



# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	04	<b>EUROPE</b>	164
<b>AFRICA</b>	06	 Bavarian Beer Ride (Germany)	166
 Tour d'Afrique	08	 Down The Danube (Austria)	172
 Riding the Rif (Morocco)	14	 Monte Amiata (Italy)	178
<b>AMERICAS</b>	20	 The Bryan Chapman Memorial (Wales)	184
 Cuba's Southern Rollercoaster	22	 Pedalling the Spanish Picos	190
 To the Tip of Patagonia (Argentina)	28	 Climbing Mt Ventoux (France)	196
 The Natchez Trace Parkway (USA)	36	 Beating the Birkebeinerrittet (Norway)	202
 A Circuit of San Juan Island (USA)	42	 West Cork's Wild Coast, (Ireland)	208
 Family Bikepacking in Ecuador	48	 A Corsican Challenge (France)	214
 Colorado Beer Bike Tour (USA)	56	 Circling Lake Constance (Switzerland/Germany/Austria)	220
 North America's Pacific Coast (USA)	62	 Sierra Nevada Traverse (Spain)	226
 Mountain Biking in Moab (USA)	68	 The South Downs Way (England)	232
 Ride the Whitehorse Trails (Canada)	74	 Arty Copenhagen Cruise (Denmark)	238
 The Minuteman Bikeway (USA)	82	 Around the Île de Ré (France)	244
 Buenos Aires' Bike Paths (Argentina)	88	 The Tour of Flanders (Belgium)	250
 The Covered Bridges of Vermont (USA)	94	 From Sea to Sea (England)	256
 Vancouver and Whistler (Canada)	100	 The Cévennes: Riding the Rider (France)	262
 Manhattan Circumnavigation (USA)	106	 Into the Outer Hebrides (Scotland)	268
<b>ASIA</b>	112	 All Along the Loire (France)	274
 Mai Chau Cycle Ride (Vietnam)	114	<b>OCEANIA</b>	280
 Bikepacking in Mongolia	120	 Beaches and Bicycles in Adelaide (Australia)	282
 Cycling the Seto Inland Sea (Japan)	128	 The Old Ghost Road (New Zealand)	288
 High in the Himalaya (India)	134	 Australia's Atherton Tablelands	294
 Bhutanese Dragon Ride	140	 The Acheron Way (Australia)	300
 Mae Hong Son Circuit (Thailand)	146	 The Munda Biddi Trail (Australia)	306
 Sri Lankan Sightseeing	152	 Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail (New Zealand)	312
 China's Wild West	158	 Tasmania's Wild West (Australia)	318
		<b>INDEX</b>	324

# INTRODUCTION

Ask a dozen cycling writers for their most memorable bike rides and you get many more than a dozen answers. For some, biking was purely about escapism and involved nothing more complicated than packing some sandwiches and meandering into the distance with the wind at their backs. One or two went a little further and, GPS unit in hand, ventured into the wilds of Patagonia and the Himalaya, powered by nothing more than their legs and a desire to see what was around the next corner.

Those writers with families recommended flat and accessible loops around traffic-free islands or along river paths. A few contributors preferred to case themselves in skin-tight Lycra and seek out heart-pounding ascents, making ardent pilgrimages to the sites of classic races to pay their respects. Mountain-biking writers wrote of thrills and spills on rugged trails on every continent. And more than a few authors agreed that a good ride wasn't complete without a beer or two afterwards with old friends or new.

What was clear, though, is that everybody has their personal interpretation of 'epic'. You can have an epic adventure straight from your front door and be back in time for tea. Or you can follow in the tyre tracks of adventurer Alastair Humphreys and pedal around the world, through 60 countries, for four years.

This book attempts to reflect that diversity and those varying levels of commitment. We can't all take a sabbatical for cycling! We've sought out some of the most entertaining experiences you can have on a bicycle, whether you're a casual rider or a cyclist with a stable of carbon-fibre machines. The settings of these experiences range from some of the world's most remote places – Mongolia, Bhutan and the Outer Hebrides – to its hippest cities and dreamiest islands. Some of these rides take just a couple of

