



FORGET TUSCANY AND THE LOIRE VALLEY, EAST GIPPSLAND IS THE NEW HOT SPOT FOR CYCLING TOURS

While cycling tours might be more synonymous with European countries like France and Italy, Victoria is becoming an increasingly popular destination for cycling tourists.

In fact, Victoria is home to the most developed rail trails in Australia, making it the perfect destination for a cycling holiday.

Liz Mitchell from Snowy River Cycling says there are a wealth of outstanding cycle routes on both forestry tracks and rail trails in East Gippsland, where she has run her cycling tour business for the past eight years. She says the abandoned rail corridors converted into multi-use paths - for walking, cycling and horse riding - not only make for a "safe and easy, cycling experience" but a picturesque one.

A former veterinarian and passionate cycle tourist herself, Mitchell launched Snowy River Cycling in 2010 after identifying an "untapped potential to use the area's network of rail trails to showcase East Gippsland's stunning natural environment."

"Being a cycling tourist myself I knew there was a growing appetite for cycling tours in this country", Mitchell says. "Having lived in Orbost for some time and experienced first-hand the many amazing rail trails in the area, not to mention the breathtaking scenery and wildlife, I knew it was the perfect region to see by bike."

Mitchell was right. Eight years on and her three to six-day guided tours through legendary Snowy River country, high alpine meadows, lush rainforests, quaint townships and a wild coastline, frequently book out months in advance. She also facilitates up to 50 self-guided tours along the East Gippsland Rail Trail - between Bairnsdale and Orbost - each year.

Then there is Snowy River Cycling's annual Great East Rail Trail Ride - a three-day cycling event that now attracts 120 participants, taking them on a gentle 100-kilometre journey through forest, farmland and friendly country towns with plenty of rest stops for river-side picnics and hearty country pub meals.

In nearby Lakes Entrance, local adventure business, Venture Out, also offer guided mountain bike tours on custom-built forest single-tracks, ranging from hour-long tours to longer 'ride and dine' packages. Mitchell says people come from near and far to experience the region's bike tours.

"More than 50 per cent of our cycling tour patrons are from interstate. But we also attract a small but growing number of international tourists."

Mitchell says while the company's rail trail tours are always popular, their 'Snowgums to Seaweed tour' - a six-day tour through the remote and little-visited Gippsland hinterland, including the Alpine, Snowy River, Errinundra and Cape Conran National Parks - has become increasingly popular.

For the first time this year, Snowy River Cycling will also host a rail trail tour designed specifically for families. With no cars, small hills and regular ice cream stops, the tour covers three rail trails over four days with family friendly accommodation and a support vehicle.

"The Family Rail Trail Tour is running for the first time in November and it's already booked out," says Mitchell, adding that the popularity of such tours reflects the growing demand for cycling holidays in Australia and the diverse make up of cycling tourists, from serious Lycra-clad cyclists to leisure bike riders of all ages.

*Prices for guided tours range from \$478.50 per person twin share for a three-day tour and up to \$1600 - \$1900 pp twin share for a six-day tour, including meals and accommodation. The cost of self-guided tours is approximately \$150-\$200 per person, per day, depending on the level of service required.

For more information visit: <https://www.snowyrivercycling.com.au/> or <https://ventureout.com.au/tours/>.

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