

Bicycle Safety Tips for Bike Tours

Especially Important When Riding in a Group

- Concentrate first on learning how to ride safely and with endurance. A long bicycle tour could likely be one of the most difficult things, physically, that you've ever attempted.
- Always stretch before and after riding.
- Have your bike in the best mechanical condition possible. A touring or road bike is going to be the easiest to ride and is the most common type found on longer bicycle tours.
- Safety involves several items. The first is your helmet. **DON'T GET ON A BIKE WITHOUT A HELMET.** Safety equipment also includes gloves. If you fall they protect the palms of your hands. Riding safely is very important and very difficult to learn. You may want to have a mirror on your helmet or your bike and use it.
- Carry a spare inner tube in case you have a flat. There are repair vans along the route, but chances are you will be waiting in line. Even if you do not have the knowledge to change a tire yourself, someone will be glad to help.
- Ride to the right. Leave room for others to pass on your left. There have been many close calls because a passing rider was forced into the lane with oncoming traffic.
- The greatest threat to your well-being on the route is not cars or trucks but other cyclists. Many riders may be riding for the first time surrounded by many other cyclists. And, while this circumstance promotes certain euphoria, it also holds hidden dangers, i.e., running into each other and falling down.
- Before you stop, make sure no bicycles or motor vehicles are immediately behind you. Stop at the far right edge of the roadway and immediately move off the roadway. Stay clear of the roadway. Stopping is especially dangerous at the crest of a hill or on a curve.
- Call out to fellow cyclists when you are going to pass on the left or right or up the middle, or are pulling off or pulling on.
- Be predictable and don't weave. Ride in a straight line to make it easier for those riding behind you.
- Don't draft. Drafting in a crowd is dangerous to yourself and others around you. Drafting vehicles is also dangerous and will not be tolerated on any organized bike tour.
- Know what the road signs mean.

Food and Hydration

You also should carry some type of high-energy food. (Usually food is available when you want it, but there are always times when you may need a boost.)

Don't put yourself in danger because you're not drinking enough fluids. The temperature, wind, distance and previous day's events all will determine your need for fluids. One rule of thumb is that a bicyclist should drink water every 14th minutes, but water is not enough. You should carry at least two water bottles with you. Because we sweat and lose those precious minerals when we exercise, we have to replace them through sports drinks and other fluids. And since certain beverages can hinder the effectiveness of some important vitamins and minerals, it's a good idea to have some vitamins on hand.

Sugar and carbohydrates keep your body going on long rides, but don't try to eat them all at one sitting. It's much better to eat several times a day than to try to pedal on a full stomach. And, as all seasoned riders know, there's always a food stand just up ahead.

Road cycling signals and warnings

Understanding the meaning of each of these communications not only helps you, but also your fellow riders and drivers. Please take a moment to review these communications used by cyclists in a group:

Obey Traffic Regulations

As a cyclist in Florida, you are responsible to follow the same traffic regulations as other vehicles. Yes, bicycles are vehicles! This means stopping at red lights and stop signs, not crossing solid yellow lines and obeying all traffic laws.

Ride on Right Side of Road.

Cyclists should always ride on the right side of the road. Since all roads utilized during most bike tours are still open to motorists, we cannot ride on the middle or left side of the road as well. There are townspeople that need to get to work, farmers tending to fields and others that should not be hindered by cyclists taking up both sides of the road. Hogging the roads might anger motorists and create a negative image of cyclists in their mind. Be a good guest and share the road!

Let Other Cyclists Pass.

You should ride as safely as possible to the right when possible. If you hear a cyclist sound off, "**ON YOUR LEFT**", this means they are attempting to pass you on your left. Do not turn your head to the left to look as you could collide with the approaching cyclist, but rather acknowledge them with a simple "**THANK YOU**" and let them pass. Be courteous and let faster riders pass safely on your left. Do not force them into the left lane. If you want to hold a conversation, do not block the entire lane. Leave a passing lane in the right hand lane!

Don't ever Cross Solid Yellow Lines.

The solid yellow line indicates that it is unsafe for motorists to safely pass in this area because it is difficult to see oncoming traffic due to hills, curves or other challenges. Likewise, it is extremely dangerous for cyclists to ride left of the solid yellow or double yellow lines. Cyclists should always ride right of solid yellow lines!

Car Up -- Car Back

These commands should be sounded off to alert fellow cyclists that a vehicle is approaching from up ahead "**CAR UP!!!!**" or from behind "**CAR BACK!!!!**". Cyclists should ride with caution and attempt to ride as far to the right and single file to allow the vehicles to safely pass the cyclists. Be courteous to those that we share the road with!

Sound Off When Passing

If you intend to pass a cyclist or group of cyclists, please be courteous and sound off, "ON YOUR LEFT". This lets them know you are approaching and intend to pass them. If you rapidly pass them without signaling, the cyclists could be startled and steer into you causing a collision that could have been avoided. Make sure you signal enough in advance that you do not startle them with your signal.

Sound Off When Stopping

When stopping, you should signal with your arm straight down and your open palm towards the rear and sound off, "SLOWING!!!" and then "STOPPING!!!". If you are pulling off the road, please sound off, "RIDER OFF!!!". Cyclists should pull completely off the road and shoulder to not block the road. Cyclists should not pull into a driveway and stop as this is a danger to the cyclist and to motorists.

