

Mountain Biking & Cycling

(Guidelines & Regulations)

The Department of Tourism,
The Administration of Union Territory of
Ladakh



MOUNTAIN BIKING & CYCLING IN LADAKH

Mountain biking in India has gained the attention of bikers and adventure seekers alike. The Himalayan Range especially the region of Ladakh is the perfect setup for this extreme adventure that tests your grit and gives you experiences of a lifetime. But at the same time, it is extremely dangerous and needs professional guidance at every step.

Ladakh is home to some of the most rugged and exciting mountain biking trails that never fail to impress. Right from those who are just beginning or those who are at a professional level now, both of a chance to practice and master further at this skill in this country. Mountain biking is quickly emerging as a favorite among numerous thrill seekers.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh to streamline and promote adventure activities in Ladakh in a regulated manner is issuing the Guidelines & Regulations for carrying out Mountain Biking & Cycling. These guidelines shall extend to the whole of the Union Territory of Ladakh and come into force from the date of its notification.

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh recommends following the guidelines & regulations for Mountain Biking & Cycling, issued by the Adventure Tour Operators Associations of India (ATOAI) and endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

These guidelines will act as a defining force with respect to the procedures to be followed, mandatory trainings for guides/instructors, equipment to be used, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), necessary documentation, risk mitigation processes, addressing medical concerns, emergencies, rescue operations, safety briefing, etc. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) shall follow these guidelines while conducting Mountain Biking & Cycling in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

VALIDITY

The 'Guidelines & Regulation for Mountain Biking & Cycling' will remain valid for five (5) years, from the date of its notification. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) are advised to strictly adhere to the terms and conditions of these guidelines and follow its best implementation for the sustainable development of the adventure tourism ecosystem in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

ENCLOSURES

- Annexure 1 – Guidelines & Regulations for Mountain Biking & Cycling in the Union Territory of Ladakh
- Annexure 2 – Implementation Framework for the Union Territory of Ladakh

ANNEXURE 1

GUIDELINES & REGULATIONS FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING & CYCLING

1. INTRODUCTION

Bicycling tours in India have been managed by privately owned companies and do not fall under the purview of any government or any community-instituted central body. The Cycling Federation of India organizes races and tours for licensed elite athletes for prize money. Any tours where amateur athletes/ holidaymakers are entering into a commercial contract with a touring experience provider do not require any permissions from any sport-related bodies.

2. ADVENTURE GUIDES / INSTRUCTORS: BASIC MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

While there are no technical criteria or qualifications required, these are experiences that will help a tour leader ensure a successful trip:

1. Experience of being in the saddle and riding the distance covered per day. This will ensure that they are alert and not fighting their fatigue. In a staged tour that lasts multiple days, the guests will experience cumulative fatigue; the tour leader cannot be in the same position. They need to have spent time cycling, so they do not experience saddle soreness and can help their charges and ensure a good experience for them.
2. Knowledge of the terrain being traversed, potential hazards of that area, and typical weather conditions, in addition to knowledge of Hindi, English, and or local language are required.
3. The knowledge to assess which customer needs what size of helmet and how to tighten or loosen the various straps to ensure a snug fit on their heads.
4. First-aid and CPR certification.
5. Basic knowledge of bike maintenance while on tour and fixing issues such as punctures, gears not working well, and other minor repairs.
6. Owning a government-authorized identity card and keeping it with them for the duration of the tour.

3. TRAINING

No specific training is required to be a cycling tour operator in India. However, it is helpful if the organizers meet the basic qualifications listed above. It will go a long way toward ensuring the safety and well-being of your clients and your confidence in your operation.

