

Cycling Tourism in China

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Introduction

As a branch of tourism, and to be more specific, sports tourism, cycling tourism has undergone rapid development in western countries. It is similar to conventional tour, but it is also different from conventional tour with its own features. Like conventional tour, cycling tourism requires that the guide meet the clients and see them off at the airport. Also there will be vehicles which are rented by the travel agency to transfer the clients out of the city and the guide will lead the way. But cycling tourism differs from conventional tour in that the vehicles just follow the cyclists, because the vehicles transport luggage for them and pick them up when they feel too tired to cycle again, and transport them to that day's destination according to the plan. They will stay in hotel at night and have meals in restaurants. What should be complemented is that there will be many problems when they are cycling, especially the bicycle, so the guide must be very versatile. He should have the capacity to fix the bikes. Besides, some food and water are necessary to them. It also puts high demands on the participants of cycling tourism, either the guides or the clients.

Cycling tourism has developed greatly in western countries, but it has little room for further development, so it is extremely urgent to spread it to other countries, especially in China.

Cycling tourism is feasible in China, taking into account its favorable geographic conditions, rich historical and cultural relics. Its natural location and internal topography provides necessary factors for cycling tourism in China. Its rich historical and cultural relics provide abundant resources for cycling tourism. In addition, Chinese people's increasing awareness of the importance of health and the benefits brought about by cycling tourism all ensure the feasibility of cycling tourism in China. Cycling tourism will have a gorgeous prospect in China in the future.

Chapter One: An Overview of Cycling Tourism

Bicycle is very familiar to us. It has a zigzagged road on its history. In order to know about cycling tourism, we should take the history of bicycle and sports tourism into consideration.

1.1 History of Bicycle

Bicycle, as one important means of transportations, has a long history. But who invented it is still a mystery. However, the origin of bicycle itself dates back to Paris in 1791, when Comte de Sivrace unveiled a machine riding on two large wheels in the gardens of Palais Royal(Yu Jiying, 2005). The primitive bicycle boasted a padded saddle and a flat handlebar, although the front wheel did not turn for steering purposes. The design was somewhat improved when Karl, Baron von Drais built what he called a “walking machine or shift walker” in 1817 (Ma Guoli, 2004). But something was still missing. Like Sivrac’s bike, von Drais’ device lacked pedals, forcing riders to push the machine with their feet. The velocipede, or fast foot, remedied this situation by attaching pedal directly to the front wheel, much like the modern child’s tricycle. Constructed entirely of wood, it soon earned the nickname of “the boneshaker”(Zhou Qiuyan and Chen Baoqi,1992). This design was improved once again in 1842, when Scottish blacksmith Kirpatrik Macmillan built a series of connecting rods to drive the rear wheel from a set of pedals located directly under the rider. When rubber tires replaced wood and steel in 1868, the package was almost complete. The addition of pneumatic tires in 1888 made the bicycle worthy of riding and racing over long distances.

Since then, the sport’s evolution has been a steady climb as athletes and engineers experiment with anything that might shave a few seconds off their times. The sport’s boom in the late 19th century made it a natural for the first modern Olympic Games in 1896.

1.2 Sports Tourism

Sports tourism is a branch of tourism. It is a social, economic and cultural phenomenon derived from communication and transportation between different people. “The earliest record of sports tourism can date back to the Olympic Games in 776 B.C.”(Liu Boli and Tao Yuping, 2000). From the 16th century, the rapid development of communication and transportation made tour and travel easy, so chances for sports tour increase greatly. From the second half of the 19th century, industrialization provided necessary factors for sports tours. It also laid a foundation for sports tourism in various social strata in the 20th century. During the 20th century, the improvement of communication gave impetus to unprecedented development for sports tourism. Proper tour price, top-notch service in restaurants and hotels, change of value, emergence of grand sport events and governmental dominance all provide indispensable factors for sports tourism.

Sports tourism is very popular in recent years. But actually it is the business of tourism which spurred by sport events. It happens when the sport events are held to spur tourism on purpose. Some sports tours take place after the sport events, and some are called spontaneous tours which happen when the sport events are being held. Sports tourism concerns all the tourism industry, carries out sales promotion through sport events and spurs broader cooperation among people from different parts of the world.