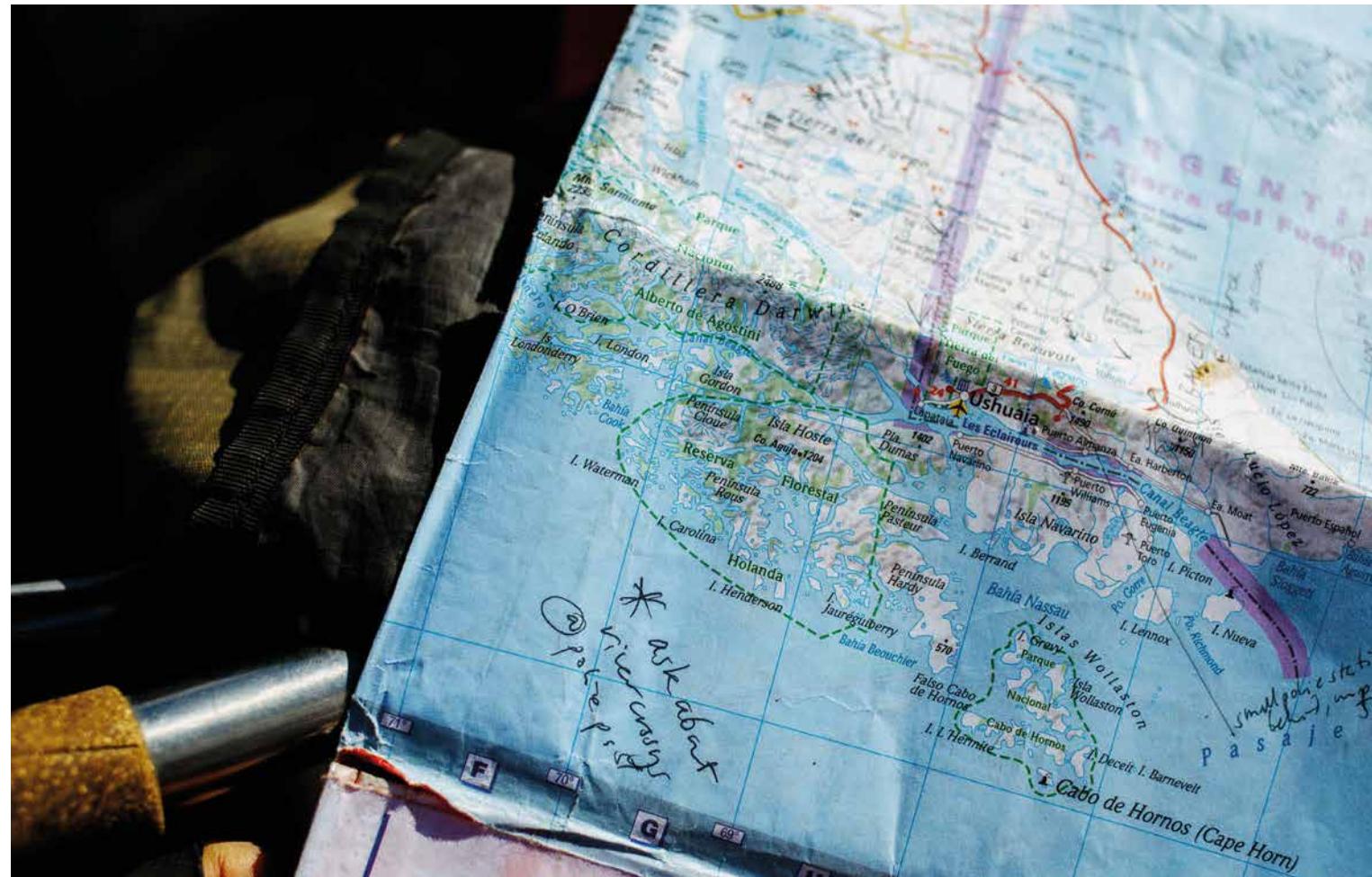
hours, others a day or two, a week, or more than a month. We've usually not tried to specify times the rides might take beyond the distance involved – everybody is different; take as long as required.

Instead, we've given a general indication of whether a ride is easy (in terms of terrain, distance, conditions or climate) or more challenging (bigger hills, longer distances, fewer cake shops). The most important point of these stories is to inspire you to get your bike out (dusting it off and pumping up the tyres first if need be) and explore somewhere new with the wind in your hair.

Cycling is the perfect mode of transport for the travel-lover, allowing us to cover more ground than if we were on foot, but without the barriers that a car imposes. We are immersed in our surroundings, self-powered, independent, and forever pondering the question 'I wonder what's over there?'. The bike rider is free to follow a whim, discover the limits of their endurance, or stop and settle for while. Hopefully, this book will prove that there's no better way of simply experiencing a place, a culture and its people than by bicycle. And as some of these tales tell, arriving on a bicycle opens doors, literally and figuratively.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The main stories in each regional chapter feature first-hand accounts of fantastic bike rides in that continent. Each includes a toolkit to enable the planning of a trip – when is the best time of year, how to get there, where to stay. But beyond that, these stories should spark other ideas. We've started that process with the 'more like this' section following each story, which offers other ideas along a similar theme, not necessarily on the same continent. Many of these ideas are well established routes or trails. The index collects different types of ride for a variety of interests.



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# ARTY COPENHAGEN CRUISE

*Be a Dane for a day on this leisurely coastal cruise from the world's most bike-friendly city to Denmark's must-see Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.*

Riding over Knippelsbro bridge, with views of copper-roofed Christiansborg Palace, the Danish parliament, from the island of Christianshavn in central Copenhagen, it seemed as if I had slipped into a parallel universe; a City of the Cyclists, in which bicycles ruled the roads and unhurried riders glided like shoals of fish through the city. And this little fish, relishing the freedom, couldn't wipe the grin from his face.