Drink Water

Dehydration is a big concern for cyclists. You should always drink plenty of water before, during, and after bicycling. A fatigued or dehydrated cyclist could cause injury to themselves or other cyclists. Even if you are drinking other fluids such as Gatorade, you should still be drinking water in addition to these fluids.

Heavy Bike Traffic Ahead

This informs motorists to expect very heavy bicycle traffic ahead. It does not tell the motorist that the cyclist has the right of way! It is there as a courtesy to the motorist and cyclists still need to obey the traffic laws of our State.

Rules of Safety and Etiquette

This list of rules for safety and etiquette has been developed as part of an overall bicycle safety campaign. When combined with the legal rules of the road and when adhered to by riders, these rules make each event safer and more enjoyable for everyone. This section outlines these rules and gives some suggestions for physical preparation.

1. The legal RIGHT.

Obey traffic laws. In Florida, bicyclists enjoy the same rights as motorists. In accepting those rights, bicyclists also assume the responsibilities for riding in a safe and legal manner by:

- Stopping completely at stop signs.
- Obeying yield signs.
- Not crossing yellow lines in your lane.
- Riding to the right.
- Signaling for turns.
- Not cutting corners.
- Riding in a respectable manner.

2. The RIGHT stuff.

Keep your bicycle in good repair. Have it readied for your long distance cycling tour, and then keep it safe to operate. It is especially important to make sure your brakes work well.

3. The RIGHT gear.

Wear a protective helmet. It is estimated that 84th % of bicycling accidents result in injury to the face or head.

Wear bright clothing to be noticed. If cycling early or late in the day, reflective clothing and lights are a good idea.

4. The RIGHT communications.

Signal turns and stops. The law says you must, but this point can't be emphasized enough. Most accidents in bike tours involve two or more bicycles and most are the result of riders not letting others know of their intentions.

Sound off when passing. Use phrases such as "on your left," "on your right," or "coming through the middle."

5. The RIGHT riding.

When stopping along the bike tour routes, let those behind know of your plans. Make sure no bicycles or motor vehicles are immediately behind you when you stop. Stop at the right edge of the roadway and immediately move to the shoulder. Stay clear of the roadway, and park completely off of the roadway to make repairs, rest, visit, etc. Stopping is especially dangerous at the crest of a hill or on a curve, so be careful.

Don't weave. Ride in a straight line to make it easier for those riding behind you.

Ride to the right. Leave room for others to pass on your left. There have been many close calls because a passing rider was forced into the opposite lane.

When turning, turn left from the center of the roadway, turn right from along the curb or shoulder, and stay to the right.

6. The RIGHT frame of mind.

Stay alert and use your brain when you ride. You must be constantly thinking and aware of what's going on around you.

Pace yourself. Bike tours are distinctly different from races. Not all riders travel at the same speed, so don't try to keep up with someone who rides too fast for you. Riding too fast or in too high a gear is tough on your knees, heart and lungs.

7. The RIGHT attitude

Be considerate. The bicycling skills of those participating in bike tours cover the full range of the experience and fitness spectrums. Each rider must look out for someone else, as well as for himself.

Be a predictable rider. Don't keep other bicyclists and motorists guessing about what your next move will be. A predictable rider is a safe rider.

Be courteous to passing vehicles and other bicyclists. Instead of riding several abreast, go single file and let those behind you pass.

Cooperate with your bike tour officials. State troopers, police, sheriff's officers and other law enforcement personnel will be present at the busiest intersections. Obey their signals.

Please stay on the marked route. The bike tour route has been selected for your safety. Services are not available to you if you are off the route.

8. The RIGHT attention.

Keep your head up and your ears open. Do not wear radio headphones while riding!

Give the right-of-way to emergency vehicles. Pull to the right and stop if you hear a siren.

Beware of loose gravel and watch for debris on the pavement. Trucks carrying sand, gravel and rock often spill some at intersections. It is sometimes necessary for a bike tour to take bike paths, sidewalks, or even unpaved stretches of road in order to avoid busy highways. Take extra care on unpaved roads, watching for loose gravel, rocks, soft spots, holes and ruts.

Avoid wide cracks in the pavement. Narrow bicycle tires can easily get caught in wide cracks. Be especially careful on roadways paved with concrete. Center cracks on concrete roads are dangerous.

Look out for railroad tracks and cross them at right angles. There are fewer tracks these days, but there are still rough tracks and some at bad angles. Raise yourself off your seat and stand on your pedals to absorb the shock and lower the center of gravity. Unclip from your pedals as you prepare to cross railroad tracks. Watch out for other riders and let those behind know of your intentions. Angled tracks and low shoulders are major causes of accidents.

9. The RIGHT condition

Get yourself in good physical shape. You should be in good shape and capable of riding those distances before you come on the ride. A good way to get ready is to join a local bicycling club. A sports health clinic can also provide you with suggestions for a good conditioning program. Eat and drink frequently. Rather than loading up once in the middle of the day, stop frequently for fluids and food. Carry water with you.