? Take the bike lane instead.

According to a 2012 article from Business Insider, an increasing number of Americans are riding their bikes to the office, though that number remains dwarfed by the 200 million personal vehicles on the road every day.

Should you ride your bike to work? It's definitely worth considering.

## **SAVE MONEY**

Fuel is expensive, car maintenance is expensive, and

sometimes even parking your car can be expensive. Making even one trip a week by bike instead of by car can help save on gas to the tune of 2 billion gallons a year, collectively. Individually, that turns into fewer trips to the fueling station.

You also could save money in health care costs. A study in the Journal of Physical Activity and Health found Portland, Oregon's residents could be saving close to \$600 million in health care costs because the

biking culture resulted in an overall healthier population.

## **FEWER TRAFFIC JAMS**

Americans on average spend close to half an hour driving to work each day. About half of Americans live within three to five miles of their office. That's a fair amount of time spent moving slowly through heavy traffic and waiting your turn at the stoplight. When riding at a good pace, cyclists can make that trip in about the same

amount of time as they could in vehicles, with less waiting, more exercise and less frustration in the process.

## **SKIP THE GYM**

The average weight loss of driver-turned-cyclist commuters was 13 pounds in one year, according to Business Insider — just for getting to work on two wheels instead of four. It provides low-impact, high-intensity cardiovascular exercise, which gets your heart pumping faster and helps

build muscle and strengthen joints — no monthly membership required.

## **NO PARKING HASSLE**

Most large cities and office buildings, and an increasingly large number of smaller cities and businesses, have bike racks or some sort of bike storage for commuters who come in on two wheels. Buy a good bike lock (the U-shaped ones work well) and lock up your bike right in front of your office building.

# Health Benefits of Cycling

Cycling is good for people in all sorts of ways. It promotes weight loss, encourages people to get out of their houses to enjoy the outdoors and builds muscle, all without putting a lot of strain on your joints. Learn more about how this sport, which can be done by all of us at our own pace, helps you to be healthier.

## HEART

You already know anaerobic exercise gets blood pumping through your body and your heart pounding. A study from the University of Glasgow, quoted by Cycling Weekly, found that cycling to work cut a rider's risk of heart disease in half. Researchers also found lower risks of cancer among people who cycle regularly.

## JOINTS

Cycling is one of the few cardiovascular activities that get your body moving without putting significant impact on joints. A runner's body weight is all on her joints, putting stress on knees, ankles and hip joints. Cycling takes the weight off those joints, reducing the likelihood of over-use injuries, such as muscle damage or inflammation, while still providing the positive benefits of lubricated joints.

## MUSCLES

It only takes a couple of good hills to feel the burn while cycling — the same burn that turns your legs to jelly when you get off a bike after not riding for a while. Cycling is great for burning fat while at the same time building muscle in your lower body, especially with the glutes, hamstrings, quads and calves. Besides having more toned, leaner and stronger muscles, people with more muscle burn more fat all the time — even while sedentary — than those with less muscle mass.

## BRAIN

Exercise has been proven to have a

positive effect on mental well-being as the body releases feel-good endorphins. Add to that the chance to explore new areas and see beautiful vistas during a quad-pounding bike ride, and cycling is an easy way to improve your mental health, according to Cycling Weekly. A good bike

ride also increases blood flow to the brain, which can help reduce cognitive changes related to dementia.

## LUNGS

Cycling, just like any cardio, will improve lung capacity, but the benefits go deeper than that. A study by

the Healthy Air Campaign, which Cycling Weekly quoted, showed people who ride a bike actually breathe in fewer dangerous fumes than commuters who drive to work. The study found the driver experienced five times higher levels of pollution than the cyclist.



# Finding the Right Bike

Finding the right bike is simple for children: Find the right height in their favorite color and they are good to go. Adults have more to take into account as they make their two-wheeler decisions, and it's an important decision. The wrong bike could make your next cycling trip harder, less comfortable and potentially dangerous.

REI's expert advisers suggested a number of factors to consider when purchasing a bike: fitness level, where you'll be riding, including the terrain, and how much money you want to spend.

## MOUNTAIN BIKES

Mountain bikes have flat handlebars and gears, large tires, better braking systems and a shock-absorbing suspension that will allow you to take on rocks, ruts and other hazards of uneven terrain. They have fewer gears than road bikes. Not all mountain bikes are built for the same terrain, however; for particularly rough terrain, look into fat bikes, with tires that are 4 and 5 inches wide, while trail bikes, which are the most popular type of mountain bike, allow for a mix of fun, efficiency and sensible overall weight.

## ROAD BIKES

If you live in an urban area and will be biking on even surfaces, a road bike could be a good purchase. They're lightweight (great if you're lifting your bike on and off buses or trains) and are good for commuting, fitness cycling, touring and racing. The handlebars curve downward, helping make the rider more aerodynamic — and faster. Riding at this angle can



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aggravate the cyclist's lower back.

## HYBRID BIKES

This is the bike for people who want to use the same bike to commute, ride through the local park and do a little mild off-roading.

Hybrids tend to have the smaller tires of road bikes with the maneuverability of mountain bikes but are frequently built to be a little more comfortable than either, with a wider saddle or a shock-absorbent fork. Features could include disc

brakes, racks, fenders or lighting.

## SPECIALTY BIKES

Looking to ride leisurely through town? A cruiser, with wide tires and seat and a relaxed sitting position, is the bike for you. Cargo bikes,

while heavy, are built for carrying gear, while folding bikes, as their name implies, can be folded into a carrying bag and packed into work or on a trip. There are even electric bikes with a motor to help you climb hills more easily.

# Easy Bike Maintenance

Performing routine maintenance on your bike can keep big costs down, make your bike last longer and provide a safer, more enjoyable ride.

Even if you're not an expert, there are steps you can take to keep your bike in the best condition possible.

REI's expert advisers run through a list of tasks to do regularly, while also recommending regular maintenance by a bike mechanic twice a year for regular riders.

## INSPECT YOUR BIKE

You should be doing this before every ride so you don't discover a problem 10 miles from home. According to REI, run through the ABCs:

**A: air pressure.** Check your tires and make sure your quick-release levers and thru axles are tight.

**B: brakes.** Squeeze your front and rear brake levers to make sure they're working properly.

**C: chain.** Examine your chain and all the gears. These parts should be lubricated and clean, which will help your bike shift more easily and help the drivetrain last longer.

## CLEAN YOUR BIKE

This is especially necessary for people who cycle in the mountains or in rough or wet



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terrain. Wipe the parts down, paying special attention to the chains and other parts that are particularly susceptible to rust and corrosion, and lubricate frequently. Wipe off excess lubricant before riding.

## TAKE THE CHAIN OFF

You should clean the chain frequently, and most of the

time you can leave the chain on the bike for this task. Simply brush out the links with an old toothbrush, relubricate the chain and then wipe off excess lubricant. Every few months, however, take the chain off the bike for a deeper clean. After brushing it, immerse the chain in a solvent solution to get rid of the

stubborn grime, letting it soak until most of the dirt is gone. Dry the chain, then relubricate and put it back on.

## SECURE THE BOLTS

Bolts that aren't properly fastened can result in a piece falling off your bike and you having to walk it home. Even if all the pieces stay together,

this can cause your bike to wear out more quickly or not function as it should. When you do your regular maintenance, check on the bolts to be sure they are fastened tightly enough. Look at the owner's manual or check online for the correct torque specs, as over-tightening also can cause your bike to break down.

# Choosing the Right Helmet

If you're riding a bike, you need to wear a helmet. The average bike rider is likely to crash once every 4,500 miles, and head injuries cause most of the hundreds of cyclist deaths each year. Wearing a helmet significantly reduces the likelihood of suffering severe head injury, but having the right helmet is important to protecting your head.

Eastern Mountain Sports provided tips to find the right helmet for you and members of your family.

## MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT SIZE

Wrap a flexible measuring tape about 1 inch above your eyebrows to get your head circumference. More expensive helmet brands offer multiple sizes; less expensive brands are more likely to have a sizing ring that can be adjusted to fit the head. Children's helmets usually fit a head circumference of 18 to 22.5 inches.

## CHECK HOW A HELMET FITS ON YOUR HEAD

A bike helmet should fit snugly on your head, usually sitting about an inch above the eyebrows and not wrapped too tightly around your head. If the helmet shifts easily, it is too loose. It should be positioned so it is parallel to the ground, not tipped forward or backward. The strap around your chin will form a "V" shape around each ear; there should not be any chafing. Correctly adjusted straps should allow for two finger-widths between your chin and the strap.

## CONSIDER WHERE YOU DO MOST OF YOUR CYCLING

There are different helmets

for road biking vs. mountain biking. Road bike helmets are lighter and aerodynamic with a glossy texture; this allows the helmet to slide over pavement in the event of a crash, instead of catching on it. Mountain bike helmets are bulkier and are designed to provide extra protection to the

back of your head, in case you fall backward. They also often include visors.

## CONSIDER COLOR AND OTHER FEATURES

Picking your bike helmet's color is less a fashion concern and more for visibility. Road cyclists especially should look

for white or brightly colored helmets, making it easier for drivers to see. Some helmets have ponytail ports in the back or an internal sweatband to control perspiration.

## OTHER THINGS TO KNOW

All helmets sold in the

United States meet the Consumer Product Safety Commission standards. You should replace your helmet every five years, because UV rays can cause degradation. Always replace your helmet after a significant impact, even if it doesn't appear damaged.



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# Buying a Used Bike

If you're just getting into biking, or just getting back into biking, you want to have a good, reliable bike but may not want to spend a lot of money right away. Buying a used bike is a less expensive way to get a higher quality bike than you would get when buying new, but, as with buying anything used, do your homework and know what you're looking for.

Active Cyclist shared things to look for when looking at used bikes.

## THE FRAME

Examine any nicks closely; if you see spider cracks coming out from the impact mark, or any cracks on the frame, look more closely. A crack in the frame could be a stress fracture, which can morph into a broken frame if you're cycling quickly or on rough terrain.

## THE HANDLEBARS

If the tape on the handlebars is new, ask the seller why it's been replaced. A crash can cause cracks on the handlebars that can be covered up by tape, which puts you at risk when riding. Also make sure the handlebars are even.

## BRAKES AND TIRES

A bike should slow down quickly when you hit the brakes. If it doesn't, you may need new brake cables, brake pads or both. Tires that are cracked or significantly worn will need to be replaced.

## DRIVETRAIN

This system includes the front big and small chainrings, pedals, cranks, front and rear derailleurs, chain and bottom bracket. Look at the chainrings. If the teeth look like shark fins, they need to be



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replaced. Shift through every gear when the front derailleur is both in the big chainring and the small chainring. This system is what transfers your pedaling into making the bike

move and, like a car, will be expensive to repair and replace parts, so make sure everything works.

As you're looking, take the bike for a test ride to make

sure it feels good to you, and get it inspected at a bike shop before purchasing. If you have a friend who knows bikes, take them with you to check out a potential purchase. It's also

important to factor in the cost of an inspection and repairs when considering the value of a used bike. You don't want to spend all the money you saved making the bike usable.