Laid out over a series of islands, Denmark's capital is the most bike-friendly place I have pedalled. Some streets see 30,000 cyclists per day; and dedicated traffic signals and junctions, cycle lanes separated by kerbs from cars, and supersized bikeways all help to keep them moving safely. Indeed, in 2015 the city opened an aerial bikeway, the *cykelslangen*, swooping above the harbour and a shopping mall.

Here, a bicycle is the best way to encounter the fun-loving side of Copenhagen, from the cafe-backed beach park at Amager to the parks and gardens of Frederiksberg. Architecture fans can pedal down Ørestads Blvd for Jean Nouvel's blue-clad concert hall, food-lovers can tootle along the canals of Christianshavn, home to the famed restaurant Noma (and its newest little sister, 108). Danes cycle to work, they cycle to school and they cycle to bars, restaurants and parties.

But, irresistible though the city is on two wheels, I have an out-of-town trip in mind: a 25-mile (40km) or two-hour jaunt north along the Danish Riviera to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, near Helsingør (Elsinore), where castle Kronborg was the setting for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Before I plan my route, though, I have a coffee with photographer-turned-bicycle-ambassador Mikael Colville-



© Sarah Coghill





Andersen, who agrees cycling is a quick entry point into a country's culture. 'If you're standing shoulder to shoulder with 100 cyclists at a red light, smelling the perfume of the person next to you, that contributes to a sense of community.'

Danes pedal with panache: women wear heels and skirts, men sport suits. 'Anything you can walk in, you can cycle in,' says Mikael. Few wear helmets, feeling as safe on their bikes as they do on foot or in a car, and none break the rules – I spy not a single red-light jumper. Danes ride all year round ('Viking biking' Mikael calls it), easily navigating the city, in wind, rain or sun, on robust town bikes.

'Bicycles are like vacuum cleaners in Denmark', Mikael tells me, 'we all have one and we all use them every day but we don't think about them all day, we don't have ten of them, and we don't polish them; it's a tool.'

The next day I borrow one of these tools from a friend in Frederiksberg and set off on my Danish Riviera trip, starting with a big breakfast. Lying at the end of a cobbled lane next to a canal and embodying the Danish concept of *hygge* (warmth and wellbeing), Parterre satiates with avocado on rye toast, skyr with muesli, and fresh-baked pastries.

At the far end of Christianshavn and its colourful canal-side buildings is Copenhagen's landmark opera house. Once you've taken a spin around the island and some photos, head back



*"It was no longer unusual to see somebody pedalling a cargo bike with their dog in the front"*

onto Torvegade, Christianshavn's main road, and over the Knippelsbro bridge.

From here, I jump onto Bredgade and turned north through the city, cruising past the star-shaped Kastellet fort.

The roads are busy but cyclists have a segregated path to themselves. I remember Mikael's most important point of etiquette and keep to the right side of the lane so faster cyclists, or at least those who know where they are going, pass me to the left. Young or old, male or female, it seemed that everybody was on a bicycle and moving along with an elegant efficiency. It was no longer unusual to see somebody pedalling a cargo bike with their dog in the front, or breeze around a corner, head up, skirt billowing.

Eventually the city's industrial zone peters out, to be replaced by a marina. This is where navigation becomes a cinch: just keep the sea to your right. Soon, the bike path runs alongside the waterfront: on the other side of the stretch of sea lies Sweden.

This is the start of the Danish Riviera. When the sun is out, the

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clear blue water is speckled with white sails and slowly turning wind turbines. But in overcast weather, the view can be as gloomy as a Scandinavian detective drama. I pedal on, my heavy town bike dictating the sedate pace, though unimpeded by any hills. I roll through Klampenborg, a low-rise village with yachts moored just beyond the sea wall, then through Taarbæk and Skodsborg, the sea always just a few metres off my right shoulder. Bike Route 9 seeks out more traffic-free paths and lanes.

The signposts suggest that I'm nearing my destination, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, a long and low white building best known for its collection of works by Alberto Giacometti. Louisiana was founded by Knud Jensen in 1958 – his original intention was to display Danish art, but he soon changed direction and decided to promote international art in Denmark.

I park my bike outside – I'm not the only person to have cycled here – and go exploring. Louisiana's best feature is a seafront sculpture garden, featuring works by Henry Moore and Joan Miró. It's a sunny day and families picnic on the lawns, dabbling in the sea and running around the sculptures.

As the afternoon passes, I begin to think about getting back to Copenhagen. I cycle to the local railway station and jump on a S-Train from Humlebæk to Nørreport station in central Copenhagen with my bicycle – simple, sensible, practical.

So very Danish. **RB**



### CHRISTIANIA

Christianshavn is also home to Christiania, the alternative enclave and self-proclaimed 'free state', known over the years as a marketplace for cannabis (and police raids). Epic Rides readers will, naturally, be more interested to learn the place has lent its name to a range of practical cargo bikes, in which Danes ferry their groceries and families. Christiania is also the only place where unusual upright Pedersen bicycles are made (and can be bought at [www.pedersen-bike.dk](http://www.pedersen-bike.dk)).

