

China Cycle Itinerary

Days 1 – 2: Flight to Kunming, China

Arrive in the 'eternal spring city' of Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, and transfer to our hotel in the city centre. Kunming is a surprisingly modern and pleasant city but has plenty of interesting historical sights such as the Tanhua temple, the Eastern and Western pagodas and the Incantation Pillar. We will organise a walk through the back streets of the old quarter with its family run traditional shops selling an assortment of weird and exotic paraphernalia. Alternatively you can spend the day at leisure strolling through Green Lake Park, an interesting insight to Chinese family life.

Meals: dinner only

Day 3: World heritage town of Lijiang

In the morning we transfer back to the airport and take an early morning flight and arrive in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage town of Lijiang at 2,440m above sea level. The old town of Lijiang is home to the fascinating Naxi people, descendants from Tibetan nomads. Women in the Naxi community play a strong role in the family and in business. The traditional blue clothes of the Naxi are still worn by many today and you'll most likely come across them in the busy market streets of the old quarter. This is an enchanting place to explore the narrow cobbled streets, ancient bridges and marvel at the traditional curved roofs of the wooden houses. The afternoon can be spent on a walking tour through some of the old neighbourhoods visiting the Museum of Naxi culture, and the Black Dragon Pool with stunning views of the jagged snow capped Jade Dragon Snow Mountains (5596m high at the southern edge of the Tibetan Plateau), or relax in one of the many cafes. Buy a floating candle after dark, make a wish and float it down one of the many little canals which line every street. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner*

Day 4: Cycling around Lijiang

Today is our first day's ride. A gentle introduction to warm those leg muscles up as we cycle around the beautiful Lashi Lake. This is found at an elevation of 2500m and is home to tens of thousands of migratory birds such as the black necked crane. We will be passing through small Naxi villages and will experience the traditional rural lifestyle of this intriguing ethnic minority. The cycling today provides an escape into Old China with a step back in time as we ride under the shadow of the Yulong Mountains, the southern most section of Himalayas. Today includes a few sections of off road cycling, sure to be appreciated by those who enjoy getting off the sealed paths. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 36km*

Day 5: Lijiang to Bai Shui He

A varied and spectacular days riding as we take back roads out of Lijiang past the ancient villages of Su He and Baisha, famous for their 15th century Buddhist fresco paintings which depict scenes of village life. During the day we will ride along a mixture of sealed roads and packed dirt paths that will take us past an intricate terraced landscape and unusual buildings such as the Yu Feng temple, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. We start off with quiet roads and moderate inclines and build up to two climbs before lunch, neither long but the second is on cobblestones. Soon after we'll stop for lunch at the small but pretty Jade Lade. We continue on a few kilometres of rough dirt track before we're back onto tarmac and a welcome descent to get ready for our last but longest ascent for the day. Its seven kilometres up but the road is good, and the view is spectacular. We have our last descent down to the valley of Bai Shui He and our home for the night, a quiet location with awesome views of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and renowned for its crystal blue waters.

Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 54km

Day 6: Bai Shui He to Tiger Leaping Gorge

Few rides can match the magnificent scenery and sense of adventure when cycling through the famous Tiger Leaping Gorge of the Yangtze River, a spectacular mountain area. This is one of the deepest and most dramatic gorges in the world, rising 3900m from the river to the snow capped peaks. (Twice the height of the Grand Canyon!). We start the day with a substantial climb along cliff hugging roads with dramatic drops and, following a descent to match, head into the valley floor of the Hei Shui River. A second and more difficult climb due to cobblestones brings us to Mao Niu Ping and a well deserved coffee break. A final short climb and we'll be at our highest point of the trip, 3300m. Here we take a well-deserved rest and look down at the tiny Naxi villages nestled in the hillside. We then brace ourselves for a spectacular 30km downhill descent on rocky roads to Daju. From here we hike down to the river, cross in a small ferry (with the bikes) and then a steep climb out of the gorge for 2km. We then ride the remaining 10km into the gorge along the spectacular road that has been cut out of the steep cliffs. As we cycle up the Yangtze you will be amazed by the height of the canyon walls towering above us. Our efforts are rewarded when we reach the narrowest part (20 metres) of the gorge that takes its name from the myth of a tiger escaping its hunters by leaping across this gap. We stop at a small cluster of houses (Walnut Grove) half way up the gorge for an overnight stay in a guesthouse. A warm top will be needed as the steep gorge hides the sun after 3.00pm. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 62km / 2km hike*

