

Choosing a bicycle for long distance touring

This is the most common question we get asked by people contemplating a bicycle tour with us. For any cycle tourist – whether in a group or going solo, and cycling the smooth cycleways of western Europe or thru the rugged back roads of South America – choosing an appropriate bike for the tour is no easy task

Three Basic Types To help you make the right choice, we have broken down your options into the three most suitable options.

1. Mountain Bike with Front Suspension A 'hard tail mountain bike' is the most versatile choice for any bike tour. It provides suspension and relative comfort for the off roads, and with a thinner set of tires it provides a decent ride on paved roads. The drawback is that it will be a little slower, a little heavier, and a little less efficient than other bikes on pavement. Having locking front suspension is useful, as you can 'lock out' on the smooth roads and engage the suspension on the rougher roads. This bike is the most common choice on tours crossing rugged terrain.

PROS: versatility, durability, and comfort

CONS: less efficient on smooth roads, less mounts for panniers, more complicated parts

2. Cyclocross or Touring Bike Cyclocross bikes are becoming more and more popular among cycle travellers, as they combine the ruggedness of a mountain bike, with the speed and efficiency of a road bike. These are quite similar in style and form to classic touring bikes. While cyclocross/touring bikes do accommodate wider off road tires they do not have suspension, and riders may be seriously challenged on the rougher off-road sections. Touring bikes, moreso than cyclocross bikes will have excellent mounts for racks and extra water bottles. Both these bikes are a good choice for places with better roads or on any tour where speed is more important to you than comfort.

PROS: efficient on the smooth roads, while still rugged enough for the rougher roads

CONS: no suspension, less comfort

3 Hybrid Bicycle This bike has the same wheel size as a cyclocross bike, but with straight handlebars instead of road style drop bars. Hybrids sometimes have front suspension and suspension in the seatpost. Hybrids are designed more for comfort and leisure than for performance, and have more of an upright sitting position. This is a very popular style of bike for European cycling trips, that also works well in other places.

PROS: comfort, good mounts for racks and bottles

CONS: not always designed for rugged terrain

Consider your Riding Style: What type of rider are you? Do you like to sit upright to have a full view and worry little about speed? Or do you like to be tucked into an aerodynamic position and go as fast as you can, and as efficiently as you can? This will help you narrow down your options very quickly.