

SUMMER OF CYCLING

7 Great Biking Cities (and Which Trails to Ride)

There's no better way to zip through a new city than on two wheels. Here are some routes to try, from riverside jaunts to mountain climbs.

May 23, 2022

A bike is a game changer when exploring a new city: It's cheap, speedy and a fun way get in some exercise while on vacation.

From a 1,300-foot climb in Bogotá to a 22-mile, best-of-Paris loop (don't worry, there's wine and ice cream at the end), seven writers offer their favorite rides in cities known for their urban trails.



Adorable architecture? Yes. Active military base? Yes. A ride by Kastellet begins this cruise around Copenhagen. Andreas Meichsner for The New York Times

Copenhagen





By The New York Times

Head south along the waterfront from the statue of Hans Christian Anderson's Little Mermaid, and you'll soon pass Kastellet, whose cute red barracks belie its status as an active military base, before crossing the cobblestone square that is home to the royal palace, Amalienborg. (Keep an eye out for Prince Frederik, who frequently pulls up to the gates on his cargo bike.) Zip past the candy-colored houses of the old harbor, Nyhavn, and back down to the water's edge, where the old city gives way to the sharp angles of the Royal Library and the chunky architecture of Blox, which houses the Danish Design Center. From here, you can turn left immediately to sail over Lille Langebro, the city's newest bicycle bridge, or pedal on to the serpentine Cykelslangen. Either way, you'll land in the harborfront neighborhood of Islands Brygge, whose swimming area is a favorite spot for winter bathing and summer tanning.



Riding across the Cykelslangen. Andreas Meichsner for The New York Times

A short jaunt north brings you to the tall masts of the artist Olafur Eliasson's Cirkelbroen, or Circle Bridge. From there, zigzag your way toward the Opera House, stopping at the nearby Hart bakery for buttery pastries. Continuing roughly north will bring you to the dramatic swoop of CopenHill — the Bjarke Ingels-designed power plant and urban ski slope — and from there, it's only a little further on to the Refshaleoen area, where you can find natural wine and more swimming at the dockside restaurant La Banchina, or tasty fried-chicken sandwiches in the garden at Amass restaurant. Someday, you'll be able to return to the starting point via another bridge, but for now, a harbor ferry that departs from the dock outside Amass makes the crossing. And yes, it takes bikes.



The brightly colored townhouses of the old harbor, Nyhavn. Andreas Meichsner for The New York Times

Distance: 7 miles.

Difficulty: Easy.

Good for kids? Yes.

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: La Banchina, Amass, Hart.

Time to ride: 30 to 60 minutes, with no stops.

— LISA ABEND



Nearly a quarter of Bogotá's population takes to two wheels during Ciclovía, when the city is closed to car traffic on Sundays. Federico Rios for The New York Times

