

Economic benefits of cycle tourism



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Introduction

Nothing beats the freedom of exploring new places by bike. Cycling gives people a close-up experience of the history, landscape and character of a place in a healthy and active way, while providing a boost to local businesses and avoiding additional traffic congestion.

Cycle tourism makes a significant contribution to the UK economy, with particular benefits for small businesses in rural areas. Places that have taken steps to attract cyclists by developing great routes and facilities have seen the benefits first-hand.

But it's not just about routes. The economic benefits are maximised when cycling forms part of the overall experience,

a way to discover and connect the fascinating historical, cultural and natural features that make a place unique.

This factsheet brings together key information and statistics about the impact of cycle tourism around the UK, to help local authorities and tourism providers assess successful interventions to attract cycling visitors and bring money into the local economy. A few small steps can make a big difference.



£650m

In the **UK**, Sustrans estimates that leisure and tourism cycling on the National Cycle Network contributes **£650m** a year to the economy and supports over **15,000** jobs¹.



£520m

Total tourism spend from cyclists and mountain bikers in the UK is **£520m**².



£443m

There are **1.23m** overnight cycle trips per year in the UK, contributing around **£443m** - with an average spend of **£360** per trip or **£46.75** per day³.



£241-£362m

Cycling and mountain biking tourism make a significant contribution to the **Scottish** economy of between **£241m** and **£362m** per year^{4,5}.



€44bn

Within **Europe**, the cycle tourism sector is worth **€44bn** - 16% more than the cruise sector - with around **2.3bn** cycle tourism trips per year⁶.





What is cycle tourism?

Sustrans, the UK charity behind the National Cycle Network, defines cycle tourism as “recreational visits, either overnight or day visits away from home, which involve leisure cycling as a fundamental and significant part of the visit.”⁷

The difference between leisure and tourism is not always clear-cut. According to Visit Britain’s GB Day Visits survey⁸, the key distinctions are place and regularity: tourism visits are to places away from where the person lives, which they don’t visit ‘very regularly’, lasting more than three hours.

What does the ‘average’ cycle tourist look like?



45-55 years old



60% male
40% female



Above average educational and professional status



50% cycle in couples/pairs, 20% alone, 20% in groups of 3-5 and 10% in larger groups

Around 10% of the adult population participate regularly in recreational cycling^{8,2}



Types of cycle tourism

The term ‘cycle tourism’ can include many different types of visit and visitors.

It is useful to distinguish four main types of recreational cycling and cyclists, whose distinct needs should be addressed as part of any tourism strategy.



Touring cyclists on longer linear/circular routes with a minimum of one overnight stay, generally travelling by cycle or combination of cycle and train.



Enthusiast road cyclists or mountain bikers who will travel to an area for a short break (or as part of a longer road trip of several locations) riding local routes, generally travelling by car.



Casual holidaymakers, often families or couples, who may cycle once or twice during a longer holiday, generally travelling by car.



Day trip cyclists including cycling event participants who will visit the area for a short period of time and not stay overnight.

Types of economic impacts

People cycling on holiday need somewhere to stay, and they spend money in cafés and pubs. But there are also less obvious benefits.

Transform Scotland⁶ identify various economic impacts from cycle tourism: in addition to direct expenditure there are also health benefits, events, infrastructure construction and gross value added.



£ Cyclist spend

Total tourism spend from cyclists and mountain bikers in the UK is **£520m**².

The **1.23 million** overnight cycle trips in the UK contribute around **£433m** to the economy. This equates to an average spend of **£360** per trip or **£46.75** per day³.

Day visitors spend an average of **£15**⁵ while the average spend on accommodation for overnight trips is **£27**³. For multi-day trips, overnight expenditure makes up **86%** of total expenditure⁵.

A Department for Transport study found that cycle tourists spend around 9% more per trip than the average visitor, with the average cycling spend being **£81** per trip. Touring cyclists are limited in how much they can carry, so they shop locally and frequently⁹.

Cycle tourism trends suggest that the sector is continuing to grow, despite the general economic slowdown across the UK and Europe⁸.