Day 7: Free day in the Gorge

To celebrate our 'half way' achievement we've scheduled a free day in the gorge to rest your legs and take in the breathtaking scenery. For the energetic there is the option of taking a hike to the bottom of the gorge following small dirt paths along its dramatic cliff edges. Otherwise, just sit back and be mesmerized by the sheer natural beauty of this remarkable natural wonder. *Meals: breakfast only*

Day 8: Tiger Leaping Gorge to Shigu

A pretty days ride out of the gorge, winding back along the Yangtze river through remote towns, road side villages and terraced paddy fields. We will follow the river to what is known as the 'first bend' of the Yangtze since leaving Tibet. This is a popular spot for local women to sell fruit and other local produce. On the bank of the river there is a memorial hall commemorating the famous Long March. Today's ride is a mixture of long patches of flat road, some spiralling hills and nice descents. Overnight at the ancient town of Shigu, where the river was crossed in 1936 by the People's Army led by Mao Zedong. It is also believed that Khublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, crossed here when Mongolia was the largest empire in the world. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 70km*

Day 9: Shigu to Jian Chuan

Another memorable day that will take us into the heart of rural Yunnan as we ride along the 'Old Tibet' road past tranquil scenes of mud brick villages, bamboo groves, rivers and paddy fields. After the initial leg warm-up 10-km climb, the rest of the day is flat enjoyable riding through rural scenery.

You really sense a feeling of timelessness as the way of life here has remained unchanged for centuries. Cycling through the numerous day markets where villagers from the local area come to buy, sell and socialise provides plenty of opportunities for interaction with the colourfully dressed minority groups of the Yi, Naxi, Bai and Ben. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 57km*

Day 10: Jian Chuan to Er Yuan

This is one of our hardest days riding. After a gentle start to the day passing small towns we start our Challenge of 11 km grinding up and over a long steep winding mountain road covered in terraced paddy fields resembling giant staircases. Our burning quads are rewarded with a good rest and an inspiring panorama at the top. There is an exhilarating down hill on the other side as we enter the mouth of the valley that leads to Dali! We end the day in Er Yuan where we can soothe our leg muscles in its famous hot springs. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 65km*

Day 11 Er Yuan to Dali

This morning is the last leg of our Challenge as we ride to the historical town of Dali. Cycling along flat sealed road between the towering Canshan Mountain range and Er Hai Lake, we should arrive in Old Dali in time for a late lunch. This fascinating town is home to the Bai people, one of the nation's largest minorities and once the centre of the powerful 8th Century Nanzhao Kingdom. Dali is an extraordinary town to explore with its gated city walls, bustling old streets and lakeside setting. The local Bai people can be seen in traditional dress as they come to market for the day. In the 16th Century Dali was an important gateway for cultural exchange and trading with South East Asian countries. It was also an important pass on the ancient "Silk route of the South". Today it is a melting pot of different ethnic groups, which is reflected in its splendid architecture cobbled streets and colourful street markets. It is no wonder that it has been the subject of Chinese poems for centuries. *Meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Distance cycled: 48km*

Days 12-14 Dali to Kunming / fly home

We transfer in the morning from Dali back to Kunming by private bus. Our flight departs the following afternoon to Singapore and then on to Australia. We arrive home in the early morning of day 14.

Meals: breakfast and lunch on day 12 / breakfast on day 13