

Taking to the Road Responsibly: On Two Wheels

BY ETHAN GELBER

For 20 years my desire to see the world from the saddle of a bicycle has been unquenchable. Touring on two wheels is, for me, the only way to travel. Deep in the wilderness and on the roads, over long and short hauls, in the familiar and the foreign, it just can't be beat, especially as a responsible form of transportation. It works wonders for your emotional and physical wellbeing. It saves on transport costs. And, of course, it does little to damage the environment or sap its resources, adds no noise to natural calm, no pollutants to pure beauty and no danger in protected places.

Bicycle tourism also fells many of the obstacles that sometimes keep visitors and locals apart. Better yet, it actually creates commonality. As a cyclist you can choose paths that wander far from motorways, putting you in touch with people in places that outsiders don't see. When you're hungry, you can pause in small markets patronised only by locals. When it rains on field workers, you get wet with them or share their shelters. Plus, you develop a healthy respect for the land, one that teaches both humility and forbearance.

Short pedal trips are a more and more common traveller's treat, whether shopping near home or renting a steel steed for a zip to a nearby attraction. Long trips and involved adventures are the makings of journeys of a lifetime. Both are responsible forms of travel gauged to a human pace, more resonant with nature, the elements and the people who live by their rhythms.

As the world gets smaller and distant horizons creep closer, a new breed of robust cyclist has flourished: one ready to push over distances that even some motorists would balk at – hundreds and sometimes thousands of kilometres, tackled over lengthy stretches of time.

My list of top 10 epic bike tours, in no particular order, is truly epic. Don't think, 'I could never do that'. You'd be surprised how many journeyers do – those who let fancy and curiosity get the better of them.

TOP 10 EPIC BIKE RIDES

- **Silk Roads** – any of the famous ancient trade routes from the Middle East, across Asia to China
- **Iberian Pilgrimage Routes** – the Camino de Santiago between French starting points and the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela
- **Crusade Routes** – any of the well-trampled roads between Western Europe and the Middle East, perhaps along the path of the Orient Express or the Via Egnatia
- **In Napoleon's Wake** – a transcontinental pedal from Paris to Moscow
- **Around the Mediterranean** – from Morocco to Spain, the long way, keeping near the coast
- **Extended Rift Valley** – a trip along this great cleft in the world, from the Jordan River along the Dead Sea into East Africa
- **Australian Coast** – a 25,750km odyssey keeping within sight of the wet part of this dry continent
- **Coast-to-Coast USA** – the 6840km TransAmerican Trail, the 6945km Northern Tier, or the 5120km Southern Tier
- **Great Divide Route** – a 3975km off-road adventure that runs along or near America's craggy cleft dividing the watersheds east and west
- **Pacific Coast Hwy** – all or a big part of the whole highway from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego