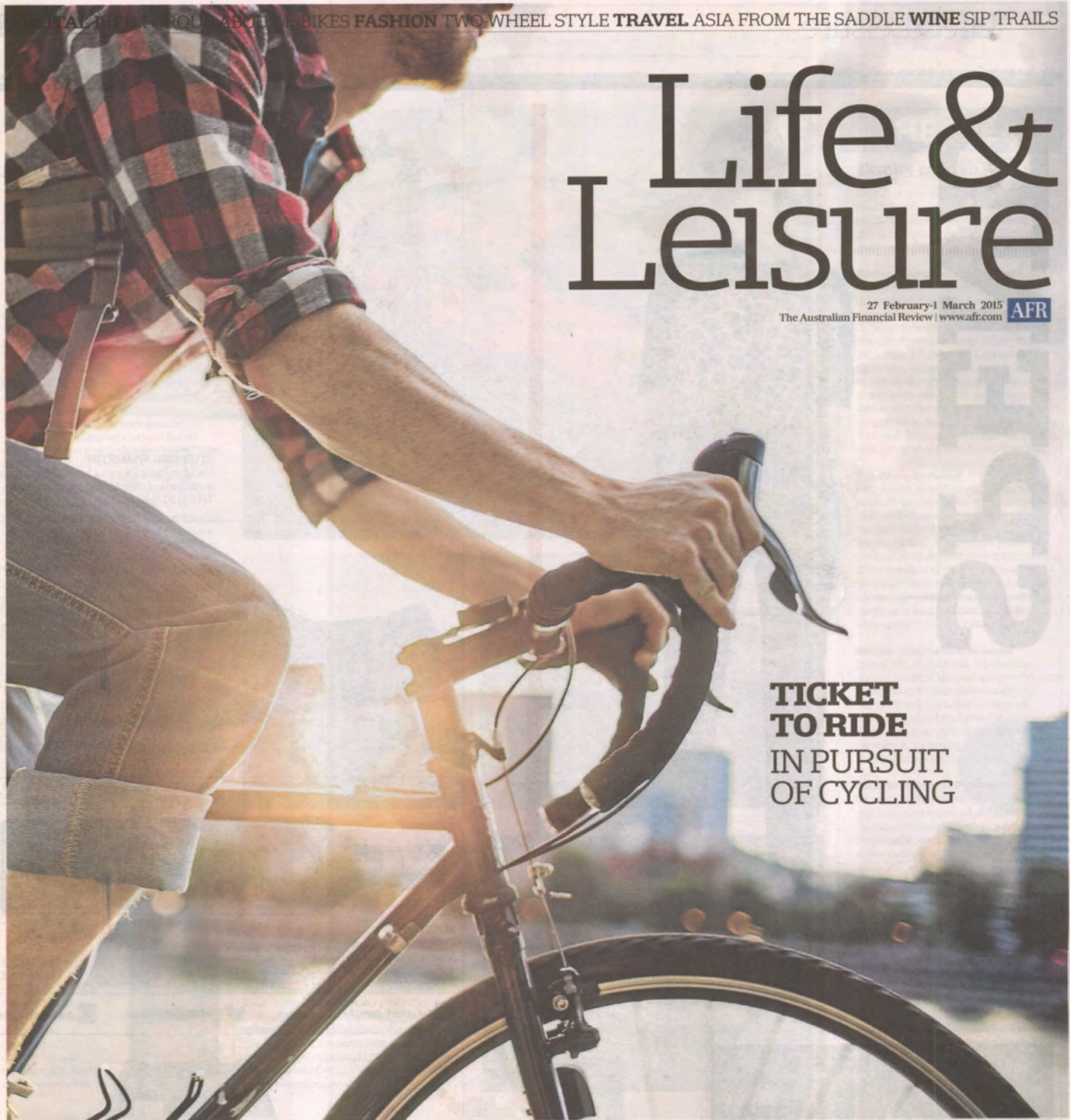


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CYCLING SPECIAL HOTELS

Pedal ways to discovery

Hoteliers and entrepreneurs are introducing bicycle services for travellers of all stripes, writes Dan Stapleton.

From the rolling hills of Christchurch to the mean streets of Manhattan, hotels and urban tourism operators are betting big on cycling in 2015.

Spurred by demand for new fitness and sightseeing options, many hotels in urban areas are offering bike hire for guests.

Meanwhile, recreational companies are capitalising on cycling's growing popularity by introducing bike-related activities to some of the world's most prominent business and tourism markets.

Bike hire has taken hold at hotels in Australia, with examples dotted along the east coast. Hotel Hotel in Canberra, an early adopter of the practice, has been offering free bicycle hire to guests since it opened in November 2013. "All different kinds of people use the bikes," the hotel's general manager, Tracey Atherton, says. "People who are here for business borrow them for meetings, while other people use them just to have a ride around the lake."

Hotel Hotel has a fitness centre, but Atherton says "the bikes blow the gym out of the water" in terms of popularity. Part of the appeal is the opportunity to get to know the city more intimately, she says.