Bogotá

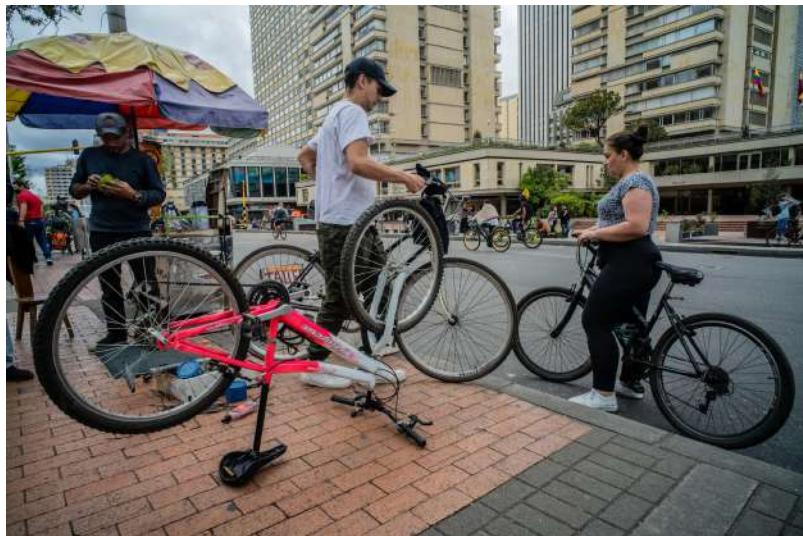


By The New York Times

In cycling-mad Colombia, nothing puts a finer point on the country's frenetic obsession with riding than a Sunday morning in Bogotá, when 70 miles of the city's normally gridlocked streets are closed to motor vehicles. From 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., an estimated two million people — nearly a quarter of the city — take to the streets on two wheels for the closure, called Ciclovía, a mass-participation event dating to the mid-1970s.

But the true fanatics start even earlier. On Bogotá's east side, an avenue leads to the nearby town of La Calera (the road begins just across from a park). There, cyclists begin congregating before sunrise to ride a 3.7-mile, 1,300-foot hill climb called Alto de Patios. By 6:45 a.m., a deluge of riders four and five abreast pours up the hill. The road, just a few car-widths across, cuts pretty oxbows through dense cloud forest as it ascends into the Eastern Hills.

Unlike the laid-back vibe during Ciclovía later in the day, cyclists here jockey for position. The throng of riders is speckled with fans dressed in replica black-and-scarlet Ineos Grenadier jerseys of Egan Bernal, a Tour de France and Giro d'Italia winner from Colombia. And everyone, from would-be racers in Lycra to families with kids on rusted-out clunkers, sprints for the King of the Mountain finish line atop Patios, just shy of 10,000 feet, as if there were real prize money at stake.



A bike tuneup during Ciclovía in Bogotá. Seventy miles of the city's normally gridlocked streets are closed to motor vehicles on Sundays for the event. Federico Rios for The New York Times

With the right pacing, it's a ride that anyone in reasonable shape can do. At flatter stretches, roadside stands offer stools where riders can rest and down a café con leche or fresh-squeezed orange juice to fortify for the journey ahead. Eventually, everyone hits the top for views; on clear days, cyclists are rewarded with the jumble of the city that sweeps out from the verdant foliage below.

Then it's all backslaps and good cheer as cyclists peel off to the myriad hill stalls and cafes to linger over aguapanela, a bracing sugar-cane infusion that makes Gatorade taste like water, and arepas con queso, cheese-stuffed masa cakes available on every corner in Colombia.

Distance: 7.4 miles (there and back).

Difficulty: Challenging. A 1,293-foot climb, but plenty of places to rest along the way.

Good for kids? Older kids who are accustomed to riding will do fine. Younger children will want to stop along the way for snacks and a rest. (They won't be alone.)

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: Roadside stands.

Time to ride: 30 to 90 minutes, depending on your speed and if you stop along the way.

— AARON GULLEY



The Hudson River Greenway, which stretches 13 miles from Battery Park at the foot of Manhattan to the Inwood neighborhood in the north, is the most popular cycling route in the city. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

New York City



By The New York Times

The Hudson River Greenway is the most popular cycling route in the city. Riding this path through a series of linear parks on the western edge of Manhattan is your chance to fall in with locals while cruising along the mighty river that helped make New York the powerhouse it is.

You can hop on the Greenway, which is part of the island-circling Manhattan Waterfront Greenway, at multiple points along its 13-mile length between Battery Park, at the southern foot of the island, and Inwood, on the northern tip. But consider launching from the intersection of Chambers and West Streets off Tribeca, where views of the river open up (and there's a Citi Bike dock; \$15 per day). Pedal north and keep your eyes peeled for cultural hot spots.

On your right, across West Street: the High Line and the Whitney Museum of American Art. On your left, rising from the river: Little Island, an undulating landscape atop what look like champagne coupes or upside-down garlic heads, depending on your point of view. Just north of it, another mini park has just opened to the public atop Pier 57 (and, come June, will serve as an outdoor cinema for the Tribeca Festival).