1.3 Cycling Tourism

Cycling tourism is a branch of sports tourism. Through cycling out for tours to get close to the nature, it shows the cyclist the natural scenery and historical and cultural relics. Besides, it practices the cyclist's body and provides extreme challenge. It shares a same feature with tourism and sports tourism—planning. It is very important for the guide and clients to have a plan for every tour. Another important feature is the high demands on the language skill and physical constitution of clients and staff of the tour. Actually, sometimes we can call it “Extreme Game”. But it will be easier when a support vehicle follows the tour. Because it can transport

the clients' luggage, tools and food when they are cycling, and take the clients, guide and other things (luggage, tools, food, water and bicycles) together to the destination. It is very challenging to cycle long distance, especially in the mountains.

Compared with routine tours, cycling tours have the following advantages. First, cycling tours not only meet people's need to tour, but also avoid the waste of resources and pollution of environment caused by routine tours. Cycling tours avoid the environmentally unfriendly aspects of burning oil, emitting waste gas, etc., which happen in routine tours. Besides, the idea of environmental protection is enthusiastically advocated through the tour. Secondly, it will exercise the tourists' body, promote the physical constitution of tourists, improve body's metabolism of tourists and make their moral quality vigorous and graceful. At the same time, it will promote the quality of tourists' spiritual and social life (Tang Honggui and Qian Wenjun, 1999). At last, as a new industry, it will provide many opportunities for jobs. It is very important for China which has to alleviate the employment burden, make the society steady and enhance the national economy.

Chapter Two: Feasibility of Cycling Tourism in China

China has the geographical and historical and cultural resources for cycling tourism. It has a territory of 9.6 million kilometers and a history of 5000 years. All the tourist resources show great attraction to the tourists at home and abroad. And many other important factors also pave the way for developing cycling tourism in China.

2.1 Geographical Factors

At first, the broad land in China is very convenient for cycling. Located in East Asian on the western shore of the Pacific Ocean, the People's Republic of China has a land area of about 9.6 million square kilometer, and is the third-largest country in the world, next only to Russia and Canada, which provide enough room for people to cycle. From north to south, the territory of China stretches from the center of the

Heilong River to the Zengmu Reef at the southernmost tip of the Nansha Islands, covering a distance of 5,500 kilometers. From east to west, the nation extends from the confluence of the Heilong and Wusuli rivers to the Pamirs, covering a distance of 5,200 kilometers. With a land boundary of some 22,800 kilometers, China is bordered by Korea to the east, Mongolia to the north, Russia to the northeast, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the northwest, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan to the west and southwest, and Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam to the south. Across the seas to the east and southeast are the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia (Pan Anding and Lin Meizhen, 2005).

Secondly, China's mainland coastline measures approximately 18,000 kilometers, with a flat topography, and many excellent docks and harbors, most of which are ice-free all year round. The Chinese mainland is flanked to the east and south by the Bohai, Yellow, East China and South China seas, with a total maritime area of 4.73 million square kilometers. The Bohai Sea is China's continental sea, while the Yellow, East China and South China seas are marginal seas of the Pacific Ocean. Some 5,400 islands dot China's territorial seas. The largest of these, with an area of about 36,000 sq km, is Taiwan, followed by Hainan with an area of 34,000 sq km. The Diaoyu and Chiwei islands, located to the northeast of Taiwan Island, are China's easternmost islands. The many islands, islets, reefs and shoals in the South China Sea, known collectively as the South China Sea Islands, are the southernmost island group of China. They are called the Dongsha (East Sandbar), Xisha (West Sandbar), Zhongsha (Middle Sandbar) and Nansha (South Sandbar) island groups according to their geographical locations. It provides scenery of the sea and fresh air for tourists, especially the tropical sea beaches. Also it is very exciting to have a tour on islands, especially cycling around the island.