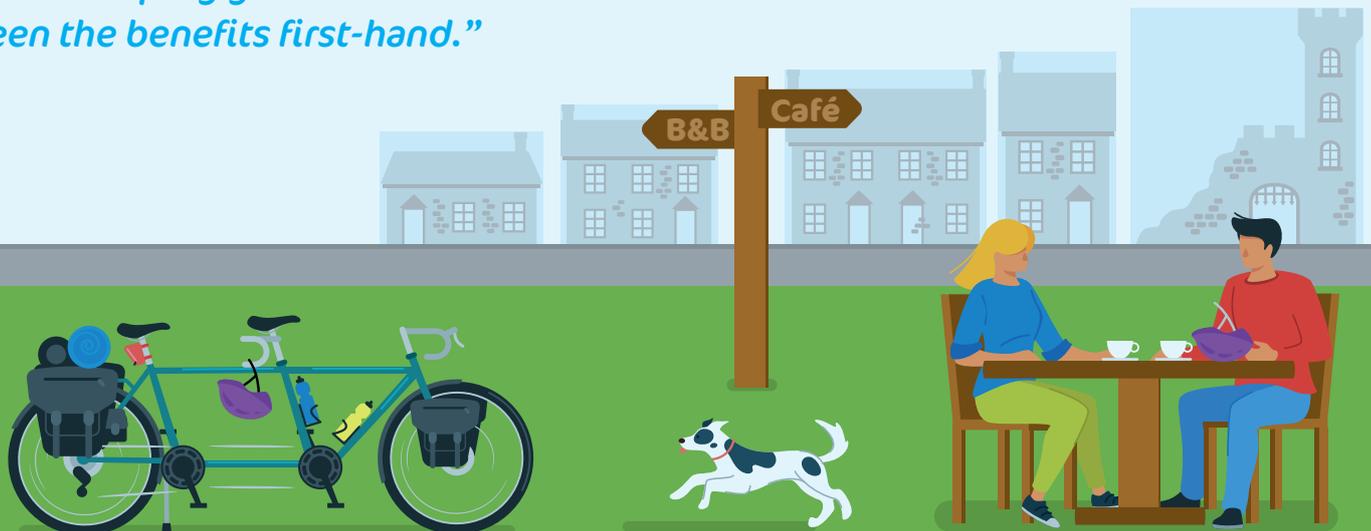


♥ Health

Transport Scotland calculates that leisure cycling in Scotland leads to health benefits worth **£4m** per year⁴.

Other health benefits calculations include all cycling (including commuting and utility trips) rather than just leisure cycling. UK-wide, there are estimated health benefits worth **£128m** from cycle-related savings in absenteeism¹⁰.

“Places that have taken steps to attract cyclists by developing great routes and facilities have seen the benefits first-hand.”





Infrastructure construction

Great cycle routes pay for themselves. The average cost-benefit ratio of investing in cycle infrastructure is **13:1**, which is very high compared to other infrastructure projects¹³.

Research suggests that investing in local cycle infrastructure creates more jobs relative to the cost of the project than large-scale transport projects¹⁴.

The tourism benefits of investing in high-quality cycle infrastructure are clear: in the UK, around 3% of the population cycle on holiday, while in Germany it is around 25%⁶. As 40% of UK households own a bike, there is a potential latent demand to tap into if safe, enjoyable routes are provided.

Job creation

It has been calculated that **35,788** jobs are generated from cycle tourism in the UK².

Sustrans estimates that leisure and tourism cycling on the National Cycle Network contributes over **£650m** to the economy and supports around **15,000** jobs, 2/3 of those in the food and drink sector. The development and maintenance of the network sustains around **400** jobs per year¹.



Events

There are a wide range of cycling events at different scales that take place in the UK, including international races such as the Tour de Yorkshire and UCI World Cup, multi-day cycling festivals, long-distance sportive events, and single-day family-friendly events.

On average, visitors staying away from home for multi-day events spend **£65.90** per day, while single-day event visitors spend **£16.40**⁴.

At an international level, downhill mountain biking races held over four days in Fort William in Scotland as part of the UCI World Cup generated **£2.5m** in economic benefits¹¹.

The Eroica Britannia vintage cycling festival takes place in Derbyshire each summer, as part of an international network of Eroica events. In 2017 the event attracted **4,500** riders from around the world and approximately **30,000** visitors over three days, generating spending of around **£438,000** within the local economy¹².

The annual Giant's Causeway Coast road cycling sportive in Northern Ireland has around **1,100** participants and brings in **£170,000** to the local area in September, showing the role of events in encouraging shoulder season cycle tourism¹¹.



Impact in each nation

Scotland

Scotland has the most comprehensive data on the economic benefits of cycling and mountain biking tourism trips. In total, these contribute between **£241m** and **£362m** to the Scottish economy every year⁴.

Transform Scotland⁴ calculated the value from four major areas of economic contribution from cycle tourism (excluding mountain biking). *Right.*

Mountain bike tourism adds around a further **£119m** per year. Visits from outside of Scotland are heavily concentrated in southern Scotland which receives 84% of mountain biking trips, due to the development of trail centres and ease of access from the rest of the UK⁵.

Economic values	£ millions per year
Health benefits	4.0
Leisure cycle events	5.6
Leisure cycle-related infrastructure	1.5
Expenditure by leisure cyclists	106.2-228.2
Total economic contribution	117.4 -239.3



England

There is a lack of data about the economic impact of cycle tourism in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Much of the information is related to outdoor activities as a whole, rather than being specific to cycling.

6 million people in England regularly cycle for leisure, around 11% of the population¹⁶. Generally, off-road cycling trips are more likely to involve expenditure than road cycling trips – 38% compared to 26%¹⁰. (This figure does however include cycling close to home which would not be classed as tourism.)