The Little Red Lighthouse, immortalized in a 1942 picture book beloved by many New York families, awaits under the George Washington Bridge. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Continuing north, past the Intrepid aircraft carrier and slips where cruise ships dock, there's a small sculpture park. The bike path then veers slightly inland in Riverside Park, cutting a wide swath around the West 79th Street Boat Basin, now being renovated. But the river remains in view and, soon enough, you're back alongside it. Up ahead, the George Washington Bridge looms, a brawny feat of engineering connecting New York to New Jersey.

The last stretch of the Greenway involves a killer hill. Instead, turn around at the base of the bridge and meet a treasured local landmark: the Little Red Lighthouse, immortalized in a 1942 picture book beloved by many New York families.

Distance: 13 miles, one-way (length of the entire Hudson River Greenway).

Difficulty: Easy.

Good for kids: Yes.

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: Grab a seat with a river view at Pier 57's City Winery at 15th Street, off Chelsea.

Time to ride: 1 to 2 hours of pedaling — or up to a day if you stop to explore along the way.

— JANE MARGOLIES



A 22-mile loop through France's capital hits many of must-see attractions, from the Eiffel Tower to the Louvre. It ends as many days in Paris do — with wine. Joann Pai for The New York Times

Paris



By The New York Times

Paris is a city transformed by bike lanes. Mayor Anne Hidalgo has already spent 150 million euros (\$158 million) developing the first stage of the city's bike plan, aimed at making the city "100 percent bikeable" by 2026, when it plans to have added 112 miles of protected cycling paths.

This 22-mile loop takes advantage of the new cycling infrastructure, mixing in many of the city's main attractions and plenty of green spaces.

From Place de la République, follow Canal Saint-Martin north. Early in the morning, the bike lane is often deserted, save for a few joggers. A short ride leads to Bassin de la Villette, which has playgrounds and park benches with soft morning light. In the summer, the city transforms this section of the canal into an outdoor swimming area.

Turn around and ride south along the canal to Rue Amelot, in the 11th Arrondissement. The quiet side street leads to Place de la Bastille. This can be a tricky roundabout, but after hitting Boulevard Henri IV, it is a straight shot to Île Saint-Louis, where you will be rewarded with views of Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower.

After cycling along the Seine, the route cuts into the Left Bank for the longest climb of the day, which finishes at the Pantheon overlooking Luxembourg Gardens.

From here, the path rejoins the Seine, following the river to the Eiffel Tower. After crossing the Pont d'Iéna and a short but steep climb past Trocadéro, the route winds through classic Haussmannian architecture to Bois de Boulogne, a park two-and-a-half times the size of Central Park. The lake is a perfect picnic stop (you can swing by the nearby Desgranges to pick up your lunch, including their "Passy Passion" baguettes).





The bar at Folderol. Joann Pai for The New York Times





Your reward. Joann Pai for The New York Times

The route returns along the Right Bank of the Seine, passing the Tuileries Garden and the Louvre. After riding along the river's banks, return to street level at Pont Louis-Philippe to cross Île Saint-Louis.

Back on the Left Bank, the route leads to outdoor dance squares at Jardin Tino Rossi, where people salsa and waltz along the riverbank. The final section takes you over the Pont d'Austerlitz, and follows Bassin de l'Arsenal past picturesque houseboats to Bastille and back along Canal Saint-Martin.

Finish the ride on a small side street near République where you'll find Folderol, a wine and ice cream bar. Their selection of natural wines and housemade ice cream is a well-earned reward for hours of cycling.

Distance: 22 miles.

Difficulty: Easy to moderate. About 500 feet of elevation.

Good for kids: Yes. The parts with the most traffic are the Bastille roundabout and the area near Trocadéro.

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: Near République: Dreamin' Man for coffee, or Mamiche has excellent pastries and sandwiches. Near Pantheon: Treize au Jardin, for its lovely and relaxed terrace. Near Île Saint-Louis: Le Peloton Café, for coffee, waffles and bike expertise; and Berthillon is a Paris classic.