*Left to right: cycling Danish-style; Copenhagen's Opera House; beaches and maritime weathervanes on the way to Louisiana. Previous page: Nyhavn waterfront in Copenhagen*



### TOOLKIT

**Start** // Copenhagen

**End** // Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk

**Distance** // About 25 miles (40km) one-way

**Getting there** // Fly to Copenhagen international airport; there are easy-to-navigate rail services into the city centre.

**Where to stay** // City-centre hotels, hostels and B&Bs.

**Bike share** // From 125 bike-sharing stations and also rail stations, such as Osterport ([www.rentabike.dk](http://www.rentabike.dk)). Bycyklen bikes ([www.bycyklen.dk/en](http://www.bycyklen.dk/en); from 25kr per hour) with GPS screens are available. For cargo bikes (and normal bikes) try [www.christianiacykler.dk](http://www.christianiacykler.dk) in Christiania.

**What to take** // Wet weather gear.

**More info** // Maps of cycle routes from tourist information offices: [www.visitcopenhagen.com](http://www.visitcopenhagen.com). Louisiana ([www.louisiana.dk](http://www.louisiana.dk)) is open from 11am-10pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Sat and Sun.

Opposite: riding the Yarra Trail into Melbourne, Australia

## MORE LIKE THIS BIKE-SHARE RIDES

### PARIS, FRANCE

In France, the bicycle is known as *la petite reine* (the little queen). It might not rule the French capital but it's a great way of getting around. Paris' Vélib (*velo liberte*, bicycle freedom) bike-share scheme was one of the first and there are now more than 1800 street side stations for 20,000 bikes and more than 273 miles (440km) of bike lanes. Additionally, roads along the Seine and elsewhere are closed to traffic during Sunday; yes, that includes the Louvre and Jardin des Tuileries. And the Eiffel Tower. One great route is to follow the 3-mile (4.5km) Canal St-Martin from République to Quai de Valmy pausing at cafes for *ravitaillement* (refreshment) as required. You can continue to follow canals, such as Canal de l'Ourcq for as far as you want.

**Start // République**

**End // Quai de Valmy**

**Distance // 3 miles (4.5km)**

### MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

As a bike-friendly city, Melbourne stands head and (compulsory) helmet above its Australian counterparts. This is not just due to the influence of Jan Gehl, the Danish urban designer and consultant to cities around the world on how they can be more like Copenhagen, who spent several years in the 1990s advising Melbourne. The city's topography plays its part too: the Yarra River runs from the northeast down to the bay; and running beside it is the mixed-use Yarra Trail. It's a tranquil, green corridor; as it passes through Yarra Bend Park try to spot the flying fox bats roosting in the trees beside the river during the day. When the trail reaches the city, it's possible to connect with the Bay Trail that follows Melbourne's bay south to Seaford, via St Kilda.

**Start // Eltham railway station**

**End // Melbourne CBD**

**Distance // Yarra Trail is about 20 miles (32km) in total.**

### PORTLAND, USA

If any American city can be said to emulate Copenhagen, it's Portland, Oregon: the city in the Pacific Northwest is no stranger to cargo bikes or rain. It's an eclectic, sustainable, independent sort of place, famed for its coffee and craft beer – what more could a cyclist want? In 2015, Portland announced a bike-share scheme, called Biketown, consisting of 600 bicycles and stations across the city. There are already more than 350 miles (563km) of bike lanes in the city, including the 11-mile (18km) Waterfront Loop along the Willamette River. To get out of town, the 125-mile (201km) Willamette Valley Scenic Bikeway starts south of the city and flows into Oregon's world-class wine-making country.

**Start/End // Start the Waterfront Loop from the Salmon Springs Fountain and head north.**

**Distance // 11 miles (18km)**

**More info // There's a downloadable map at [www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/348454](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/348454)**



# INDEX

## A

adventurous rides, *see also* mountain biking, mountainous rides, multiday tours, organised rides  
 Atlas Mountains, Morocco 230  
 Canning Stock Route, Australia 34  
 Carretera Austral, Chile 126, 138  
 Friendship Hwy, Tibet-Nepal 34, 144  
 High Atlas, Morocco 138  
 Himalaya, India 134-7, **134**  
 Himalay, Bhutan 140-3, **140**  
 Karakoram Hwy, Pakistan-China 162  
 Kilimanjaro Circuit, Tanzania 12  
 Mongolia 120-5, **121**  
 Munda Bididi Trail 306-9, **306**  
 Namibia 18  
 New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea 272  
 Pamir Hwy, Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan 162  
 Patagonia, Argentina 28-33, **28**  
 Rif Mountains, Morocco 14-17, **14**  
 Ring Rd, Iceland 126  
 Tour d’Afrique 8-11, 8  
 Albania 310  
 Alice Springs, Australia 80  
 Alpe d’Huez, France 200  
 Alps 2 Ocean, New Zealand 312-15, **312**  
 Alto de l’Angliru, Spain 200  
 Amsterdam, Netherlands 92  
 Annapurna Circuit, Nepal 144  
 Argentina 28-33, 88-91  
 Atlas Mountains, Morocco 230  
 Australia  
   Acheron Way 300-3, **301**  
   Adelaide 194  
   Alice Springs 80  
   Around the Bay in a Day 304  
   Atherton Tablelands 294-7, **294**  
   Beechworth-Bright 170  
   Canning Stock Route, Australia 34  
   Great Victorian Bike Ride 304  
   Melbourne 194, 242  
   Mt Buller 104  
   Munda Bididi Trail 306-9, **306**  
   Newcrest Orange Challenge 286  
   Otway Odyssey 206