4. EQUIPMENT

Maintaining the bicycles is critical to ensure every group of customers has a good experience. To do so, here are components of the trip that need care:

1. Bicycles

- I. Ensure the bicycles are given care after every trip. This would include:
 - Cleaning the bicycle
 - Lubricating the chain
 - Drivetrain service
 - Check chain health
 - Check brake and gear cable tension.
- II. Get a complete strip-down service done with a trusted bicycle shop, for each bicycle every 1000 km. You should get from them, a list of jobs carried out per cycle, and parts replaced, and have a sense of how long each of the parts is likely to last.
- III. If the bicycles have been through tough rocky terrain or a muddy region, inspection for damage and/ or sending them for inspection to a bicycle shop is recommended.

2. Helmets

- I. Cycling helmets by respectable brands, stocked for all sizes from extra small (XS) to extra large (XL)
- II. It is mandatory to use helmets on all rides and at all times

3. Lights

- I. Headlights: Headlights that are powerful enough to see the road at night/ in foggy or rainy conditions. Typically, headlights with mounts can be removed easily when the bikes are being left by themselves
- II. Taillamps: Taillamps that are powerful enough to be visible and provide the option of rapid blinking, so they are more visible to oncoming motor vehicles
- III. Spare batteries for each of the lights.

4. Material Carrying Equipment & Safety Equipment

- I. Panniers and racks for luggage

- II. Bungee cords to tie additional material to the bike rack
- III. Cable locks to lock the rear tyre, possibly the front tyre, and the frame of the bicycle to a pole, a gate, or similar construction

5. INSPECTIONS & MAINTENANCE PROCEDURES

Listed above.

6. SOPs & OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

1. SOPs:

- I. Inspect gears 1-2 days before travel.
- II. Check weather conditions.
- III. Reach out to all service providers enroute and get confirmations, if possible, by email of the terms of agreement with them.
- IV. Check cash, cheque, and card usage enroute and ensure there are sufficient funds.

2. Operating Instructions:

- I. Give all customers a safety briefing at the start of the tour, such as not riding more than two abreast, right of way to larger vehicles, hand signals, and following instructions of the tour leader.
- II. Explain to them how the bicycle gears function.
- III. Get them used to riding on seat posts, heights that are higher than what they are likely to be used to, from childhood if these are inexperienced cyclists.
- IV. Explain the importance of a helmet to be worn at all times on the saddle, the right way to wear one snugly, and the importance of wearing a helmet of the correct size.
- V. Check for medication clients are on and ensure that they are carrying sufficient dosage for the duration of the tour.
- VI. In the case of self-guided trips, the guides MUST give the travelers a briefing of do's and don'ts including how to engage with the locals and where to stop / not stop.
- VII. Self-guided riders must check in with the local operator daily to update them on their well-being.

7. DOCUMENTATION

1. Maintain a logbook of all gear (cycles, helmets, racks, panniers, backpacks, lights, locks, etc.).
2. Copies of permits to enter a region, if relevant.
3. Copies of the tour operator's credentials.
4. Copies of the identity and emergency contact details of each client.
5. Mandatory insurance copies of each client.
6. List of doctors & hospitals as well as ambulance providers along the route.
7. List of reliable bicycling stores (which manage the cycle brands being used) along the route.
8. Emergency Action Plan.

8. RISK MITIGATION

Risk to Humans:

1. Recommend a comprehensive medical checkup before a tour. Ask for a doctor's certificate of fitness while signing up for the trip, if the distance and terrain are challenging.
2. Ensure customers have medical insurance and that copies of the insurance are handed over to the guide before the start of the trip.
3. Ensure you have information like blood group, known allergies, known medical conditions, and emergency contact persons (at least two names and numbers).
4. An indemnity form signed by each tour participant states that they are taking sole responsibility for their well-being during the trip and this legally keeps the tour leader and touring company safe.
5. In the case of self-guided trips, a detailed briefing covering the cultural situation in India, the safety of women, etc. should be given before the commencement of the trip.