Time to ride: 2.5 to 4 hours, depending on stops.

Bike repairs: La Chouette near the start of the route for any bike tuneups. Friendly staff and very knowledgeable.

— SOPHIE STUBER



Washington, D.C., has an extensive web of interconnected bike routes. Melissa Lytle for The New York Times

Washington, D.C.



By The New York Times

Washington has been bullish on biking in recent years. A number of government agencies and nonprofits oversee and maintain miles of dedicated lanes, bike-friendly roads and gravel trails through the capital, Virginia and Maryland, making the greater Washington area one of the most bike-friendly regions in the country.

One roughly 20-mile loop in Northwest Washington and Maryland — a local favorite — meanders through Rock Creek Park and Georgetown and along the Potomac River and the C & O Canal, providing a scenic window to the area's colonial history, vital waterways and abundant green spaces.

Start by biking south in Rock Creek Park, a densely forested valley in the middle of the city that runs roughly north to south from the Maryland border. The park's dedicated bike trail meanders for miles next to the happily bubbling creek, past the National Zoo, over stone bridges and up wooded hills. It's a downhill adventure at every twist and turn. On weekends, the park's main artery, Beach Drive, is closed to cars, providing more road for bikers. There's an added bonus in the summer: The verdant greenery shields you from the hot sun; to avoid the worst of the area's notorious humidity, however, it's best to bike early in the morning.



A number of government agencies and nonprofits oversee and maintain miles of dedicated lanes, bike-friendly roads and gravel trails through the capital, Virginia and Maryland. Melissa Lytle for The New York Times

Ride alongside the creek to the Potomac River, near the Georgetown and Foggy Bottom neighborhoods. Many bikers take a right at the river through Georgetown, where you can enjoy the area's brightly painted and lovingly restored historic homes, to pick up the Capital Crescent Trail.

The Capital Crescent, a dedicated bike trail, was once the 11-mile Georgetown Branch of the B & O Railroad and now runs parallel to the C & O Canal, one of the country's major transit arteries before the advent of the railroad; parts of it are now preserved. On the Capital Crescent, you ascend slightly as you glimpse rowers from Georgetown University and other boaters on the Potomac, and ride through the soaring Dalecarlia Tunnel or over one of the many rehabilitated railroad bridges. As you bike in a northeast direction, you'll be surrounded with lush greenery.

In the region, there's a tremendous amount of work currently being done to expand bike trails and other public transit options; as a result, one branch of the C.C.T. is currently closed. So enjoy the detour, which will take you past lavish houses in the Maryland suburbs of Bethesda and Chevy Chase as you bike east on streets to pick up Beach Drive again.

Affordable bike rentals can be found at the many docking stations operated by Capital Bikeshare.



Many benches can be found along the Capital Crescent Trail for impromptu picnics, if you need a rest. *Melissa Lyttle for The New York Times*

Distance: 20 miles.

Difficulty: Moderate, with 300 feet of elevation, at most.

Good for kids? Yes. Many sections on the C.C.T. are flat and on dedicated trails, and the no-cars rule in Rock Creek makes it a family-friendly option on weekends.

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: Georgetown provides ample places to pick up food or drink, with Baked and Wired selling delicious “cakecups” in various flavors and with almost overwhelming frosting. Many benches can be found in Georgetown and Rock Creek and on the C.C.T. for impromptu picnics.

Time to ride: 2 to 3 hours, depending on stops.

— ELISABETH GOODRIDGE



Riding through Jardin Anglais in Geneva, Switzerland. Andrea Wyner for The New York Times

Geneva



By The New York Times

Here's an easy route that takes you through quintessential Geneva, with a stop in the United Nations area, a cruise along a lakeside promenade, a quick dip in the lake, then a swing past the city's historic center.

From the Cornavin train station, head north up the gently sloping Rue de Montbrillant and into the heart of Geneva's international district. Stop for a wander around the plaza in front of the city's iconic Broken Chair, just in front of the main offices of the United Nations in Geneva. From there, coast downhill to the shady and manicured Parc Mon Repos, then along the lakeside promenade of the Quai Wilson, taking in views of Mont Blanc in the distance if the weather is good.

