

CHOOSING A BIKE FOR A SUPPORTED CYCLE TOUR



Long distance cycle tours have unique requirements. Riding a bike day after day, often in remote locations, means we need to prioritise durability and repairability. Bikes that are suitable for weekend rides at home are not always the best choice for a long tour. Whenever possible, avoid proprietary components, and any parts where spares and replacements will be very hard to find.

KEY DECISIONS: HANDLEBAR, BICYCLE TYPE, FRAME MATERIAL

Handlebar type: Drop bar or flat bar

Riders should stick with the same type of handlebar they are already used to riding – both flat bar and drop bars are ok to use. For flat bars, adding ergonomic grips and/or bar ends is a good idea. The choice of handlebar will narrow down the type of bikes to choose from.

Many riders make the switch to a flat bar as they age, as these can be easier for anyone dealing with changes to their balance, agility, and hand strength / dexterity.

Bicycle type: Hybrid, hardtail, gravel, touring

Flat bar: hybrid, or hardtail mountain bike

Drop bar: gravel/cyclocross or touring bike

*note: suspension is not required on any of our tours, but on some tours with rougher roads, riders may opt for front suspension (ideally with a lock out).

E-bikes: Allowed on selected tours, please see [our website](#) for more information.

Frame material: Steel, titanium, aluminum, or Carbon

For a long cycle tour, we prioritise durability. For that reason, we recommend steel (most durable), titanium (light and durable, expensive), or aluminum (light, somewhat less durable) frames. High-quality metal frames can still be relatively light weight, especially when equipped with lighter components. Some riders do still choose carbon frames, however they need to be aware that these are more susceptible to damage from non-riding incidents like falling over onto a rock, or while being carried in a vehicle.

Suspension

Not required for most tours, but may be wanted for tours on rougher roads, or for riders who prefer comfort above all else. Comfort can also be improved by using larger tires, or with suspension seatposts or stems.

KEY COMPONENTS

Tires

Tire clearance: Each tour will have a specific tire size recommendation. At minimum, 35c tires, but we always suggest at least 40c, even for tours on entirely paved roads. On some tours, tires up to 50c may be required. We don't recommend tires narrower than 35c for any of our tours. A specific tire size recommendation is provided for each of TDA's tours.

Tire type: We recommend using a very durable tire, with at least some light tread. The Schwalbe Marathon Mondial and Schwalbe Marathon Almotion are two excellent choices.

Easy gearing

The vast majority of riders will want easier gears than what comes on a new bike from the factory. Consider changing to a smaller chainring(s) or bigger cassette.

Mechanical or electronic drivetrain

Mechanical drivetrains are preferred for repairability in the field. Many riders do still choose electronic drivetrains, but they should be aware that while these are generally reliable, when a failure does occur, it can be difficult or impossible to repair in the field without finding replacement parts.

Hydraulic disc brakes

These are preferred for their overall performance and reliability.

COMFORT & ERGONOMICS

Bike fit

A bike fitting session is highly recommended. This ensures getting the right size frame, and can also help make adjustments to other component's size and position.

Saddle

Measure sit bone width, and buy a matching and high-quality saddle. Don't be afraid to try more than one.

Handlebar comfort

Consider adding thicker bar tape, or ergonomic grips.

Pedals

Only riders who are highly experienced and comfortable with clipless pedals should use them. All cycle tours involve a considerable amount of walking, and getting on and off your bike many times a day. The performance benefit of clipless pedals is small, and for most people the greater comfort, walkability, and safety of flat pedals is a better choice. If using flat pedals, be sure to get high-quality mountain bike flat pedals and shoes. Lightweight shoes like the Five Ten Trailcross LT are perfect for touring. If using clipless pedals, be sure to get shoes that are ok for walking, where the cleat does not protrude beyond the sole of the shoe.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Cost

We always recommend not spending more than you need to meet the above requirements. Spending more gets only relatively small gains in lightness and performance.

Carrying capacity

Riders should carry at minimum two water bottles, and a small bag for clothing, snacks, first aid, and repair kit. On many tours, three or four water bottles (and additional warm / wet weather clothing) may be required.