Equipment Risk: Tour operators must ensure that:

1. A comprehensive first-aid kit is carried on the trip. Ensure that all medicines are within the expiry period.
2. All bicycles are in good condition to ride – this should be confirmed by a service professional.
3. Lights (headlights and taillamps) on all bicycles.
4. Helmets for all riders.
5. A support vehicle is close-by at all times.
6. In a group with people of varied abilities, the operating company must ensure that there is a leader and follower every day.

9. EMERGENCIES AND RESCUES

1. To deal with an evacuation required due to natural disasters etc., assess emergency evacuation procedures for the various places the tour will go to.
2. In an emergency, the touring group takes and follows instructions from the tour leader. This information needs to be communicated to the group at the start of every tour.
3. The Tour Leader must assess the situation and administer first aid as appropriate and call for backup as soon as possible.
4. To deal with cases of medical emergencies, assess proximity to hospitals, time is taken to reach there and mode of transport.
5. If there is a medical emergency and the tour leader is occupied with the emergency, the company must set a practice of how to manage the rest of the group.

10. SAFETY BRIEFING

Leaders are required to give a brief demonstration of the bike (brakes, gears, and any possible adjustments). It is recommended this happens before clients are given their bikes to ensure that they all focus on the explanation. The briefing to the clients must include:

1. Keeping identification with them always.
2. Taking ownership for assessing if they feel unwell or not up to the trip at any point and alerting the tour leader.
3. Riding safely, riding as per traffic rules.
4. Keeping their helmet on at all times, while on the saddle.
5. Using lights when conditions require it.
6. Cleaning bicycles and keeping them ready for the next day of travel.
7. Following instructions of the tour leader at all times, especially emergencies briefings during the trip.

Evening Briefings: In the evening before each ride, the leader must explain the next day's ride to the whole group. Points covered will include:

1. Using a map to show the overview of the route for the day.
2. Any included transfers are needed as part of the travel on that day.
3. Expected distance of the day's ride.
4. Expected terrain (road surface, ascent, and descent).
5. Planned stops: notable rest stops, lunch, and any visits.
6. Where the ride will finish and the accommodation, they will be using that night.

Next Section' Route Descriptions: At rest stops and re-grouping points during the ride leaders are expected to give short 'next section' briefing to let clients know what is coming up:

1. The distance and approximate duration of the next section.
2. Any known hazards (road surface, heavy traffic, steep descents, difficult route finding, etc) and how to avoid them.
3. Any directions and junctions the group should look out for.
4. Points of interest to look out for.
5. The next planned stopping or re-grouping point.

11. MEDICAL CONCERNS

Covered above.

12. BASIC MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GRANT OF RECOGNITION TO OPERATORS

Tour Operator Organization to have:

1. Minimum two personnel qualified for the job (specified above).
2. First aid /CPR certified personnel.
3. Well-maintained bicycles, (if being offered), basic safety equipment, and tools.
4. Knowledge of the region – history, geography, and culture; permits needed for the region, inherent risks (natural, political, social, etc.).
5. Registered office.
6. Recognition by Local/ State/ UT Tourism Department.

Tour Leaders with experience of:

1. Riding bicycles on the road for multiple days and riding the distance covered by the tour.
2. Good communication skills.
3. Ability to converse with government authorities and get relevant permissions.
4. Ability to plan and schedule all events in advance.
5. Ability to deal with and iron out issues on the trip.
6. Administering first aid and helping clients with medical insurance should the situation arise.

The company must follow a strict 'leave no trace policy and conform to high sustainability standards.