Set off across the Mont Blanc Bridge, at Lake Geneva's westernmost tip, then pause for a photo of the famous flower clock in the Jardin Anglais. From there, continue along the lake and past the Jet d'Eau — a fountain that shoots more than 400 feet into the air. Then lock up your bike and go for a swim (or just lounge on the sand) at the public beach at Baby-Plage.

For the final leg, head back along the lake, then wind around the edge of Geneva's Old Town (the Vienne Ville) to the Plaine de Plainpalais, where you can ogle a creepy statue of Frankenstein's monster, who committed murder along this very stretch in Mary Shelley's famous novel. From there, it's a short ride back to the train station.



Rue des Alpes. Andrea Wyner for The New York Times

Distance: About 7.5 miles.

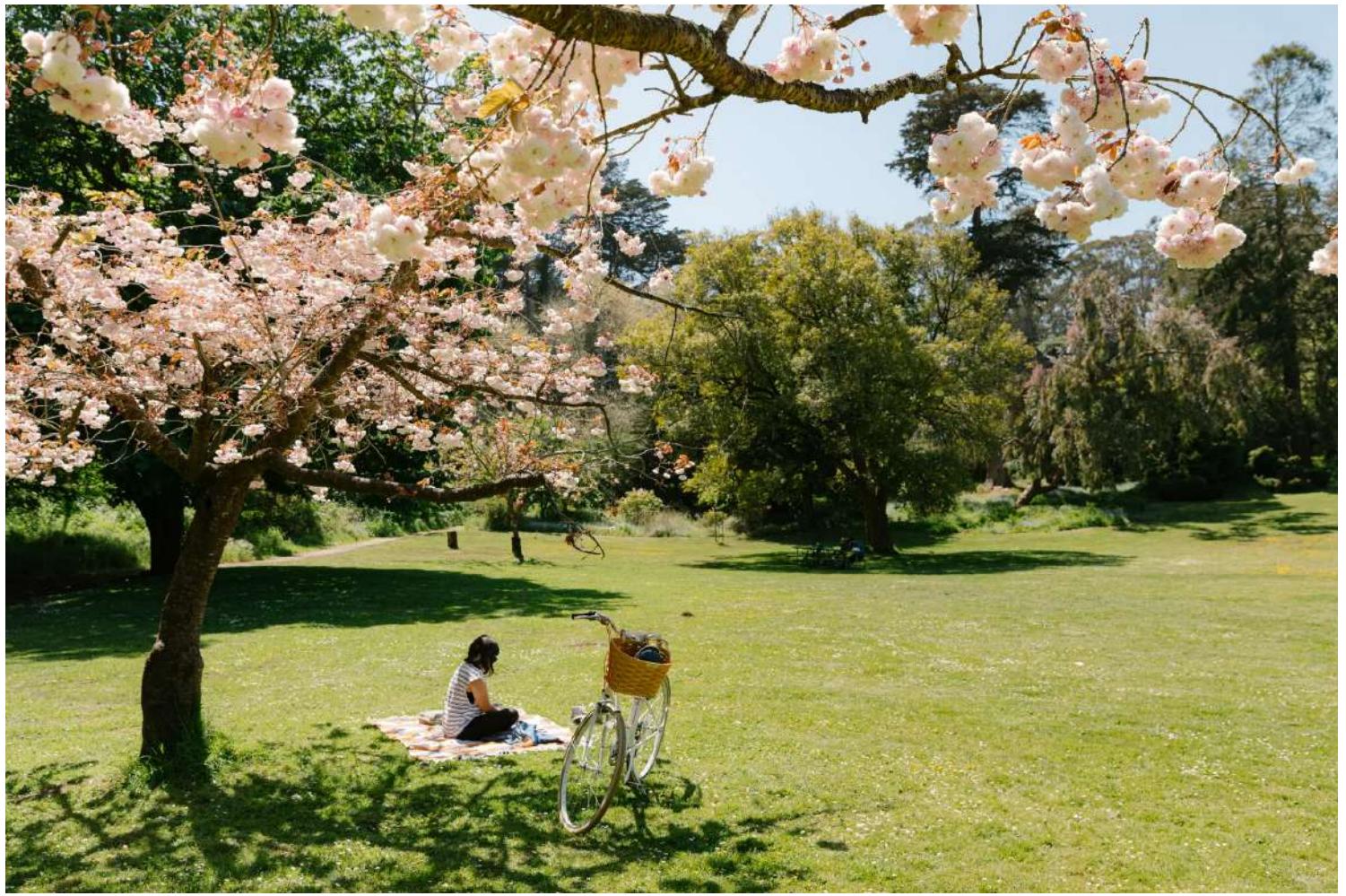
Difficulty: Easy; one moderate climb, but otherwise mostly flat or downhill.

