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America's Top Mountain Biking Town

Thirty-five reasons why Bend, Oregon, rules



There are plenty of great mountain bike towns in America, but most have a downside. Moab, Utah, is a slick wonderland, but take a wrong turn during the summer months and you can end up a large slab of beef jerky. Crested Butte, Colorado, offers majestic views from endless singletrack. The downside? It has two seasons, winter and the Fourth of July. The birthplace of mountain biking, Marin, California, is awesome if you don't mind dodging the hiking-pole-wielding locals who feel it is their duty to rid the trails of pesky mountain bikers. Durango, Colorado, has epic riding right from town, but it also has long winters, it is hard to get in and out of, it is a tough place to make a living, and every rider is so darn fit. Whistler is in Canada. That brings us to our pick for the best mountain biking town in America. A drum roll, please. Bend, Oregon.

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Located in central Oregon at the eastern foothills of the Cascade Mountains, Bend, population 81,000, rests at an elevation of 3625 feet and seems like it was founded just for mountain bikers. It was actually founded by pioneers who took refuge and kicked back on the banks of the Deschutes River to recover from their trip across the massive plains from the East. The place was originally named Farewell Bend, because these early travelers were so bummed to continue their trip West. All the things that attracted those early pioneers are what attract mountain bikers today.

Don't believe us? We've got thirty-five reasons to back up our claim that Bend is the best mountain biking town in America.

Accessibility: The Roberts Field Airport in Redmond, Oregon, serves Bend. If you can't get a non-stop flight there, then going through Portland, Oregon, from anywhere on earth is your simplest option. Driving from Portland (around three hours) is a beautiful, totally worth it road trip. Here are distances from some cities in the region:

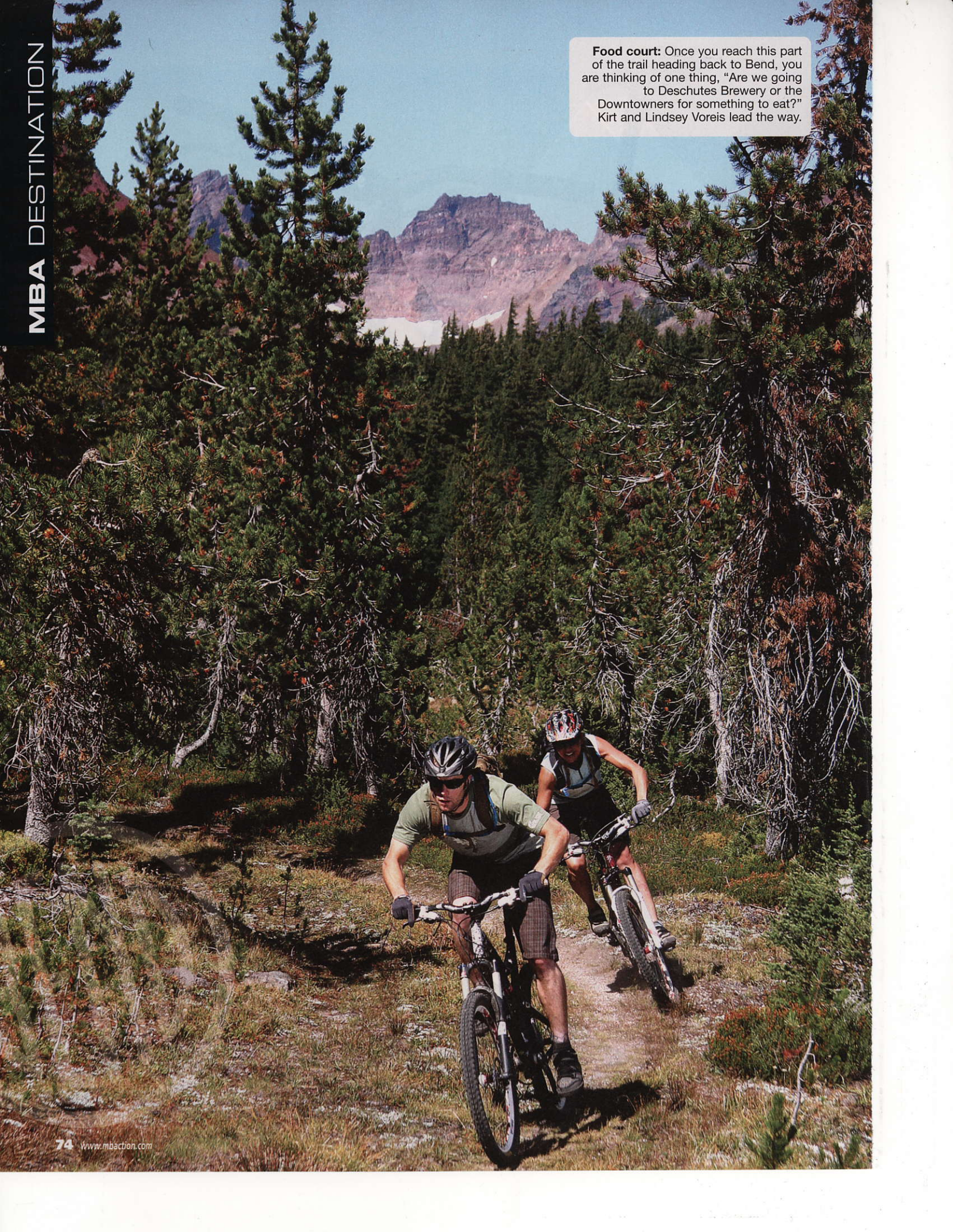
- 175 miles from Portland, Oregon
- 130 miles from Salem, Oregon
- 121 miles from Eugene, Oregon
- 500 miles from San Francisco, California
- 330 miles from Boise, Idaho
- 343 miles from Seattle, Washington
- 394 miles from Reno, Nevada

