

The Israel Bike Trail is a national project for the construction of a mountain bike trail that traverses the entire country from the northernmost and highest point in Israel - Mount Hermon - to the lowest point on earth - the Dead Sea, and to the southernmost point - the city of Eilat on the shores of the Red Sea.

Imagine that in just a few short years, you'll be able to hop on your bike on Mount Hermon and pedal away until you reach Eilat. The project is led by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority with financial support from the Ministry of Tourism and the Israel Government Tourist Corporation as well as other government ministries, including the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The concept is that anyone who bikes the trail will learn about the diverse landscapes and cultures of Israel. In planning the trail, we have attempted to connect to as many important tourist sites as possible into a single contiguous trail. The trail is planned to extend over 1,200 kilometers (approximately 750 miles), making it one of the longest trails in the world, and perhaps the most beautiful and diverse. To create the trail, teams are currently deployed throughout Israel, seeking the best possible routes. The trail is being constructed with the highest possible mountain biking trail standards. Parts of it are being built by volunteers and others by professional trail builders.

We set several principles for the planning phase:

- **Rider services** - Each day begins and ends at a place where riders can sleep, eat and, if necessary, have their bikes repaired.
- **Daily stages** - We defined daily stages that are not particularly long, so that riders will have enough time to visit the sites located down the length of the trail and wander around the areas they ride through. With that objective in mind, we set a daily stage of 35-40 kilometers (skilled riders can easily combine two segments into a single day).
- **Easy riding** - To ensure that the trail is very easy to ride, the planning teams have worked hard to reduce the level of technical and physical skills riders need to enjoy the trail. Although you can't make the mountains in Israel disappear, you can take an incline that isn't suitable for a biker and make it more moderate so that it is rideable. Steep descents can also be made more manageable by moderating the incline so that bikers can feel secure when riding down them.
- **Crossing the country in a reasonable number of days** - While the trail could

The Israel

Pedal your way to an appreciation of



Cyclists riding through the arid landscape. Photo: Ezra Sharabany

Bike Trail

Israel's landscapes and history

be designed to go through virtually all of the important sites in Israel, planners wanted to find the right balance between the desire to complete the journey in a reasonable number of days and number of sites. We believe that you can ride the entire trail in 25 days (or come twice - once in the winter to ride in the south, and once in warmer weather to bike through the north).

- **A safe trail** - Keeping the safety of riders in mind, the planners strive to keep riders away from heavy traffic areas, but when necessary crossings are well marked with signs.
- **Cities popular with tourists** - The trail also goes through cities such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.
- The trail is open seven days a week, and is free of charge.
- **Knowledge of Hebrew not necessary** - The trail is being designed so that non-Hebrew speaking tourists will be able to follow clear signs in English. Furthermore, the most advanced signage systems navigation knowledge.
- **Advanced technology** - Bikers will be able to take advantage of the trail's website and other advanced technologies.

What will you see while pedaling away?

What sites does the trail pass through? Mount Hermon, the Golan Heights and its volcanic hills, Druze villages, the mountainous Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, the Jesus Trail and Christian holy sites, Mount Arbel, Horns of Hattin, Nazareth, Jezreel Valley, Tel Megiddo, Plain of Manasseh, Caesarea, the Mediterranean shore, Yarkon River, Tel Aviv, The route to Jerusalem, the Old City King's Highway, Beit Guvrin, Yatir Forest, Arad, Masada and the Dead Sea. You will also see the Zin River, Sde Boker, Mitzpe Ramon, Makhtesh Ramon, the Nabatean Incense Route, Arabah, Eilat Mountains, the Red Sea and much, much more.

This coming fall, we will be officially opening the stage of the trail running from Mitzpe Ramon to Eilat. You are invited to come ride through one of the most beautiful desert trails in the world, 300 km (approximately 186 miles) through breathtaking desert landscapes, all well organized, with signs and created specifically for bike riders. Spend 6-8 days in the desert, enjoy the serenity of the primal landscape and imagine yourself riding on a camel.

The trail from Mitzpe Ramon to Eilat begins from the town of Mitzpe Ramon, located at the rim of Makhtesh Ramon, a geographic feature unique to Israel, and as the travel down its length, riders will continue to enjoy spectacular views of the crater. The route uses the ancient tracks of camel caravans

*Riding down the incline...
Photo: Shai Giterman,
Adrenaline*



◀ that transported the spices and fragrances of frankincense and salt from Yemen and Saudi Arabia to the ports of the Mediterranean Sea - Gaza, Ashdod and from there to Europe. Down the length of the trail, you will see Nabatean and Roman fortresses. The first day of the trail ends at the bottom of Makhtesh Ramon, at the well-kept Khan Be'erot, managed by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. On the second day, we'll ride through Israel's largest canyons - the Nekarot River. After investing much effort, we were able to create a trail on one of the sides of the river, making it possible to ride down the length of the deep and impressive river. While on the trail, we will pass through the ancient inn for travelers, Khan Nekerot and Khirbet Katzra. The day ends at the impressive site known as Moa.

The third day of our ride begins at the khan in Moa and ends after passing a spectacular desert single-track built by volunteers on Moshav Faran, which offers an example of the impressive agriculture that developed under the extreme climate of the Araba. On the fourth day, we ride down the length of the Syria-African Rift, southward through the Araba, near the border with Jordan and the beautiful scenery of the mountains of Edom. On the fifth day, we will have to work hard to ride or walk uphill to Ketura, depending on your level of fitness. Regardless, within about an hour you will have made it to the top and be able to look down at the scenes of the stage, which ends at Kibbutz Neot Semadar, a green community with organic farming. And... nothing could be better than capping off this tough day with a nice meal at Pundak Neot Semadar.

Every day offers its own peak, and just when you think you've seen everything, you have another three incredible days ahead. They begin at the stage that runs from Neot Semadar to the most isolated and remote town in Israel - Shahrut. On this day (it's tough to believe), we will cross impressive dunes, and towards the end of the day, we will look out over the Araba from the Shayarot Range. Tomorrow we will face the toughest day of riding yet, close to 50km of desert trail, part single track, that winds along the Eilat Mountains and descends to Timna Park. You need to set out very early in the morning and take large amounts of food and water with you. Anyone who has made it this far, will be able to handle the riding, but for those who are not as skilled, this is one of the toughest days on the trail.

The prize for making it this far is ending the day in Timna Park. Tomorrow, the last day on the trail is easier and shorter, so take some time in the morning to explore the network of bike trails recently developed around the park and ride between its pillar- and mushroom-shaped rock formations. Set out on the final leg that ends after a glorious view of the Gulf of Eilat and the neighboring countries: Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

What's still in store?

This coming year, we look forward to completing large parts of the northern

segment, from Mount Hermon to Nazareth, and we may also be able to complete one of the impressive tourist bike paths in Jerusalem, allowing riders to travel through time from the Old City and the Western Wall to the modern city, past the Knesset and the Israel Museum. The planning team is currently preparing the final plans for this fascinating urban route.

There are still hundreds of miles left to build on the trail and much to do until we complete this important national project. Our vision is to fill Israel with bikers from around the world and bring them closer to Israel through their bicycles. In recent years, Israel has rapidly become a biker's paradise, with hundreds of miles of mountain bike trails throughout the entire country. Even now, each stage we launch becomes a hub for bikers and introduces them to more and more of the country's hidden gems. ●

A coastal view. Photo: Hillel Sussman



Pedaling through the sand. Photo: Shai Giterman, Adrenaline



A glimpse of water and greenery. Photo: Hillel Sussman