Good for kids? Children need to be able to navigate some road traffic in places.

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: La Buvette des Bains, along Quai Wilson.

Time to ride: 1 to 3 hours, depending on stops.

— PAIGE MCCLANAHAN



A rest in Pioneer East Meadow in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, Calif. Jason Henry for The New York Times

San Francisco



By The New York Times

"The Wiggle" began as a footpath for the original people of San Francisco, the Ohlone tribe. The squiggly path through the city's center allows walkers (and now bicyclists) to bypass the city's legendary hills and enjoy a mostly flat trip from downtown to the shining jewel of the west coast, Golden Gate Park.

It was already a very good park for biking, but recent efforts by Car-Free JFK and others have successfully closed the park's central artery, John F. Kennedy Drive, to car traffic seven days a week. When biking it, you will likely share the road with a mix of retiree cyclists, preteen skateboarders and enthusiastic disciples of the "Godfather of Rollerskating," David Miles.

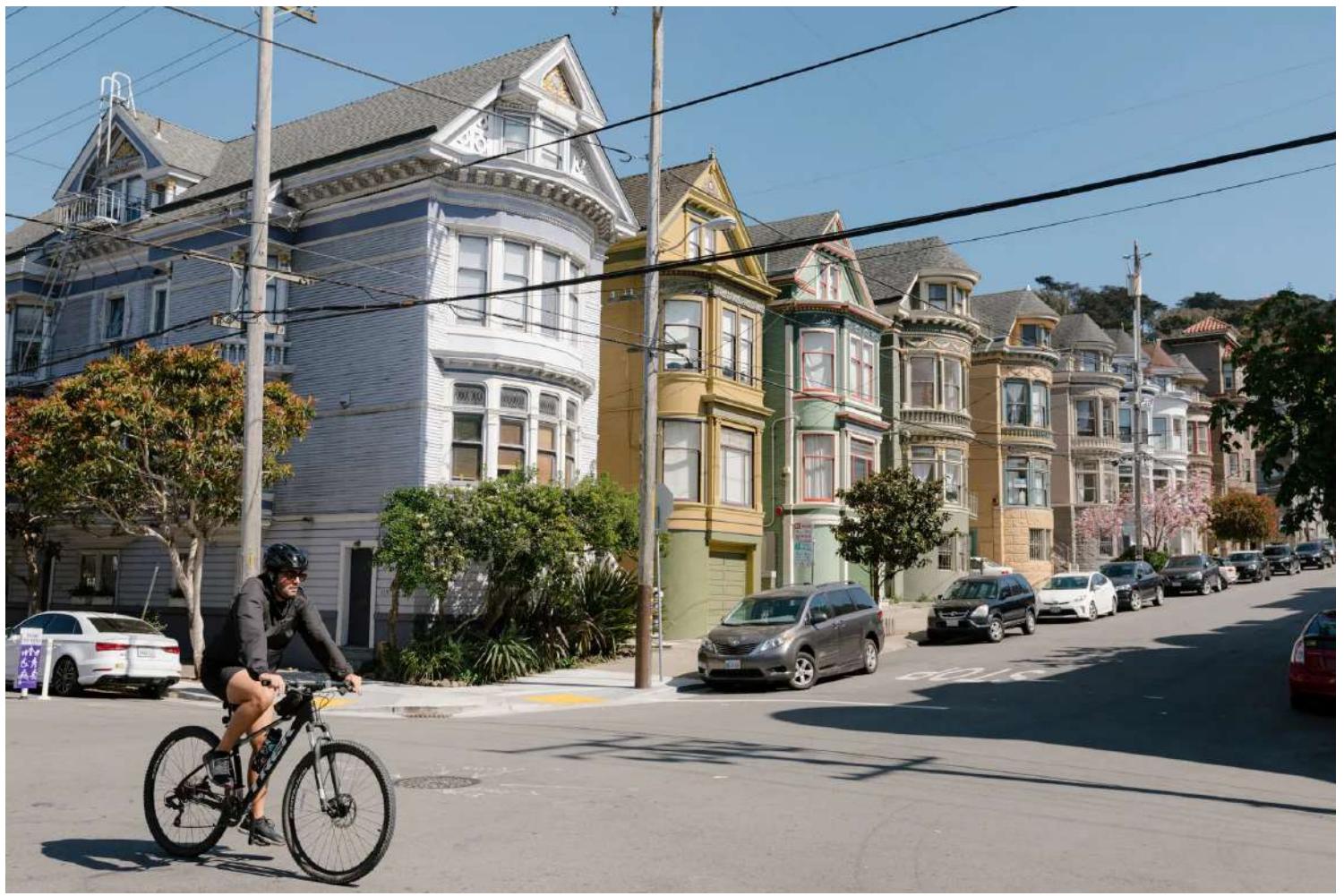
Start at the Civic Center BART station, an easy connection to the entire Bay Area. Take Market Street southwest to the Wiggle, which begins on Duboce Avenue behind a large Safeway store on the corner. Once you get to the park, if you're not in the mood for pretzels or food truck fare, stay to the south on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, passing the AIDS Memorial Grove, to easily reach the restaurants and shops of 9th Avenue. The spicy veggie pho at Sunflower Garden Vietnamese includes chunks of king oyster mushrooms and plenty of crunchy and juicy toppings.