Flowy fun: The trail network closest to town consists of fast, flowy singletrack without too much gut-busting climbing. Bend trails are missing something the trails on the west side of the Cascades have plenty of: mud.



Go Cog Wild: Cog Wild Bicycle Tours is based in Bend. If your time in the area is limited, you will get the most out of your precious riding time by using Cog Wild. We highly recommend their tours.

Food court: Once you reach this part of the trail heading back to Bend, you are thinking of one thing, "Are we going to Deschutes Brewery or the Downtowners for something to eat?" Kirt and Lindsey Voreis lead the way.





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Worth the effort: Woody Starr, a local radio DJ, trail advocate and promoter of Bend's Big Fat Tour, points out to Cog Wild's Melanie Fisher the reason why he is never going to leave Bend: riding as far as the eye can see.

Green Energy Transportation: John "Mr. Bend" Flannery is a cyclist who operates Green Energy Transportation, (541) 610-6103. He will get you and your bikes from the airport to town while filling you in on what is happening.

Lodging: You will not have trouble finding a base camp in Bend. We stayed at the plush Phoenix Inn on a hill overlooking downtown. The location is perfect, and they offer a bike room. There are plenty of other hotels, camping and other options. One group we rode with (who traveled from Canada to sample Bend's trails) rented a house for their week of riding. You can try Bend Vacation Rentals at (877) 355-9492.

Eats: The town is loaded with great places to eat. We started our visit at the Deschutes Brewery (a hangout of local riders and fitness freaks). The Downtowner offers great sandwiches and soup at affordable prices. There are loads of pizza places, Mexican food, and Nancy P's and Jackson's Corner both understand what mountain bikers' portions need to be.

Bike shops: Bend has the highest number of bike shops per capita of anywhere we've traveled. You've got Pine Mountain Sports (Santa Cruz, Fisher and Rocky



Service with a smile: Bend has more bike shops than 7-Elevens. Now that's our kind of town. If you need to rent a bike, get a bike repaired, or check out what the locals are riding, you have plenty of options to choose from.