Thirdly, China's topography is completely formed around the emergence of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the most important geological event over the past several million years. Taking a bird's-eye view of China, the terrain gradually descends from west to east like a staircase. Due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian

plates, the young Qinghai-Tibet Plateau rose continuously to become the top of the four-step “staircase”(Committee of National Geographic,2007) averaging more than 4,000 m above sea level, and it is called "the roof of the world". Soaring 8,848 meters above sea level on the plateau, Mt. Qomolangma is the world’s highest peak and the main peak of the Himalayas. The second step includes the gently sloping Inner Mongolia Plateau, the Loess Plateau, the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, the Tarim Basin, the Junggar Basin and the Sichuan Basin, with an average elevation of between 1,000 m and 2,000 m. The third step, dropping to 500-1,000 m. in elevation, begins at a line drawn around the Greater Hinggan, Taihang, Wushan and Xuefeng mountain ranges and extends eastward to the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Here, from north to south, are the Northeast Plain, the North China Plain and the Middle-Lower Yangtze Plain. Interspersed amongst the plains are hills and foothills. To the east, the land extends out into the ocean, in a continental shelf, the fourth step of the staircase. The water here is less than 200 m deep. The areas of mountains and hills and plateaus account for 65 percent of the total land area of China. This kind of topography meets the requirements of the “Extreme Game”—cycling tourism, since it is very challenging to cycle in the mountains over long distances.

2.2 Historical and Cultural Factors

China, one of four oldest civilizations in the world (Water Conservancy), has a written history of over 5000 years and boasts rich cultural relics and historical sites, which draw the attention from all over the world.

China has gone over a long history of primitive society, slave-owning society, feudal society, semi-feudal and semi-colonial society and the present elementary stage of socialist society. Historical sites stud all over China just like stars in the sky, and museums of various sizes bring visitors and tourists both home and abroad to the ancient Chinese civilization. China’s modernization drive, high-tech equipment, its national economy with a high annual growth rate and a huge domestic market—all these indicate the orientation of development of one fifth of the mankind in the 21st

century, providing a reminder for the people in countries with economic slump. Among the world's four most famous ancient civilization (the other three ancient civilization being ancient Egypt, Babylon, and India), Chinese civilization is the only one in the world that has been developing for more than 5000 years without interruption. The origin, the development process, context and mechanism of this ancient Chinese civilization are the most important subjects for archaeologists, historians, visitors, and tourists to explore.

China is the inventor of compass, papermaking, gunpowder and printing. The Great Wall, Dujiangyan Water Conservancy Project, Grand Canal and *Karez* (an irrigation system of wells connected by underground channels used in Xinjiang) irrigation system are the four great ancient engineering projects built over 2000 years ago.(Yang Zaitian, 2004). Nowadays, they are the symbols of the rich culture of the Chinese nation. For thousands of years, China's architecture, art, religions, human studies, social sciences and people's lifestyles have undergone tremendous changes. China boasts 101 famous cultural and historical cities, 1271 national key cultural relics under protection, 177 state-level scenic spots, 153 state-level nature reserves, 44 national geological parks and 342 national forest parks, of which UNESCO had inscribed 30 historical sites or scenic spots on the World Heritage List by July 2, 2004. China now ranks the third, behind Italy and Spain, on the list. The world famous Old Silk Road, 3000-year-old capital cities, well-preserved imperial palaces and gardens, Suzhou and Hangzhou (the two cities are famed for their wonderful and exquisite gardens), vast grasslands, northern scenery featuring ice and snow, Buddhist temples, imperial museums, memorial halls, grotto arts, sculptures, palaces, and pagodas are of high historic value reflecting Chinese national architectural styles.

China has 56 ethnic groups. The Han nationality makes up approximately 91.59 per cent of the total population, mainly living in the eastern part of the country, while the 55 ethnic groups account for 8.41 per cent of the total population in China (according to the 2000 census). According to the Chinese Constitution, all nationalities in China are equal. The state protects their lawful rights and interests

and promotes equality, unity and mutual help among them. Every ethnic group has its own cultural and historical heritages and custom, meanwhile, calligraphy, painting, sculpture, and various kinds of arts and crafts show the artistic talents of the people of all 56 ethnic groups of the great Chinese nation.

2.3 Other Factors

Besides the above-mentioned favorable factors, cycling tourism is also made feasible in China by the following factors—infrastructure, political policy, economy, sport events, medical care and insurance, etc.

