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One-day bike tours in Asia catching on with holiday crowd

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All over the region, bicycles are replacing tour buses as the best way to sample a country's culture while on holiday. But if a week in the saddle sounds like too much for your tush, these one-day dashes could be right up your street

Cambodia and Myanmar

Next time you're planning a trip to Angkor Wat, try seeing the treasured temple complex at a different pace. After watching the sunrise, a bicycle tour with Grasshopper Adventures will take you through surrounding ruins and forests while visiting temples Bayon, Ta Prom and the Elephant Terrace. Avoid the crowds, discover hidden trails and soak up more of the monument's magic than you could by foot.

Last year 12,000 customers jumped in the saddle for tours in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam with Grasshopper — a threefold increase over four years — and the morning tour of Angkor Wat is one of its most popular. "You get to see the real Asia by bike," says director Adam Platt-Hepworth.



Taking a breather among the ruins in Angkor Wat, Cambodia.
Photo: George Henton

A day trip of the temple-strewn town of Bagan in Myanmar, is another favourite. Tiny lanes dotted with ancient temples wind around the Irrawaddy River where you can explore

temples, farms and villages on its "Brilliant Bagan" tour.

"Instead of piling out of a tour bus in the same location as 500 other people, when cycling you can impulsively roll into a roadside shop and eat true local food," says Platt-Hepworth. "Most importantly, you get to do it in the company of like-minded, adventurous and healthy people."

Day tours with Grasshopper Adventures start from US\$33. All tours include bike, safety equipment, a guide, any non-bike transport involved, and usually a meal or snacks along the way.

grasshopperadventures.com [1]

Thailand

You've been to Bangkok, but have you explored the Bang Kra Jao (Bangkok's Great Green Lung)? This peaceful haven exists over the Chao Phraya River and a short distance from busy Sukhumvit.

Only small pathways, not roads, join this lush wilderness to Bangkok, so biking is the perfect mode of transport says Struan Robertson, CEO of one of Asia's oldest bike tour operators, SpiceRoads. You can meander through a maze of small paths past local communities before exploring a 250-year-old temple and a floating market. After having cycled about 25 kilometres, return to Bangkok around lunch.



Temple complex in the Thai capital. Photos: George Henton

It's just one of a variety of day tours offered by SpiceRoads in Thailand alone. "The best way to get to know the 'real Thailand' is on two wheels," says Robertson, who says the company's cycling tours are not taxing. "The majority of our tours are cultural: we cycle fairly slowly, the distances aren't too long and there are opportunities to stop and learn."



Entrance to Chinatown in Bangkok.

For a longer day out, venture north to Sankampaeng and the picturesque Lanna countryside to the east of Chiang Mai. Spend a day taking in temples, rice paddies and water buffalo while negotiating more strenuous hills. Cap off your 40km effort with a dip in the Sankampaneng Hot Springs.



A quiet ride in the suburbs.

Half-day tours with SpiceRoads start at 1,000 baht (HK\$240). All tours include bike, helmet, entrance fees, ferry rides, water and snacks. Lunch is provided for full-day tours.

spiceroads.com [2]

Macau and Guangdong

Once you've tackled a few day-tour saunters, try something more challenging. Grab a bike for the "Kaiping Dash" on April 25 — a bite-sized adventure organised by Hong Kong-based cycling tour operator Mad Dogs. If you don't own a bike, you can borrow one through its bike share scheme.

Mad Dogs aims to provide "achievable but challenging" cycling journeys around Asia. Most tours challenge riders with hundreds of kilometres over several days, but founder Humphrey Wilson crafted the Kaiping Dash to cater for the weekend cycling enthusiast.



Chikazhen Street in Kaiping.

It's a 155-kilometre, one-day quest starting at the border of Macau, travelling through the Guangdong hinterland to Kaiping, home to the Unesco World Heritage listed watchtower houses or "dialou".

"It's hard, but it's not ridiculous," says Wilson. "And completing it signals a massive achievement in one day — with the added bonus of not taking any time off work."

Check into your hotel on Friday at Zhuhai (within easy reach of the ferry pier) and wake early on Saturday to a hearty breakfast before heading off with other riders through the manageable bustle of the city at dawn. Within an hour roads become quieter and scenic rural villages of southern China inundate the senses.



World Heritage listed watchtower houses (above and below).
Photos: George Henton, Corbis



After lunch, summon the energy for a few more hours, skirting Kaiping before heading into Chikanzhen by late afternoon. Explore the quirky Chinese city the next day in an informal ride or make the short journey back to Hong Kong.

Register for the Kaiping Dash before March 25 for US\$250. The cost includes two nights' accommodation, support vans and all meals on the day of the cycle (day two). Excludes flights, ferries and transfers, snacks, water and food during days one and three.

gomaddogs.com [3]

Taiwan

Taiwan's intricate road networks, quiet traffic and challenging topography make for a stimulating day or weekend of cycling just a 90-minute flight away. In Motion Asia (IMA) offers customised road cycling tours throughout Taiwan specialising in Taipei day trips for groups of two or more and multi-day tours for six or more all over Taiwan.

"We offer day tours of 30 kilometres for a beginner up to 200 kilometres through the biggest

mountains in Northern Taiwan with 3,000 metres of altitude gain for advanced riders," says IMA director Cam McLean. "The mountains and countryside around Taipei offer superb riding and scenery on a par with the best on offer in Taiwan."



The coastal road near Jinshan in Taiwan.

Immediately north, Yangmingshan National Park offers a compelling mix of fast flat scenic coasts and big mountains, while the historic mining towns of Jiufen, Jinguashi, Ruifang, Houtong, and Pingxi in the northeast will see you enjoy rolling hills, beautiful lush valleys and beach hotspots.

"We can literally start riding on the outskirts of Taipei, less than 10 minutes from Taipei 101, heading in a number of directions, which makes Taipei a unique destination for cyclists," says McLean.



Waterfall on the ancient mining trail.

IMA offers customised day tours for two or more cyclists based out of Taipei, and multi-day tours for groups of six or more all over Taiwan. Packages include transfers, support van or riding guide, snacks and refreshments, insurance and trip photos.

inmotionasia.com [4]

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