The spicy veggie pho at Sunflower Garden Vietnamese. Jason Henry for The New York Times

Other 9th Avenue favorites: an outpost of the Oakland cooperative bakery Arizmendi, Green Apple Books and Ebisu Sushi.

Re-enter the park and take Stow Lake Drive around Stow Lake and then pick up JFK Drive, meandering peacefully through car-free paths and past award-winning landscape design. Heading back, ride downhill to Market Street via Page Street, a designated "Slow Street" that limits car traffic. Restored Victorian homes in all hues and friendly neighborhood bars line your path. Wholesome Bakery, with bike racks out front, has delicious strawberry galettes and fudge brownies to take home. It's a smooth 10 minutes back to the BART station or other downtown destinations.



Page Street is a designated “Slow Street” that limits car traffic. Jason Henry for The New York Times

Distance: About 8 miles.

Difficulty: Easy. About 280 feet maximum elevation.

Good for kids? Yes.

Where to eat/fill up your water bottle: Public water refill stations, Sunflower Garden Vietnamese, Arizmendi, Ebisu Sushi, Wholesome Bakery.

Time to ride: 1 to 2 hours, depending on stops.

— NINA F. ICHIKAWA

Correction: May 23, 2022

An earlier version of this article included a photo caption that misidentified a location. It is Île Saint-Louis in Paris, not Place de la République.

Correction: May 23, 2022

The article also misspelled the name of the “Godfather of Rollerskating” in San Francisco. It is David Miles, not David Mills.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section F, Page 6 of the New York edition with the headline: 7 Great Biking Cities (and Which Trails to Ride)