

# How To Plan For An Unplanned Cycling Trip

*Text and photos  
Peter Brown from Canada*

**In June 2019 (the year before Covid), I needed to meet with a business colleague for two weeks in Ankara, Turkey. Flying from my home near Vancouver, Canada is quite a long trip, so without telling him, I decided to go a week early, and get over the jet lag before our meetings started.**

When my flight landed in Ankara, I turned on my phone and found a message from him: "Sorry Peter, some urgent work came up, and I had to go to Switzerland. Please can we change our meeting until 2 weeks later?"

Hmmm... I could turn around and fly back to Canada. But it is a long flight back, it was only for two weeks, and I would be paying the extra ticket

from my own pocket. So I decided not to go back. I could go down to the beaches on the south coast of Turkey, but I have worked in Turkey for almost 20 years and spent lots of vacations there. So I decided not to do that. What to do? The answer is obvious!

Since I am an average, normal human being (which of course means I love doing long-distance bicycle tours on recumbent bikes) the next morning I phoned up Azub Bikes in Czech Republic and asked if they would rent me a recumbent for a couple of weeks. Of course they said yes, so without any thinking, I immediately bought an airline ticket Ankara-Vienna leaving that night.

Very pleased with my instantaneous tour planning

so far, I started to pack for the trip, and realized I had a small problem. I came to Turkey expecting two weeks of business meetings. I had no plan for any kind of a bicycling trip. I spread out the items that I had brought with me on the bed. Two suit jackets, three long sleeve business shirts, business pants, and shiny leather shoes, all in a big hard-shell suitcase, plus a laptop in a briefcase. It certainly did not look like the kind of items needed for a two week cycling trip!

I guess I could run out and spend a few hundred euros on buying some new cycling gear, but I really didn't want to (and also I didn't have much time since my flight was leaving in about 8 hours). So I decided to get creative (in other words, desperate).

I had brought two old T-shirts to sleep in. Not beautiful, but I decided they would be adequate for cycling in. I had also brought a pair of running shoes for walking around when we weren't in business meetings, and two pairs of white socks. Not my first choice for cycling, but under the circumstances, they would be OK. I didn't have any cycling shorts, but just by chance I had brought two pairs of boxer-shorts underwear. One was pure black and the other was black with a white stripe down the side. If you didn't look too closely, they almost looked like cycling shorts. Of course they had no padding, but in a recumbent you don't really need any padding in the shorts. I made another call to Azub and they very kindly agreed to include a pair of panniers and a bike lock with the rental bike. That was all the planning that I could do! I was all set!

I could only take things which would fit in the panniers that Azub would give me. Thus I didn't take my big hardshell suitcase with me on the flight. I am glad that I don't get embarrassed easily. I felt perfectly fine showing up at the Ankara airport wearing one of my ratty T-shirts, my black underwear, and carrying the rest of my possessions in



*The lovely Azub 6 bike that I rented.*



*Jan and Roel chatting at the Azub factory.*

a taped-up garbage bag. It's all part of the adventure! And the airport staff when I arrived in Vienna were kind enough to allow a guy dressed like this, even though I was dragging a garbage bag, to sleep in the airport from when I landed (2 AM) until about 8 AM, when I slowly departed to get on the train for Azub.

I arrived at the restaurant in front of the Azub factory for an early bite to eat, and bumped into another recumbent cyclist who was also waiting to get in (turned out to be Roel, the editor of EU-Supino!). We had a pleasant chat and he certainly impressed me with some of his riding stories (I kept my garbage bag of clothes hidden under my seat while I was talking to him)!

Jan at Azub did a great job of getting me set up for the bike (he didn't even comment on my stylish cycling clothing or my sensible choice of a garbage bag for transporting it!) He gave me a lovely white *Azub 6* with 20/26 wheels, above-seat steering, 27 speed derailleur, and a mesh seat. I loved it!

As I started to say goodbye to Jan and wheel the bike outside, I realized that I had been so focused on getting to Azub that I had forgotten an important part of the plan: I had no idea of where I should go! My wife and I like to cycle down rivers from the source to the sea (you can see our blog at [www.riverriders.net](http://www.riverriders.net)) so I asked Jan if there were any rivers in the vicinity. He pointed me in the direc-

tion for the start of the Oder River, which is only about 80 km from the Azub factory. He said "The Oder starts in Czech Republic, goes into Poland, and forms part of the border with Germany. Good luck!" And that, dear readers, is how you plan for an unplanned cycling trip!

