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World's top 50 riding experiences

14 MARCH, 2012

tags: Best bike rides, bike holidays, bike tourism

From the Alaskan tundra to the precipitous tip of Africa, we scoured the globe for the top fifty riding experiences for keen riders of all persuasions.

Here at *Ride On*, we know that there is no better way to travel than by bike. There are hundreds of roads to ride, trails to discover and cities to explore from the saddle of our trusty two-wheeled companion. In coming up with a list of the top 50 rides we were naturally biased toward Aussie rides, but after surveying our riding buddies, online fans and intrepid travel writers, we gathered hundreds of rides from around the world. After much debate, we managed to whittle our list down to fifty, presented in alphabetical country order starting with Australia. Some of these rides we wouldn't do ourselves, or recommend you to do – the Death Road in Bolivia, for example! – but they still deserve to be included.



LEGEND

-  Mountain bike
-  Road bike
-  Touring bike
-  Coastal views
-  Mountainous
-  Rural scenery
-  Alpine
-  Urban
-  Minimal hills
-  Kid-friendly
-  Multi-day tour
-  Destination
-  Day trip

Cycle Queensland

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What better way to discover the hidden sights of the Sunshine State than by bike? Cycle

Queensland is a fully-supported nine-day tour exploring a different route each year. This year's ride travels from Gayndah on the Central Coast to Noosa, via Hervey Bay.

Map reference: 1



Daintree and Cape York, Queensland

Explore sublime rainforests, spectacular waterfalls and pristine beaches. Ride from Cairns to Port Douglas, Cape Tribulation and Cooktown, or for the serious tourers, make the epic trip north to Cape York. There are numerous companies running tours in the area, from fully-supported tours to intrepid mountain-biking trips.

Map reference: 2



Outback Odyssey, South Australia

Discover the majesty of the Flinders Ranges by the seat of a mountain bike. Travelling along the Mawson Trail for 900+km from Adelaide to Blinman, the 14 day tour is fully supported and limited to only 200 riders.

Map reference: 3



Riesling Trail, South Australia

Travelling 34km from Auburn to Clare through the picturesque Clare Valley wine region, this rail trail passes by numerous cellar doors and visitor attractions. Perfect for a leisurely day out.

Map reference: 4



Bay of Fires, Tasmania

Listed as one of Lonely Planet's top ten cycling trips, the spectacular Bay of Fires on Tassie's north-east coast is more reminiscent of a tropical lagoon than blustery Tasmania. Bright red lichen covers the rocks, giving the bay its name. There is only one partially-sealed road in and out of the Bay of Fires Conservation Area, leaving from St Helens for a round trip of about 100km.

You can discover the Bay of Fires as a side trip on Great Escapade Tasmania 2013, a nine-day ride (Saturday 9 – Sunday 17 February) from Launceston to Port Arthur. Riders who register before Friday, 16 November, save \$100 plus get free bike transportation to and from their capital city. For more information, visit www.greatescapde.com.au.

Map reference: 5



Tasmania Trail

A little-known trail travelling 480km from Devonport in the north to Dover in the south. The trail is suitable for bushwalkers, horse-riders and bike riders and passes through some of the most beautiful and fascinating parts of Tasmania.

Map reference: 6

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Around the Bay, Victoria

Australia's largest mass-participation bike ride is held each October. It skirts Port Phillip Bay (210km) in one day, including a ride over the 22-story high Westgate Bridge. In addition to the basic circuit, five different shorter and longer ride options are offered.

Map reference: 7



Great Ocean Road, Victoria

Beginning in Torquay and ending in Warrnambool, the Great Ocean Road covers 243km of the most iconic scenery in Australia. It climbs up into the Otway Ranges National Park before descending to the coastal highway, past rocky beaches and seaside towns.

Map reference: 8



Bright, Victoria

This small Victorian Alpine town is a cycling hub, home to some huge cycling events and routes. The Alpine Classic, held each January, has seven ride options, and the 3 Peaks Challenge held in March passes through the town. The Murray to Mountains Rail Trail travels over 100km from Wangaratta to Bright through natural bushland, open farmland, hidden valleys and beautiful mountain ranges.