Seven Peaks Ride 304  
 South Australia 282-5, **282**  
 Tasmania 318-321, **318**  
 Tour Down Under 282-5, **282**  
 Austria 172-5, 220-3, 322

## B

Barcelona, Spain 92  
 Bavaria, Germany 166-9, **166**  
 beer tours, *see also* whiskey tours, wine tours  
   Bavaria, Germany 166-9, 166  
   Beechworth-Bright, Australia 170  
   Bruges, Belgium 170  
   Colorado, USA 56  
   Massachusetts-Vermont, USA 60  
   Portland, USA 170  
 Belgium 170, 250-3, 254  
 Bhutan 140-143  
 Bolivia 34  
 Bosnia 218, 310  
 Bryan Chapman Memorial, Wales 184-7, **185**  
 Buenos Aires, Argentina 88-91, **88**

## C

Camel Trail, England 176  
 Canada  
   BC Bike Race 322  
   Boston-Montreal-Boston 188  
   Cape Breton Island 248  
   Carcross 77  
   Montreal 92  
   Whistler 100-3, **100**  
   Whitehorse Trails 74-9, **75**  
 Canary Islands, Spain 132  
 Canning Stock Route, Australia 34  
 Carretera Austral, Chile 126, 138  
 Cévennes, France 262-5, 266, **263**  
 Channel Islands 248  
 Chile 54, 126, 138  
 China 118, 162, 158-61, **158**  
 city rides, *see also* day rides, easy rides, family rides  
   Amsterdam, Netherlands 92  
   Barcelona, Spain 92  
   Brooklyn-Queens Greenway, USA 110  
   Buenos Aires, Argentina 88-91, **88**  
   Copenhagen, Denmark 238-241, **238**  
   Kyoto, Japan 98

Melbourne, Australia 242  
 Mexico City, Mexico 110  
 Montreal, Canada 92  
 Paris, France 242  
 Portland, USA 242  
 Tokyo, Japan 110  
 Colle delle Finestre, Italy 200  
 Copenhagen, Denmark 238-241, **238**  
 Corsica, France 214-17, **215**  
 Côte d’Azur, France 266  
 County Cork, Ireland 208-211, **208**  
 Croatia 218, 272, 310  
 Cuba 22-5, 26, **22**

## D

Danube River, Austria 172-5, **173**  
 day rides, *see also* city rides, easy rides, family rides, mountainous rides, races  
   Acheron Way, Australia 300-3, **301**  
   Bruges, Belgium 170  
   Conguillío National Park, Chile 54  
   Connacht Classic, Ireland 212  
   Crater Lake Rim Ride, USA 66  
   Dingle Peninsula, Ireland 46  
   Forgotten World Hwy, New Zealand 286  
   Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, USA 54  
   Guadalavaca to Banes, Cuba 26  
   Lake Como, Italy 224  
   Lake Geneva, Switzerland 224  
   Nantucket Island USA 46  
   Rennsteig Cycle Path, Germany 236  
   Ridgeway, England 236  
   Ring of Kerry, Ireland 212  
   Route of the Hiawatha, USA 86  
   Sani Pass, South Africa-Lesotho 12  
   South Australia 282-5, **282**  
   Transylvania, Romania 98  
   Tuscany, Italy 182  
   Valle de Viñales, Cuba 26  
   Vieques Island, Puerto Rico 46  
   White Rim Trail, USA 54  
 Devon Sea to Sea, England 260  
 Doi Suthep, Thailand 150  
 Downieville, USA 292

## E

easy rides, *see also* city rides, day rides, family rides

Camel Trail, England 176  
 Ciclabile delle Dolomiti, Italy 86  
 Dingle Peninsula, Ireland 46  
 Guadalavaca to Banes, Cuba 26  
 Île de Ré, France 244-7, **244**  
 Loire, France 274, 274-7, **274**  
 Mai Chau, Vietnam 114-17, **115**  
 Manifold Track, England 176  
 Minuteman Bikeway, USA 82-5, **82**  
 Nantucket Island USA 46  
 Po River 278  
 San Juan Island, USA 42-5, **43**  
 Sonoma County, USA 98  
 Valle de Viñales, Cuba 26  
 Vieques Island, Puerto Rico 46  
 Ecuador 48-53  
 England  
   Camel Trail, England 176  
   Cornwall 176  
   Devon Sea to Sea 260  
   Icknield Way Trail 236  
   London-Edinburgh-London 188  
   London-Munich 194  
   London-Quantock Hills 266  
   Manifold Track 176  
   Ridgeway, the 236  
   Sea to Sea Cycle Route 256-9, **256**  
   South Downs Way 232-5, **232**  
   Tissington Track 176