Wealth comes from building roads, especially for cycling tourism. By the end of 2005, China had 1.93 million kilometers of highway, of which 132,674 kilometers were national road, 233,783 kilometers were provincial road, and 494,276 kilometers were county-level road, and also 88,380 kilometers were high delicate. The total kilometers of road in counties and villages are increased dramatically, and the condition of traffic structure and density and mastery are improved greatly. By the end of 2005, the kilometers of road in counties and villages have reached 1.27 million, making up of the total number of 85.4 per cent, and the density of the road all over China is 20.1 kilometers per a hundred square kilometers. 99.81 per cent of the towns and villages have roads. Also road in every region has improved. By the end of 2005, there were 631,000 kilometers in the east of China, 659,000 kilometers in the middle, and 639,000 kilometers in the west (Statistics Bureau of People's Republic of China, 2005). The road is the necessary factor for cyclists to ride on.

Thanks to the practice of the Reform and Open Policy since 1978, tourism turned blossom, and is an important source of GDP gradually. In the new century, in particular, the Chinese government has carried out many policies to develop tourism and keep the tourism market on track (Qi Luoqi, 2000), and many other concerned policies were made in each province. With the rapid development of economy, bicycle industry has improved greatly in China. Many high-qualified bicycles appear in China, and many kinds of bicycle shops appear in various cities. In addition, the

appearance of bicycle clubs and organizations make potential cycling tourists get close to cycling tour (Joe Friel, 2002).

The vigorous growth of sport events in recent year also spurs cycling tourism. During the period of peace and development, sport events provide a stage for different countries to communicate and understand each other. A case in point is the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. It will also provide an important chance for the development of cycling tourism in China (Hou Shusen and Qiu Weidong, 2001). Besides, the industry of medical treatment and insurance provides strong safeguard in the rear. At last, the development of science and technology provides high-qualified equipment, which gives the impetus and assurance to cycling tour.

Chapter Three: The Future of Cycling Tourism in China

Cycling tourism has developed greatly in western countries, but there is little room for further development. Therefore, it is necessary to spread it outside, especially in China.

In China, more and more people have taken cars, trains and planes as means of transportation after the Reform and Open policy in 1978. In recent years, with an increase of dispensable income, more and more families possess private cars, which is gradually pushing bicycles out of people's daily life. This kind of lifestyle is exerting great influence on the society. It causes damage and pollution to the environment. The waste gas, heat, noise and traffic accidents and jams are very serious problems. It also contributes to the greenhouse effect. Besides, people almost discard physical exercise while engaging themselves in pursuing material affluence. As a result, people's physical constitution is getting worse, which is not good for economy and development in the long term.

Fortunately, more and more people are aware of the situation. They recognize the importance of health and the function of sports in enhancing health. This, combined with the fact that many Chinese people are having more and more dispensable income and leisure time, makes most Chinese people potential amateurs

of cycling tour (Zhang Guangrui,2005), since cycling tour exercises the tourists' body, promotes the physical constitution of tourists, improves the metabolism of tourists and makes their moral quality vigorous and graceful.

Taking into account the rapid development of economy in China and the changing lifestyle of the Chinese people, cycling tourism, if handled properly, is sure to have a glorious future in China.

Conclusion

The history of bicycle is very long, and it is also used extensively in China. Cycling tourism has developed very well abroad, especially in the Netherlands. In China, the prospect for cycling tourism is definitely good.

At first, China provides objective factors for developing cycling tourism. China has a vast territory of 9.6 million square kilometer, an old civilization of 5000 years and also abundant natural, cultural and historical resources. These attractions for tourists are really favorable for cycling tourism. Secondly, in recent years, the development of Chinese economy, politics, science and technology and sport events has provide important guarantee for cycling tourism. China is playing a crucial role on the international stage, and the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing will provide a chance for China to show itself to the rest of the world and a chance for all the other countries to know China better. In addition, cycling tour will exercise the body, improve the physical constitution, promote body's metabolism and make tourists' moral quality vigorous and graceful.

With favorable international environment and advantageous domestic conditions, China is ready to embrace cycling tourism, and cycling tourism, if handled properly, will surely open a new era in China.

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