Map reference: 9



Great Victorian Bike Ride, Victoria

The Great Vic is an icon of Victorian tourism. It is a nine-day fully-supported ride of approximately 800km through regional Victoria, which attracts almost 5,000 riders each November. The route changes annually and offers shorter versions to cater for all riders.

Map reference: 10



Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail, Victoria

Travelling 38km through the Yarra Valley through open farmland, forest and small towns, this is the closest rail trail to Melbourne and is much loved. Lilydale is the last station on the metro train network and a new bridge over busy Maroondah Highway, opened in November 2011, makes the trail even more accessible to families and riders.

Map reference: 11



Five Dams Challenge, West Australia

Starting in Perth, the Challenge heads 234km up and around the five major dams of the Perth hills with over 2,000m of vertical climbing. A 146km Three Dams Challenge is also on offer.

Map reference: 12

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Rottneest Island, Western Australia

This small island, located 18km from Perth, is a car-free oasis with miles of white beaches. Bikes are the main form of transport and can be hired inexpensively to take in the historical buildings and coastal hamlets of the island.

Map reference: 13



Munda Biddi Trail, Western Australia

Beginning in Mundaring near Perth and finishing in Manjimup, the Munda Biddi is the longest trail in Australia at over 1000km, meandering through scenic river valleys and the magnificent eucalypt forests of south-west Australia.

Map reference: 14



Nullarbor Plain, West and South Australia

The Nullarbor Plain is a unique aspect of the true Australian outback – a flat, treeless, arid plain covering 200,000 square kilometres on southern Australia. Riding from Norseman in WA to Ceduna in SA (about 1,200km) is a rite of passage for Australian touring cyclists who want to challenge themselves, escape the everyday and see this unique landscape.

Map reference: 15



Bicentennial National Trail, Australia

This little-known trail, running 5330km from Cooktown in Queensland to Healesville in Victoria, is suitable for horse riders, bushwalkers and mountain-bikers. You can jump on and off different parts, or for a real challenge, tackle the entire thing.

Map reference: 16



Death Road, Bolivia

'El Camino de la Muerte' runs 69km from La Paz to Coroico in the north of Bolivia, rising to 4,650m and descending to 1,200 metres. The edge of the muddy, single-lane road drops off at least 600m straight down, with no guard rails. Though around 300 people a year die on the road, many operators offer bike tours.

Map reference: 17



Icefields Parkway, Canada

Stretching 232km through the heart of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site, the Parkway is one of the world's most outstanding roads. Explore pristine mountain lakes, glaciers and valleys. Begins in Banff and ends in Jasper, Alberta.

Map reference: 18



Cape Breton Island, Canada

Recently named one of the world's best cycling destinations by Lonely Planet, Cape Breton Island has non-stop seaside panoramas and wide, open roads.

Map reference: 19



Whistler Mountain Bike Park, Canada

Total MTB heaven, with over 50 trails for all skill levels, from gentle beginner's tracks to gnarly drop-offs and rock faces, set amongst breathtaking scenery.

Map reference: 20



Beijing, China

The cycling infrastructure in China's capital was overhauled leading up to the 2008 Olympics and bike lanes now cover nearly every inch of the bustling city. Hire a Flying Pidgeon from one of the hire shops found on every street and get off the tourist trail to discover hidden alleyways and backstreet communities.

Map reference: 21



Lake District, England

The home of Britain's hardest cyclosportive, the Fred Whitton Challenge, the superbly picturesque Lake District also offers gentle touring routes and extensive mountain bike adventures among the fells that include the highest mountain in England.

Map reference: 22

Symbols: Rural, Mountainous, Destination, MTB



Rhine River Cycleway, Europe

Following the path of the Rhine from Andermatt in the Swiss Alps to Rotterdam in Holland, the Rheinradweg bike path meanders along both sides of the river, past UNESCO heritage sites, tiny European towns and renowned wine regions.

Map reference: 23

Symbols: Flat, Kid-friendly, Tour



The Pyrenees, France

Base yourself in the mountain town of Pau and ride (in)famous Tour de France monster passes. Hotels in the region offer accommodation and road bike hire packages.