A few notable events during my unplanned 900 km trip along the entire length of the Oder River: The *Azub 6* model bike that I rented was an early model demonstrator that had one feature that Azub do not really recommend on this type of recumbent. Hydraulic brakes. Why? They are too good! With the slightest pressure from one finger, they stop the bike very quickly. Why is this a bad



*The typically non-existent shoulders on many of the highways in Poland.*



*To compensate for the slightly dangerous highways, there are some lovely forest pathways.*



*Shade was always welcome on the hot sunny days.*







*Caution, there could be houses on sleds in this area?  
Really I don't know...*

thing? I will give you an example. One day I was tired, and getting a bit dizzy from the heat. I needed to find a bank machine because I had no cash. A group of three very pretty girls on the sidewalk saw me riding by and I decided to ask them for directions. In my haste to stop and talk with them, I pulled the brake levers as if I was on a normal bike. Of course, this was much too hard for hydraulic brakes. My rear wheel went perhaps 30 cm up in the air, the bike pivoted slightly on the front wheel, and I came crashing down in a heap on the road.

I hit my helmet quite hard on the edge of the sidewalk, and my right arm fell under the bike as I crashed. I stood up, bleeding and stunned. Although it was nice to be cared for by the three

girls for a few minutes, I don't think I will try using that method to meet people again. Fortunately every bar and restaurant in Poland has some excellent pints of liquid pain reliever that soon helped me forget about my damaged elbow and rattling brain! Later I told Jan at Azub that during my trip I only had one bike crash, but not to worry, I protected their valuable bike from getting scratched by using my head.

The small pathways in Poland were lovely. But they were a bit hard to find. For some reason, the Google Maps cycling feature is not enabled in Poland. So it is usually directing me to the highways. There are no bike lanes on the highways. The big trucks rush by about 10 or 20 cm from my handlebars. I am just thankful that every truck driver also rides a bicycle, and is doing his best to give me enough space.

There were many cyclists on the roads and pathways in Poland. Let me describe a typical Polish cyclist: She is about 70 years old, wearing rubber beach flip-flops on her feet, she has two large bags of groceries swinging precariously from the handlebars, and she is riding a bike that was manufactured just after the Second World War mostly using surplus Russian tank parts. I am so excited that riding my 3000 Euro high-tech *Azub* recumbent speed-rocket bike, sometimes I can even keep up with her!

One day, I was following a very scenic small road winding through the countryside, when it was blocked by a big red gate with lots of official writing and symbols on it. There was an official looking building, but nobody was in it, so I just cycled past it. After a few kilometers, I could hear gunfire in the distance ahead, so I was starting to wonder about this road. But after a few minutes, the sounds stopped, so I kept going. Then I passed

an army tank sitting on the side of the road. The soldiers on the tank were sitting eating their lunch, and looked at me in some surprise, but they didn't say anything, so I kept going.

After a few more kilometers, I was quite relieved to pass out through another red gate. Just after the gate, another Jeep passed me going the opposite direction. The soldiers on it looked at me in considerable surprise, but they didn't say anything and kept driving. Just then, I started to hear muffled explosions, like maybe artillery shells just behind me. I think I was quite lucky to pass through that military base while the soldiers were on their lunch break.

I have to comment on how nice the people in Poland were in helping me with my (lack of) planning. One example: on my train ride from the end of the Oder back to Azub, I didn't understand why the conductor started making a fuss over my ticket. The nice lady in the next seat explained that I did not have the required separate ticket for my bicycle (even though I had asked for one at the ticket office) and also my ticket was actually for a different city with a similar sounding name that was in the opposite direction. With lots of discussion and official ticket-punching, she and the conductor managed to sort it out, so we shared some of the food that I had brought, and the conductor let me sleep on an empty group of seats. Such nice people!

When people ask me what was the most interesting part of my cycling trip, I say "Well, I didn't really plan for it, but I cycled all the way across Poland in my underwear!" <