"Canberra has great bike paths, and bikes really help their rider to connect to the Canberra landscape. You get to find all the nice hidden bits," she says. "We wanted to make it easy for guests to experience that."

Hotels in Australia's busier urban centres are also embracing the bike-hire phenomenon. The Art Series group provides bicycles for free loan at several of its Melbourne properties, including The

Nearly as soon as the bikes make their debut for the season, our concierge receives countless requests from guests.

Olivier Lordonnois, The Mark

Blackman in St Kilda and The Larwill Studio in North Melbourne. In Sydney, visitors can borrow bicycles at the Hilton for a nominal fee or take advantage of free bike loans at the Arts Hotel in Paddington.

The Larwill Studio and Hotel Hotel teamed with Australian companies to manufacture bikes that were in keeping with their brand identities. At The Larwill Studio, which is decorated with vivid artwork by painter David Larwill, guests ride striking burnt-orange bicycles by Melbourne-based company Lekker, while at Hotel Hotel, which emphasises local produce and craftsmanship, the bikes were made by Goodspeed, which has its headquarters just metres from the hotel.

Across the Tasman, Kiwi hoteliers are capitalising on the country's reputation as an adventure playground by offering cycling activities that go above and beyond what is on offer in Australia. Upscale hotels such as The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, in Hawke's Bay, and Kauri Cliffs, in Matauri Bay, have been providing guests free mountain bike hire for some time, but the real action is taking place in the Canterbury region around Christchurch. Otahuna Lodge, 20 kilometres from Christchurch in Otahuna Valley, can arrange bespoke "heli-bike excursions", promising high adventure for confident cyclists. The hotel's managing director, Hall Cannon, says "guests are picked up from Otahuna's own great lawn, choppered high into the Southern Alps and then left to bike along a network of remote, breathtaking trails".

Nearby, work has begun on Christchurch Adventure Park, which Cannon hopes will provide another strong incentive for travellers to stay at his lodge. The



Clockwise from top: the Awasi Hotel in Patagonia is surrounded by incredible scenery; in New York, Australian James Phillips' offers bike hire and guided tours of New York; Otahuna Lodge arranges bespoke heli-bike excursions The Mark, on the Upper East Side, has a fleet of bikes decorated by Jacques Grange.

380-hectare site on the outskirts of the city will feature 120 kilometres of groomed cycling trails through forested land, making it the largest bike park in the southern hemisphere. Canadian developer Select Evolution is investing \$NZ20 million (\$19 million) in the venture, with New Zealand's government chipping in \$NZ2 million.

"Cycling has been on an upward trend for years and shows no sign of waning," Select Evolution development manager Dan Harmon says. "Consequently, cycling tourism is also increasing, as people seek an authentic, adventurous, and healthy way to spend their free time."

"Cycling is already a major component of the NZ tourism offer and we will further improve on what is available to the international adventure tourist."

The park, which is projected to open in September 2016, will offer on-site lodging ranging from "flash-packer" (upmarket hostel-style) accommodation to luxurious studio cottages in the forest, bringing the hotel-plus-cycling trend full circle.

In New York City, biking culture is developing rapidly and hotels and fitness companies are stepping in to provide new services. Former mayor Michael Bloomberg championed cycling in the early 2000s, green-lighting the construction of hundreds of kilometres of bike lanes and introducing the popular Citi Bike hire scheme. Now hotels such as The Greenwich, in Tribeca, and The Mark, on the Upper East Side, are responding with free bike hire for guests.

James Phillips, an Australian based in New York, is taking things one step further with his new venture The Domestic, which offers bike hire and guided tours to visiting cycling enthusiasts. "We enable

cyclists of all levels to arrive in Manhattan at short notice, to ride a first-class bike that's fitted to their dimensions, and not worry about where to go," Phillips says.

"Importantly, we can arrange to meet clients at their hotels and leave straight from the front door, which has never been offered in New York City before."

Phillips takes riders up and down Manhattan's West Side Highway, or on tours through Central Park. Advanced riders have more challenging options.

"Avid cyclists wanting adventure and a little more tempo are best escaping the city across the George Washington Bridge," he says. "It's a 30-minute commute up the West Side Highway and puts you in stunning cycling country. Tree-lined routes carry you north, passing through quaint towns like Piermont and Nyack."

At The Mark, which is known for attracting stylish and wealthy patrons, cycling is becoming popular. The hotel has a fleet of six bicycles, decorated by French designer Jacques Grange.

"Nearly as soon as the bikes make their debut for the season, our concierge receives countless requests from guests," general manager Olivier Lordonnois says. "On a day with favourable weather, the bikes can be seen roaming the streets from sun-up to sundown."

While he admits fitness enthusiasts rarely use the bicycles, the guests who do are an eclectic bunch.

"It ranges from families on holiday and couples enjoying a romantic weekend getaway to solo travellers full of wanderlust," he says. "The service is wildly popular." **L&L**