Eritrea 12

## F

family rides  
   Camel Trail, England 176  
   Cape Breton Island, Canada 248  
   Conguillío National Park, Chile 54  
   Danube River, Austria 172-5  
   Lake Annecy, France 224  
   Lake Constance 220-3  
   Lake Geneva, Switzerland 224  
   Lofoten Islands, Norway 248  
   Quilotoa Loop, Ecuador 48-53, **48**  
   Route of the Hiawatha, USA 86  
   Sark, Channel Islands, UK 248  
   Tissington Trail, England 176  
   Vermont, USA 94-7, **94**  
   White Rim Trail, USA 54  
 Fiora Valley, Italy 182  
 Forgotten World Hwy, New Zealand 286  
 Fort William, Scotland 80

France 138  
   Alp D’Huez 200  
   Atlantic coast 66  
   Cévennes 262-5, 266, **263**  
   Corsica 214-17, **215**  
   Côte d’Azur 266  
   Île de Ré 244-7, **244**  
   Lake Annecy 224  
   Loire 274-7, **274**  
   Mont Ventoux 196-9, **196**  
   Paris 242  
   Paris-Brest-Paris 188  
   Paris-Roubaix 254  
   Portes du Soleil 298  
   Provence 230  
   Rhine Cycle Route 278  
   Samoens 104  
 Friendship Hwy, Tibet-Nepal 34, 144

## G

Germany 66, 166-9, 220-3, 236, 278, **166, 220**  
 Great Allegheny Passage, USA 40, 310  
 Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, USA 54  
 Great Lake Trail, New Zealand 316  
 Guatemala 194

## H

Heaphy Track, New Zealand 292  
 High Atlas, Morocco 138  
 Himalaya, 134-7, 140-3, 144, 162, **134, 140**

## I

Iceland 126  
 Icknield Way Trail, England 236  
 Île de Ré, France 244-7, **244**  
 India 134-7, 162  
 Indonesia 150, 156  
 Ireland 46, 208-211, 212  
 Italy 132, 218  
   24h of Finale Ligure 72  
   Ciclabile delle Dolomiti 86  
   Fiora Valley 182  
   Lake Como 224  
   Lake Garda 292  
   Monte Amiata 178-181, **179**  
   Po River 278

Sardinia 218  
 Strade Bianche 182  
 Transalp 322  
 VenTo 278

## J

Japan 98, 110, 128-131

## K

Karakoram Hwy, Pakistan-China 162  
 Kilimanjaro Circuit, Tanzania 12  
 Kokopelli Trail, USA 298  
 Kosovo 310  
 Kyoto, Japan 98  
 Kyrgyzstan 162

## L

La Farola, Cuba 26  
 La Vélocysée, France 66  
 Lake Annecy, France 224  
 Lake Como, Italy 224  
 Lake Constance 220-3, **220**  
 Lake Garda, Italy 292  
 Lake Geneva, Switzerland 224  
 Lesotho 12  
 Lofoten Islands, Norway 248  
 Loire, France 274-7, **274**  
 London 188, 194, 266  
 Lôn Las Cymru, Wales 260  
 Lycian Coast, Turkey 18

## M

Mae Hong Son, Thailand 146-9, **147**  
 Mai Chau, Vietnam 114-17, **115**  
 Mammoth Bike Park, USA 104  
 Manali-Leh Hwy, India 162  
 Manifold Track, England 176  
 Mekong Delta, Vietnam 118  
 Melbourne, Australia 194, 242  
 Mexico City, Mexico 110  
 Minuteman Bikeway, USA 82-5, **82**  
 Mississippi River Trail, USA 278  
 Moab, USA 68-71, **69**  
 Mongolia 120-5, **121**  
 Mont Ventoux, France 196-9, **196**  
 Monte Amiata, Italy 178-181, **179**  
 Monte Bondone, Italy 182

