



EPIC BIKE RIDES *of the* WORLD

Explore the planet's most thrilling cycling routes



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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.