Northern Ireland

Overall outdoor activity tourism in Northern Ireland, including cycling, is estimated to be worth around **£100m** to the economy²⁰.

The mountain biking offer in Northern Ireland is particularly strong, with eight trail centres across the country. After new trails were built in 2013, the trail centres received an estimated total of **85,000** visitors over the year. Two of the centres, Rostrevor and Castlewellsan, generated a combined economic benefit of **£670,000** during the first year¹¹.



Wales

For all types of outdoor activity tourism including cycling, the annual economic contribution to the Welsh economy is estimated to be **£481m**, or 6% of the total tourism contribution.

This breaks down into a similar amount from domestic overnight trips (**£236m**) as day trips (**£220m**), with trips from overseas visitors adding **£24m**.

In 2006/7, cycling was the main reason for approximately **65,000** overnight trips and a part-reason for approximately **188,000** trips¹⁷.

The 870-mile Wales Coast Path walking route illustrates the benefits of long-distance trails: in 2014 it brought in **£547m** in direct expenditure¹⁸, and has created around **112** full time equivalent jobs¹⁹.

The Welsh Government is currently looking at ways to reform legislation to increase public access and has highlighted economic benefits as one of two key drivers for this, along with public health.



Case studies

This section explores examples demonstrating the economic benefits of investing in different aspects of cycle tourism, to appeal to the different target markets.

These case studies illustrate the importance of effective marketing and providing a complete experiential package with great routes, clear information, cycle-friendly accommodation and support from other businesses such as the food and drink sector.

Benefits of traffic-free trails: Camel Trail, Cornwall

The Camel Trail is a disused railway line that runs for 17.3 miles from Padstow to Wenford Bridge. It is a shared-use trail open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

In 2015, there were **424,000** visits to the trail, generated by **256,000** unique users. 67% of these visits were by bike, equating to **283,000** cyclists.

56% of users were Cornish residents and 44% were visitors from elsewhere. 14% said the trail was the main reason for their visit to Cornwall.

Approximately **£6.7m** was spent by users of the Camel Trail, and in total it generated approximately **£13m** of business turnover and supported around **260** jobs²¹.



World-class mountain biking product: 7stanes trail centres, Scottish Borders

The 7stanes are seven mountain biking trail centres scattered across southern Scotland, which have turned the Borders into a world-class mountain biking destination.

Between them these centres received just under **400,000** visitors in 2007, which would put them in Scotland's top 20 visitor attractions with similar visitor numbers to Stirling Castle. During that year they generated around **£9m** in visitor spend and supported **250** full time equivalent jobs²².

80% of visitors came from outside the local area¹⁸, and 84% of overnight mountain biking trips by visitors from outside Scotland are to southern Scotland.

Trail centres are an important driver of mountain biking activity, persuading riders to travel further afield and spend money when they would otherwise ride closer to home. 85% of singletrack mountain bikers are prepared to travel away from home to ride high-quality trails⁹.





An ideal long weekend trip: Sea to Sea route, northern England

The Sea to Sea or C2C route is one of the most popular recreational cycling routes in the UK. This is partly due to its length: running for 137 miles from Whitehaven or Workington to Sunderland or Newcastle, it can be easily completed in around three days. It is also well established and clearly signposted, and accommodation providers have answered the demand for places to stay along the route.

An outdated but useful 1997 monitoring study²³ found that between **10,000** and **11,000** people cycled the C2C route that year, with total visitor spend estimated at **£1.1 million** (worth **£1.7 million** today).

- The majority of users staying overnight along the route used bed and breakfast accommodation (63%). The next most used types of accommodation were youth hostels (16%) and camp sites/camping barns (11%). A small proportion of users (7%) used hotel accommodation.
- Accommodation, cafés, pubs and restaurants made up 76% of expenditure while riding the route.

Adjusting for inflation between 1997 and 2020 (values in brackets are today's money):

- The average daily expenditure per rider was estimated to be £30 (**£47**).
- Visitors typically spent £5-£40 (**£8-£63**) on accommodation, with the majority (57%) spending £10-£20 (**£16**).



Benefits for local businesses: Pedal Peak project

The Pedal Peak project aimed to promote leisure cycling in the Peak District, by developing promoted routes and helping local businesses to attract a cycling market¹².

Hassop Station cycle hire and café is located on the Monsal Trail, a disused railway line, and enjoyed a 100% increase in business between 2011 and 2016 following the completion of the trail.

The owners of the Anglers Rest pub in Bamford used a Pedal Peak grant to install bike racks, a pump and a workstation and are reaping the benefits:

"We know we get cyclists daily, often in large groups, and are becoming a cyclist destination. For us, every cyclist is a potential customer, especially in food and drink, so we do everything we can to welcome them and the feedback has been great!"



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