Rush hour: While Bend's trails attract a lot of riders, it is never this crowded. A group of friends from the Canadian Yukon head out on the Ochoco Loop with their Cog Wild tour guides.

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Mountain), Hutch's (Specialized, Cannondale and Giant), WebCyclery (Ellsworth and Niner), Northwest Adventures (Diamondback, GT and Schwinn) Bend Bike & Sport (Felt) and Bend Cyclery (Kona). If you have bike trouble, you can get it fixed without missing a day of your riding vacation.

Maps: The Bend mountain bike trail network is well documented by Adventure Maps, (503) 559-0051.

Cog Wild Bicycle Tours: If you are not planning on moving to Bend, you will need to make the most of your riding time while you are in town. You can try to explore the trails based on suggestions from bike shops or reading maps, but Bend offers so many choices, we highly recommend hooking up with Cog Wild Bicycle Tours, (866) 610-4822. This locally owned mountain bike tour company operates under Special Use Permits from the Deschutes, Ochoco, Umpqua, Mt. Hood, Willamette and Fremont National Forests. They offer one-day tours, shuttles, mountain bike vacations, women's tours and kids camps.

The MBA wrecking crew used the services of Cog Wild Bicycle Tours on our three-day Bend visit because the area offers such a vast array of trails that we would have missed great riding without Cog's guidance. Their shuttle service got us out of town to the Ochoco loop and also allowed us to ride the phenomenal Bachelor to Bend route on day three



Take a picture: Just one of the many "spots" to be discovered around Bend.

Home sweet home: Kirt Voreis, showing his wife Lindsey the fast way through a stream, manuals down one of Bend's popular trails. The former World Cup Downhill racer and Dual-Slalom National Champion calls Bend home.





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when an out-and-back trip would have proved exhausting.

Do we sound like salesmen for Cog Wild? Guilty. They are great riders, friendly people, have clean and well-maintained vans and can set you up with rental equipment. Taking a Cog Wild Bicycle Tour is worth every penny.

The weather: Unlike the wet and moldy side of the Cascade Mountains that Oregon is famous for, Bend is a high desert environment. Yes, the place gets snow in the winter (Mt. Bachelor outside of Bend is a ski resort, after all), but it doesn't stay around long on the Bend trails. It gets cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Neither of these extremes would keep you from riding. If you had to pin us down, May, June, August, September and October are the best months to plan your visit.

The trails: Like any great riding destination, Bend and the surrounding areas offer a little bit of everything. The flowy, fun trails closest to town are well maintained by COTA (Central Oregon Trail Alliance). Venturing out to the Ochocos provides challenging singletrack (think rocks, ledges, lots of granny gear climbs and total-concentration descents). A 20-mile ride in the Ochocos felt like a 50-mile ride. The Mt. Bachelor to Bend trails take you past lakes and waterfalls on singletrack that has you smiling the whole way. This 45-mile ride feels more like a 20-mile ride.

Water-cooled: The temps get toasty in July and August, so rides that pass some of the area's many lakes become very popular. It seems like around every corner is another spectacular view.

Bend's Big Fat Tour: This is an epic three-day event that covers over 130 miles of singletrack and takes place October 16th through the 18th. The event is about the camaraderie and perseverance rather than head-to-head competition. Just one more reason Bend rocks.

The locals: Bend is home to lots of well-known competitors, including Olympic rider Adam Craig, Carl Decker, Ryan Trebon, Kirt Voreis, Paul Thomasberg, April Lawyer, Steve Larsen and Paul Biskup. Even if you don't see a "name" rider on the trail, the locals are a friendly mix of single-speeders, regional racers, weekend warriors and riders in love with the wide open space around Bend.

The water: You may think that mountain bikes and water don't mix. Still, you can't ride every minute of your trip to Bend. That's why the Deschutes River is our final reason for picking Bend as our number one mountain bike town in America. The river is a great place to cool down when the riding is done. □