

ACTIVITY
ZONE

CYCLING

*Profit from pedal power!***Cycling boosts health and fitness, children's concentration and helps families bond****Arundhati Nath**

Shruthi S. Murthy

In 21st century India's overcrowded cities clogged with heavy traffic and noxious fumes, cycling has lost its charm. Upto the early 1990s, children cycling around their neighbourhoods or to school was a common sight. Unfortunately, today with urban India recording perhaps the highest road fatalities worldwide — 17 deaths every hour — children or adults cycling on the country's unsafe roads is a rarity.

But the good news is that there's growing interest in outdoor cycling trips/excursions either in groups or as family. Long distance cycling away from the city's choked roads helps reduce stress and body fat levels, and improves cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and flexibility. Cycling is widely acknowledged as the ideal low-impact exercise to boost health and fitness.

A 2017 study published in the *British Medical Journal* has found that cycling to work is associated with substantial decrease in the risk of death from cancer and cardiovascular diseases, compared with non-active commuting by car or public transport. While cycling is good for adults, it is even

better for children as it boosts their concentration. A 2012 study in Denmark, which surveyed 20,000 children between the ages of five and 19, found that kids who cycled or walked to school, rather than by car or public transport, performed measurably better in tasks demanding concentration, such as solving puzzles.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY ACTIVITY

Cycling is also great for family bonding. Comments **Pankaj Mangal**, founder and trip leader at Art of Bicycle Trips, Bengaluru, which organises family/group cycling excursions: "Cycling is refreshing compared to other outdoor activities because it's a simple and active sport in which all family members can participate. Adults and children will enjoy the journey and destination if they cycle together. Three years ago, we organised our first seven-day family bicycle tour of Kerala. Since then, we have had many families signing up for day trips in Kochi and Udaipur," says Mangal.

Bangalore-based **Shruthi Shivshankar Murthy** (27), who left her corporate job to cycle from Kashmir to Kanyakumari to spread awareness about gender equality, believes that parents must encourage children to take up cycling as a hobby. "Children love cycling as it is a fun activity and it gives them freedom and independence. It also develops mental positivity and boosts health and fitness. I took up cycling as a hobby, and soon realised that not many women were into cycling. Society viewed cycling as a man's sport. This spurred me to break the stereotype and go on a cross-country cycling trip to promote gender equality," says Murthy whose journey began on February 8 last year from Jammu.

Cycling an average 100 km daily, she conducted interactive workshops on gender issues and menstrual health in schools en route. In all, she covered over 4,000 km in 45 days, on her trusty Rockrider bicycle.

So, take a break from the monotonous city life and explore the countryside on family biking excursions. It will rejuvenate bodies and minds.

FAMILY/SOLO/GROUP CYCLING TRIP ORGANISERS

Art of Bicycle Trips organises unique cycling and multi-sport adventure tours across India and Asia. Contact Pankaj Mangal at 78294 86953 or email pankaj@artofbicycletrips.com.

GIO Adventures. Apart from camping, hiking and rafting activities, GIO Adventures also organises cycling trips. Contact them at info@gio.in or call +91 7895979203 or visit <https://www.gio.in/>

PEDL by Zoomcar. The car-rental agency Zoomcar also rents bicycles. You can rent a cycle in your city at just Rs.10 per hour and pay via PayTM, and drop off the cycle at any Pedl location in the city. Book online at <https://pedl.zoomcar.com/>