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Not the Same-Old Bike Tour

From Cuba to the Galapagos, guided biking trips in unlikely destinations offer a new spin on two-wheel touring



Cycling in Cuba

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0 COMMENTS

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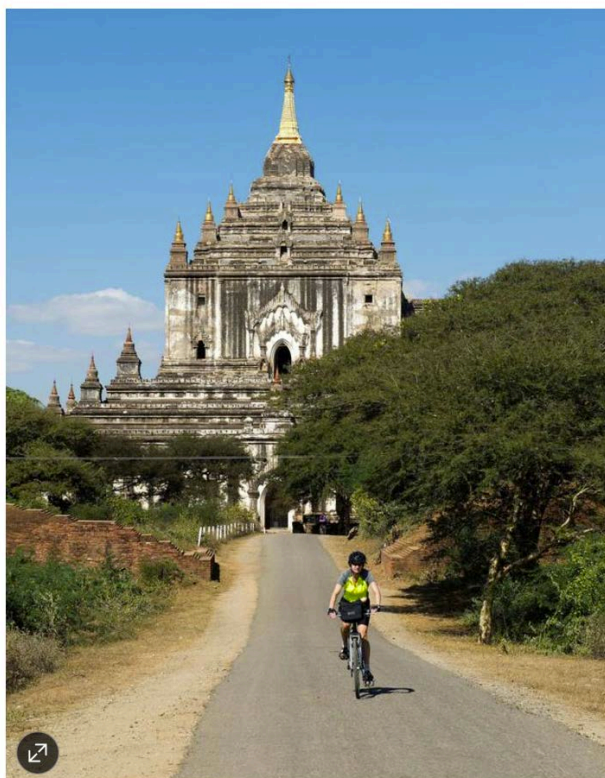
IT'S EASY TO SEE the appeal of pedaling through rustic Vermont, golden Tuscany or the wine regions of France. But for seriously intrepid travelers, cycling-trip specialists are rolling out itineraries in less predictable destinations—places where you're more likely to pass ancient temples than weathered barns and bound to see more blue-footed boobies than cows. They all offer travelers a chance to see the world in a very intimate way: more efficiently than on foot but at a speed that lets you take in all the sights, smells and sounds. You don't need to be a hard-core rider to join most of these trips, though a few (see Ecuador and Myanmar) are cushier than the others.

Cuba

Active-travel mainstay Backroads, one of the first U.S. companies to offer sporty itineraries in Cuba (pictured above), started with walking/hiking tours in 2013. This January, they're launching a weeklong biking-focused package for up to 26 riders that combines cultural excursions with abundant pedaling time. You bike for five out of the seven days, weaving through the dome-shaped hills in Viñales National Park to the ocean, and cycling from the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve, on the far west coast, to Havana—riding part of the route with members of the Cuban Masters Cycling Club. Between rides you'll stroll through small villages, take salsa lessons and engage with local artists. This type of trip requires flexibility—the itinerary can change suddenly, and high-end hotels are limited. *From \$5,998 a person, backroads.com*

→ Ecuador and the Galápagos

Most travelers explore by boat the islands that Darwin made famous, but on DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co.'s multisport tour, you can see some of them from a bicycle. The 10-day journey, designed for fewer than 14 riders, starts on the mainland, with hiking and cycling around villages and volcanoes. Then riders fly to San Cristóbal Island, home to the capital of the Galápagos province, where they can hike along lava-rock trails in search of frigate birds and blue-footed boobies. On Isabela Island, it's all about pedaling the coastline, from white-sand beaches to mangrove tangles. You reach the top of Volcano Chico on foot, but you're welcome to coast back down. Kayaking excursions balance out the trip, and at night, you'll be resting your weary muscles in some of the area's nicest accommodations. *From \$6,595 a person, duvine.com*



Myanmar

With its 2,200 Buddhist temples spread over 26 square miles of tree-studded plains, the ancient city of Bagan lends itself nicely to two-wheeled touring. The weeklong private tour run by upscale operator Butterfield & Robinson includes two days in Bagan, as well as adventurous rides near the Shan Mountains, a part of the world few foreigners see. For the last two days, you explore Inle Lake by boat, floating past hydroponic gardens and stilted houses—no pedaling required. *From \$6,995 a person, butterfield.com*



Cyclists in Tanzania PHOTO: INTREPID TRAVEL

Tanzania

Intrepid Travel, leading small, value-conscious group tours since 1989, has recently introduced a 13-day journey through Tanzania. The trip starts at small but scenic Arusha National Park and includes rides on Rift Valley escarpments, a tour of a coffee-producing village, a safari in Serengeti National Park, an optional hike to the top of the active Ol Doinyo Lengai volcano and an overnight stay in a traditional beehive-shaped hut. (Riders camp in basic tents for several other nights.) The trip maxes out at a dozen travelers. Though the cycling distances are pretty short and you can always ride in the support truck, it pays to be somewhat fit, as the terrain can be rough and hilly. *From \$2,965 a person, intrepidtravel.com*