Montenegro 310  
 Montreal, Canada 92  
 Morocco 14-17, 138, 230  
 mountain biking, *see also* adventurous rides, mountainous rides, multiday tours, races  
 Alice Springs, Australia 80  
 Alps 2 Ocean, New Zealand 312-15, **312**  
 Annapurna Circuit, Nepal 144  
 Atherton Tablelands, Australia 294-7, **294**  
 Carcross, Canada 77  
 Cévennes, France 266  
 Coast to Coast, Scotland 126  
 Colorado Trail, USA 59  
 Downieville, USA 292  
 Fort William, Scotland 80  
 Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, USA 54  
 Great Lake Trail, New Zealand 316  
 Heaphy Track, New Zealand 292  
 Kokopelli Trail, USA 298  
 Lake Garda, Italy 292  
 Mammoth Bike Park, USA 104  
 Maui, USA 132  
 Moab, USA 68-71, **69**  
 Mongolia 120-125, **121**  
 Mountains to Sea, New Zealand 316  
 Mt Buller, Australia 104  
 Munda Biddi Trail, Australia 306-9, **306**  
 Old Ghost Road, New Zealand 288-291, **288**  
 Portes du Soleil, France-Switzerland 298  
 Queenstown, New Zealand 316  
 Samoens, France 104  
 Seven Stanes, Scotland 298  
 South Downs Way, England 232-5, **232**  
 Tasmania, Australia 318-321, **318**  
 Transalp, Austria-Switzerland-Italy 322  
 Whakarewarewa trail, New Zealand 80  
 Whistler, Canada 100-3, **100**  
 Whitehorse Trails, Canada 74-9, **75**  
 mountainous rides  
 Alpe d'Huez, France 200  
 Alto de l'Angliru, Spain 200  
 Auckland to Piha, New Zealand 286  
 Canary Islands, Spain 132  
 Cévennes, France 262-5, **263**

Colle delle Finestre, Italy 200  
 Corsica, France 214-17, **215**  
 Corsica, France(m) 215  
 Côte d'Azur, France 266  
 Doi Suthep, Thailand 150  
 Fiora Valley, Italy 182  
 La Farola, Cuba 26  
 Mae Hong Son, Thailand 146-9, **147**  
 Mont Ventoux, France 196-9, **196**  
 Monte Amiata, Italy 178-181, **179**  
 Monte Bondone, Italy 182  
 Mt Batur, Bali, Indonesia 150  
 Newcrest Orange Challenge, Australia 286  
 Seven Peaks Ride, Australia 304  
 Sicily, Italy 132  
 Sierra Nevada, Spain 226-9, **226**  
 Sierra Nevada, USA 230  
 Taroko Gorge Rd, Taiwan 150  
 Mountains to Sea, New Zealand 316  
 Mt Buller, Indonesia 150  
 Mt Buller, Australia 104  
 multiday tours, *see also* adventurous rides, family rides, mountain biking, mountainous rides  
 Adriatic islands, Croatia 272  
 Antigua-Todos Santos, Guatemala 194  
 Baltic Coast, Germany 66  
 Bavaria, Germany 166-9, **166**  
 Blue Ridge Parkway, USA 40  
 Boston-Montreal-Boston, USA-Canada 188  
 Bryan Chapman Memorial, Wales 184-7, **185**  
 China 118, 158-161, **158**  
 Colorado, USA 56-9, **57**  
 Corsica, France 214-17, **215**  
 County Cork, Ireland 208-211, **208**  
 Cuba 22-5, **22**  
 Devon Sea to Sea, England 260  
 Dublin & the Barrow, Ireland 212  
 Great Allegheny Passage, USA 40, 310  
 La Vélodyssée, France 66  
 Loire, France 274-7, **274**  
 Lôn Las Cymru, Wales 260  
 Lycian Coast, Turkey 18  
 Mae Hong Son, Thailand 146-9, **147**  
 Manali-Leh Hwy, India 162  
 Mekong Delta, Vietnam 118  
 Mississippi River Trail, USA 278

Natchez Trace Parkway, USA 36-9, **36**  
 NC500, Scotland 310  
 Pacific Coast, USA 62-5, **62**  
 Picos de Europa, Spain 190-3, **190**  
 Po River, Italy 278  
 Provence, France 230  
 Raid Pyrenean, France 138  
 Rhine Cycle Route 278  
 Ring of Kerry, Ireland 212  
 Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia 34  
 Sardinia, Italy 218  
 Scottish Sea to Sea 260  
 Sea to Sea, England 256-9, **256**  
 Shimanami, Japan 128-131, **128**  
 Sri Lanka 18, 152-5  
 VenTo, Italy 278  
 Via Dinarica, Southeast Europe 310  
 Vietnam 118, 156  
 Western Isles, UK 268-271, **268**  
 Munda Biddi Trail, Australia 306-9, **306**

## N

Namibia 18  
 Nantucket Island, USA 46  
 Napa Valley, USA 60  
 Natchez Trace Parkway, USA 36-9, **36**  
 NC500, Scotland 310  
 Nepal 34, 144  
 Netherlands 92, 278  
 New Zealand  
 Alps 2 Ocean 312-15, **312**  
 Auckland to Piha 286  
 Fogotten World Highway 286  
 Great Lake Trail 316  
 Heaphy Track 292  
 Mountains to Sea 316  
 Old Ghost Road 288-291, **288**  
 Queenstown 316  
 Whakarewarewa 80  
 Norway 202-5, 248

## O

Old Ghost Road, New Zealand 288-291, **288**  
 organised rides  
 Around the Bay in a Day, Australia 304  
 Great Victorian Bike Ride, Australia 304  
 Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa, USA 40

Tour of Flanders, Belgium 250-3, **250**  
 Seven Peaks Ride, Australia 304  
 Outer Hebrides 268-271

