

Great getaways

Riding a bike is a great way to explore the countryside. As when you're walking, you're in the scene in surround-sound outdoors where you can feel the breeze and smell the air. It's much nicer than looking at it through glass. When you're cycling you travel slowly enough not to miss anything and quickly enough to go some distance, through changing environments. It's a simple pleasure that costs practically nothing and that anyone can enjoy.

Requirements for touring are minimal. If you can ride a bike to the shops you can ride it to the next village or across the whole county. Some cycle-tourists cross countries or continents. All you really need is a bike and the desire to go somewhere. There's no minimum or maximum speed, duration or distance; no age limit; no special skills or unusual equipment needed; and no rules. You could cycle the local lanes with a bottle of water and a flapjack one afternoon, or you could take a family-sized tent and cycle-camp across France one summer.

It's not about the destination so much as it is about the journey. You want to follow the nicest route between two points rather than the shortest. That usually means getting away from the busiest roads and instead using minor roads and traffic-free cycle tracks – and sometimes bridleways and towpaths.

Family cycle touring begins with the family bike ride. You get on your bikes and go for a ride for a couple of hours. Travelling further is only slightly more difficult in that you will need to sort out a place to stay for the night. You'll need to take more things with you, and perhaps you'll be cycling further. That doesn't mean the riding need be any more strenuous; you can potter along at whatever pace you please, which with children might be quite modest. It doesn't matter.

If you wanted to travel quickly you could jump in a car. Extending a trip from one night to a long weekend or a fortnight is hardly any more difficult than continuing to pedal. The logistics of sorting beds for more nights and of carrying a bit more luggage are only slightly more involved than doing the same for one night. But you don't have to do even that. If you prefer you could go on an organised cycling holiday – like a package holiday – where all the travel arrangements are done for you and your one job is to ride.