Map reference: 24



Loire Valley, France

Most riders are drawn to the châteaux region – a 100 mile section of the valley between Angers and Blois, once home to France's kings, and now a striking reminder of the spacious, courtly lifestyles of the 15th and early 16th century aristocracy.

Map reference: 25



Etape du Tour, France

The Etape is your chance to brag to your mates that you did the Tour de France – well, one stage at least. The ride normally takes place on a rest day of the Tour and allows amateur riders to ride a mountain stage, usually in the Pyrenees or the French Alps. Roads are closed and food and medical support are provided.

Map reference: 26



Paris Respire, France

Translated as Paris Breathes, on Sundays and public holidays some of the city's most scenic riverside roads are closed to motor traffic, allowing bike riders and walkers access to the tarmac.

Map reference: 27



Paris-Brest-Paris, France

Last year marked the 120th birthday of the Paris-Brest-Paris, which originally began as a professional race. These days, the ride (held every four years by Audax) is open to anyone mad enough to try to ride 1200km in 90 hours.

Map reference: 28



Paris Roubaix Cycloportif, France

Tackle the cobblestones in the mass-participation cycloportif version of the iconic professional race. Held every two years, the ride follows the same route that the pros take, battling bone-shaking terrain.

Map reference: 29



L'Eroica, Italy

A far cry from the lycra, carbon fibre and electrolytes of modern cycling, only bikes made prior to 1987 can enter this iconic race on gravel roads through Tuscany. Riders wear era-appropriate leather shoes and merino jerseys and lunch stops are lavish feasts with Chianti on tap.

Map reference: 30



East coast of Sardinia, Italy

Located right in the middle of the Mediterranean, Sardinia combines pristine beaches, Roman ruins

and spectacular winding roads with Italian hospitality. The east coast is ruggedly gorgeous, with purple limestone cliffs and wild ravines tumbling onto isolated beaches. You can join one of the many tours on offer, or DIY it at a more leisurely pace.

Map reference: 31



Hokkaido, Japan

The northern island of Japan is home to stunning coastlines, rolling mountain scenery and World Heritage National Parks, as well as hot springs perfect for soothing tired muscles. The island's capital, Sapporo, makes an excellent base to use the extensive cycle path network and explore surrounding areas.

Map reference: 32



Amsterdam, Netherlands

Often heralded as the world's most bike-friendly city, the 400km of dedicated bike lanes, excellent infrastructure and culture of cycling in Amsterdam have to be seen to be believed. Riding along Cycle Route 10 is the best way to experience the city, as it travels 42km in and around Amsterdam.

Map reference: 33



Lake Taupo, New Zealand

The modest town of Lake Taupo has an awesome reputation for catering for bike riders. It is host of the Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge, New Zealand's largest cycling event and the world's largest cycling relay. There are a wide range of events available, including riding solo around the 160km lake route, road and mountain bike challenges, corporate challenges, enduro events and kid's rides.

Map reference: 34



Otago Rail Trail, New Zealand

The longest rail trail in New Zealand, this 150km walking, cycling and horse-riding track in the South Island of New Zealand runs from Middlemarch to Clyde. Take a few days and visit the small towns – and the numerous pubs - dotted along the trail.

Map reference: 35



Golden Ring, Russia

The Golden Ring is a 650km tour of the ring of historic towns northeast of Moscow. The picturesque towns are dotted amongst quiet countryside and feature unique monuments of Russian architecture from the 12th to 18th centuries. The Russian Cycling Touring Club runs Golden Ring tours alongside local riders.

Map reference: 36



Hebrides Islands, Scotland

Linked by a network of ferries, the Hebrides are ideal to explore by bike. Quiet roads across the six main islands take in beaches and sea cliffs and present wildlife galore, while Gaelic hospitality and culture prevails in your accommodation. The islands also offer some of the most challenging off-road cycling in Britain.

Map reference: 37



Capetown, South Africa

Table Mountain National Park and its peninsula jutting off the southern tip of the African continent offers the most spectacular coastal road on the planet. Home of the Cape Argus Cycle Tour, the world's largest timed bike race.

Map reference: 38



Camino de Santiago, Spain

This route in northern Spain has carried pilgrims honouring Saint James for nearly 1,200 years. Recently, bike riders have been tackling the 800km pilgrimage, which travels over several mountain passes before finishing in Santiago de Compostela. Riders and walkers can get a 'pilgrim's pass' and stay at *refugios*, which are shelters provided in churches and monasteries.

Map reference: 39



Barcelona, Spain

Five years ago, there were hardly any bikes in Spain's second largest city. The city's investment into bicycle infrastructure and the Bicing bike share program boosted bicycle use tenfold and these days Barcelona is frequently named as a top cycling city. The sprawling city, with its wide boulevards, plazas and incredible architecture make it perfect for exploration by bike.

Map reference: 40



Friendship Highway, Tibet and Nepal

Travelling 1,100 km from Lhasa to Kathmandu, the Friendship Highway was originally built to promote trade. It also provides a rich and varied journey taking in ancient monasteries, Mount Everest base camp and the world's longest descent, a four kilometre vertical drop over 250km from the Tibetan Plateau into the Kathmandu Valley.

Map reference: 41



Tour de Timor, East Timor

A mountain-biking race taking in some of the world's worst roads, stifling heat and difficult mountain passes, alongside generous and welcoming locals, spectacular scenery and an incredible cultural experience.

Map reference: 42



Critical Mass San Francisco, USA

Home of the world-first Critical Mass ride in 1992, the San Francisco ride is celebrating its 20th anniversary on September 28 this year with a week-long festival. The ride originally began as a way for bike riders to promote cycling and reclaim public space, Critical Mass rides are held on the last Friday of the month.

Map reference: 43



Mr Toad's Wild Ride, Lake Tahoe, USA

Over 30km of awesome singletrack on the south side of Lake Tahoe in Nevada. One of the finest technical downhill trails in the world, with stunning lakeside and forest scenery.

Map reference: 44



Going to the Sun Road, Montana, USA

This 80km engineering marvel winds through the interior of the Glacier National Park in north-west Montana. It curves around mountainsides and past waterfalls, wildflower fields, and glaciers up to Logan's Pass.

Map reference: 45



RAGBRAI, Iowa, USA

The oldest mass-participation bike tour in the world, the RAGBRAI is an annual seven-day supported ride across Iowa, averaging about 750km each year with over 10,000 riders participating.

The 2012 ride will be the 40th anniversary.

Map reference: 46



Route 66, USA

Get your kicks on Route 66! Also called 'The Mother Road', this historic road was the USA's first transcontinental road, beginning in Chicago, passing through eight states and ending in Los Angeles. These days, most of the traffic uses the highways, leaving the original road as a low-traffic bike route.

Map reference: 47



Iditarod Trail, Alaska, USA

If you manage to complete this race, let us know and we will award you a medal! Iditarod is a 30-day cycling race across 1,770km of mountain ranges, frozen rivers, dense forests, desolate tundra and windswept coastline where temperatures rarely make it above zero degrees. Only the craziest, toughest and most hard-core riders attempt to ride the Iditarod.

Map reference: 48



National Highway 1, Vietnam

Running the length of the narrow, coastal country, National Highway 1 connects the major cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh over 700km. The road passes fields of rice paddies and tiny coastal villages and over Hai Van Pass, with a breathtaking 496m descent.

Map reference: 49



World Naked Bike Ride

One for the very confident or shameless riders! Beginning in 2004 as a way to 'deliver a vision of a cleaner, safer, body-positive world'; the World Naked Bike Ride is just that – a group of people riding their bikes through major cities around the world in various stage of undress. Many people adorn themselves and their bikes with paint, flowers and decorations and unsurprisingly get a lot of attention from onlookers.

Map reference: 50



Are there any other rides that you think should be included? What would be on your list of must-do rides?

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Jim Cummings [PERMALINK](#)

14 March, 2012 6:21 pm

Hi guys

Actually the "Death Road" in Bolivia is not a very risky ride. Dozens of people ride it every day and many aren't good riders. The average Australian city street is probably more dangerous for someone on a bike.

Death Road earned it's reputation when it used to be cluttered with trucks but they all take another road nowdays.

Best wishes

Jim

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