## P

Pacific Coast, USA 62-5, **62**  
 Pakistan 162  
 Pamir Hwy, Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan 162  
 Papua New Guinea 272  
 Paris, France 188, 242  
 Paris-Roubaix, France 254  
 Patagonia, Argentina 28-33, **28**  
 Pico Turquino, Cuba 25  
 Picos de Europa, Spain 190-3, **190**  
 Po River, Italy 278  
 Portes du Soleil, France-Switzerland 298  
 Portland, USA 170, 242  
 Provence, France 230  
 Puerto Rico 46

## Q

Queenstown, New Zealand 316  
 Quilotoa Loop, Ecuador 48-53, **48**

## R

races, *see also* organised rides  
 24-hour of Finale Ligure, Italy 72  
 24 Hours of Moab 68-71  
 BC Bike Race, Canada 322  
 Birkebeinerrittet, Norway 202-5, **202**  
 Cape Epic, South Africa 322  
 Dolomiti Superbike, Italy 206  
 Liège-Bastogne-Liège, Belgium 254  
 London-Edinburgh-London, England-Scotland 188  
 Mohican MTB 100, USA 206  
 Newcrest Orange Challenge, Australia 286  
 Otway Odyssey, Australia 206  
 Paris-Brest-Paris, France 188  
 Paris-Roubaix, France 254  
 Strathpuffer 24, Scotland 72  
 Test of Metal, Canada 102  
 Tour Down Under, Australia 282-5  
 Tour of Flanders, Belgium 250-3, **250**  
 Tour of the Battenkill, USA 254  
 Trans Baviaans, South Africa 72

Wildside, Australia 321  
 Raid Pyrenean, France 138  
 Rennsteig Cycle Path, Germany 236  
 Rhine Cycle Route 278  
 Ridgeway, England 236  
 Rif Mountains, Morocco 14-17, **14**  
 Ring of Kerry, Ireland 212  
 Ring Rd, Iceland 126  
 Romania 98

## S

Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia 34  
 San Juan Island, USA 42-45, **43**  
 Sani Pass, South Africa-Lesotho 12  
 Sardinia, Italy 218  
 Sark, Channel Islands, UK 248  
 Scotland 72, 80, 126, 188, 260, 298, 310  
 Sea to Sea, England 256-9, **256**  
 Serbia 310  
 Seven Stanes, Scotland 298  
 Shimanami, Japan 128-131, **128**  
 Sicily, Italy 132  
 Sierra Nevada, Spain 226-9, **226**  
 Sierra Nevada, USA 230  
 Slovenia 310  
 South Africa 12, 72, 322  
 South Downs Way, England 232-5, **232**  
 Spain 92, 132, 190-3, 200, 226-9, **190, 226**  
 Sri Lanka 18, 152-5, **152**  
 Switzerland 220-3, 224, 278, 298, 322

## T

Taiwan 150, 272  
 Tajikistan 162  
 Tanzania 12  
 Thailand 146-9, 150  
 Tibet 34  
 Tissington Trail, England 176  
 Tokyo, Japan 110  
 Tour d'Afrique 8-11, **8**  
 Transalp, Austria-Switzerland-Italy 322  
 Transylvania, Romania 98  
 Turkey 18

## U

USA  
 Blue Ridge Parkway 40  
 Boston-Montreal-Boston 188

Brooklyn-Queens Greenway 110  
 Colorado 56-9, **57**  
 Crater Lake Rim Ride 66  
 Downieville, California 292  
 Great Allegheny Passage 40, 310  
 Great Divide Mountain Bike Route 54  
 Kentucky 60  
 Kokopelli Trail, Fruita 298  
 Mammoth Bike Park 104  
 Massachusetts 60, 82-5  
 Maui 132  
 Minuteman Bikeway 82-5, **82**  
 Mississippi River Trail 278  
 Moab 68-71, **69**  
 Mohican MTB 100 206  
 Nantucket Island 46  
 Napa Valley 60  
 Natchez Trace Parkway 36-9, **36**  
 Pacific Coast 62-5, **62**  
 Portland 170, 242  
 Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa 40  
 Route of the Hiawatha 86  
 San Juan Island 42-5, **43**  
 Sierra Nevada 230  
 Sonoma County 98  
 Tour of the Battenkill 254  
 Vermont 60, 94-7, 94  
 White Rim Trail 54

## V

Valle de Viñales, Cuba 26  
 VenTo, Italy 278  
 Via Dinarica, Southeast Europe 310  
 Vieques Island, Puerto Rico 46  
 Vietnam 114-17, 118, 156

## W

Wales 184-7, 260  
 Western Isles, UK 268-271, **268**  
 Whakarewarewa, New Zealand 80  
 whiskey tours 60, *see also* beer tours, wine tours  
 Whistler, Canada 100-3, **100**  
 Whitehorse Trails, Canada 74-9, **75**  
 White Rim Trail, USA 54  
 wine tours 60, 86, *see also* beer tours, whiskey tour