13. SECTION FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING

Guidelines for mountain biking tours are similar to biking. There are some additional MTB-specific guidelines a tour operator must ensure:

Trail Rules for Mountain Biking

1. Ride open trails only:
 - I. Do not use prohibited trails. In national parks only designated trails are permitted.
 - II. Take necessary permission for restricted trails. Reserve forests may issue entry tickets with fees.
 - III. Respect land rules for open trails.
2. Leave no trace:
 - I. Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable to damage than dry ones.
 - II. When the trail is soft, consider other riding options. Do not create new trails or cut switchbacks.
 - III. Do not ride around standing water, it widens the trail.
 - IV. Pack out as much as you pack in. Also, consider picking up any litter on the trail.
3. Control your Bicycle:
 - I. Lack of attention even for a moment can lead to serious problems for the rider and others.
4. Follow the suggested speed limit.
5. Trail etiquette:
 - I. Make all efforts to alert other trail users. A friendly greeting or ringing the bell will do.
 - II. All downhill users must yield to uphill users.
 - III. All mountain bikers must yield to trekkers and animals on trails.
 - IV. Always anticipate other trail users around corners.
6. It is important to watch out for animals on the trail.
7. Plan ahead for unusual conditions:
 - I. Know your equipment, ability, terrain, riding conditions, weather, and available resources on the route.
 - II. Always stay in touch with your group.
 - III. Carry clothes for change in weather conditions.
 - IV. Strive to be self-sufficient.
 - V. Follow all safety rules.

ANNEXURE 2 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

1. CONSTITUTION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Technical Committee' for Mountain Biking & Cycling with the following members:

Composition of the Technical Committee	
Director (Tourism), UT Ladakh	Chairperson
Chief Wildlife Warden / Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Principal ISM, Kargil Branch	Member
Principal FCI/ IHM, Leh	Member
Representative of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Mountain Biking & Cycling	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Mountain Biking & Cycling	Member
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Convening Member

2. FUNCTIONS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Inspect and certify the equipment with the operator from a safety point of view.
- Scrutinize the credential of the personnel responsible for conducting Mountain Biking & Cycling, the medical fitness of the guide, and conduct their physical test to ascertain their expertise.
- Ensure that the operator and the guide shall follow all safety procedures indicated in their rules.
- Identify new areas/ routes/ tracks for Mountain Biking & Cycling in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Notify the exact stretches on the identified areas/ routes/ tracks where the operation can be safely conducted, considering the area's environmental sensitivity, critical wildlife hotspots and fragile water systems.
- Formulate a plan for containing the environmental impact strictly inside the designated activity area.
- Forecast the potential ecological impacts and ensure a plan for eco-conditioning to minimize the impact and offsetting the potential environmental impact.
- Ensure preparation and implementation of a Risk Management Matrix, and Emergency & Evacuation plan.
- Ensure preparation of a plan for tourist awareness and education.
- Determine the capacity of each track every year before the start of any operation.

3. CONSTITUTION OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Regulatory Committee' for Mountain Biking & Cycling with the following members:

Composition of the Regulatory Committee	
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Chairperson
Wildlife Warden or Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Representative of the District Disaster Response Force (DDRF)	Member
Representative of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO)	Member
SHO/Choki of the Concerned Area	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Mountain Biking & Cycling	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Mountain Biking & Cycling	Member
Officer in-charge of the Department of Tourism, UT Ladakh at Sub-Division and Tehsils	Convening Member

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Regulatory Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Overall control for regulating the Mountain Biking & Cycling operations, in coordination with the concerned stakeholders and associations.
- Surprise inspections during the Mountain Biking & Cycling operations to ascertain adherence of the guidelines, assess the quality & condition of equipment being used and assess the ecological impact, to help develop adaptive management strategies. The Regulatory Committee shall constitute a joint inspection or verification team with the Department of Youth Services & Sports, UT Ladakh and Adventure Sports Association, if any.

- Establish a mechanism for receiving and addressing complaints, concerns, and feedback from local communities, tourists, and stakeholders.
- Any other functions concerning ATV operations in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

5. CLAIM ON ACCOUNT OF ANY MISHAP

The Department of Tourism, or any other Department/ Authority of the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, in no way be responsible for any claims on account of any mishap.

6. SHOW CAUSE NOTICE

If any operator, guide, or personnel responsible for conducting Mountain Biking & Cycling operations is found to be violating these Guidelines & Regulations for Mountain Biking & Cycling, appropriate action shall be taken by the Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh.

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