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Family-friendly cycling tours in the Toronto region

Dean Campbell
Special to the Star

Travelling by bicycle often conjures images of dirty, sweaty cyclists riding bikes laden with gear — cover models for the adventure travel section of your local bookstore.

However, with a little planning, travelling by bicycle can be a liberating experience, easily enjoyed without any of the mess and fuss.

Cycling offers perspectives on places new and familiar, a sense of accomplishment, and a good dose of fresh air. All without the traffic torture that bookends a typical long weekend out of the city.

Perhaps one of the best sources for information on travelling with a bike is [bikesandtransit.com](#). Operated by Donald Wiedman, the website provides an assortment of trip ideas, as well as a wealth of information on what to bring and how to plan your first trip — even how to get on a GO train or the subway with your bike.

Wiedman put the site together based on his own experiences, travelling by bike with his family.

"I've done a 60-km ride with my 8-year-old," he says. "The trick is making a lot of stops and travelling at their pace. Keeping an eye out for ice-cream trucks doesn't hurt either."

For those who've already travelled by public transit and bikes, Wiedman still has some valuable tips. Anyone trying it for the first time will find his site indispensable.

Many of the trips detailed on the site are easily accomplished in a day trip, but can easily be adapted for an overnight.

"If you don't have a rack on your bike, you can fit a change of clothes in a backpack, along with some water and snacks," says Wiedman. "Combined with a hotel, you'll have everything you need."

For a family-friendly weekend, he suggests taking the GO train west from Toronto to Aldershot station. From there, a bike lane runs along Brant Street to old Burlington, often a bustling place on long weekends. Continuing west along the Waterfront Trail — maps are posted along its length from Niagara Falls to the Quebec border — will take you to Wild Waterworks in Hamilton's Confederation Park. With a go-kart track in the park, you can also get a four-wheel fix.

"It makes for a big day, but it's a lot of fun," says Wiedman. "There's some old beachfront motels, and good family restaurants nearby, so it's easy to turn into a family weekend. For 14- or 15-year-olds, it would be ideal."

Another of Wiedman's suggestions, tested with his 8-year-old son, is to ride along the Welland Canal from Port Colborne to St. Catharines. Coach Canada runs a bike-friendly bus service to Port Colborne, and the GO train will take Torontonians home from St. Catharines.

"Pedal Bicycle Shop in Port Colborne can help with maps, as will the tourism kiosk in town," says Wiedman. "You'll want to be comfortable with a map but the route is all bike path, with no car traffic, and very scenic."

Wiedman recommends [welcomecyclists.ca](#) as a guide to bike-friendly restaurants, shops and accommodations, a welcome resource for planning a trip.

[Biketrain.ca](#) offers information on how to travel in Ontario with a bike, including multiple routes with schedule and fare information. Making use of a train or bus to get you and your bike out of the city — known as intermodal travel — is a great way to avoid traffic.



Next weekend, skip the planning, packing and traffic of the cottage rush, and try getting around on two wheels.

AARON HARRIS/FOR THE TORONTO STAR

The original route runs from Toronto to Niagara Falls. Operated by GO Transit, the train stops in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

The Niagara Falls station is close to the Niagara River Recreation Trail. At 56 km long, it's the perfect way to ride along and take in the Niagara Gorge, or visit area wineries. But remember, bikes are vehicles under the Highway Traffic Act, so behave yourself.

The service runs from June 30 to Sept. 3, on weekends and holidays. Additional routes offer service west to Windsor and east to Ottawa and Montreal.

Riders who want to stay closer to home can use a bike to uncover some of Toronto's best kept secrets.

"Cycling is always a great way to get around," says urban cycling consultant Yvonne Bambrick. "You can travel at your own pace, stop whenever you want, and see parts of the city you'll never see otherwise."

If you're looking to explore different parts of the city, look no farther than Toronto's ravines and other greenspace.

Starting in 2010, the city began to develop the hydro and rail corridors in the east end. Combined with ravine trails and quiet on-street bike routes, these are a perfect option for those who think cycling in Toronto requires jostling with inner-city traffic.

"The Scarborough Bluffs are always a great challenge," says Bambrick. "If you've never been, it really is impressive. Also, linking together the valleys in the city will make a wonderful ride. You'll never know what sort of wildlife you'll see in the Humber or the Don."

Bambrick points out that being prepared is key to having a great weekend ride.

"Make sure to take some food and water — picnics are great! Pace yourself and enjoy the ride, and don't try to go too far. Carry a few TTC tokens in case you want a little help getting home."

For information on how to get around in Toronto while keeping things relaxed, check out ridethecity.com, a mapping website that plots out the safest routes around the city, and locates the closest bike shops in case you need a tune-up or flat repair. With a mobile app version, it's the perfect companion for exploring Toronto.

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And keep an eye out for ice-cream trucks.