

Out There

Two wheels good

Lisbon is not known as a cycle-friendly city but the council has made a start on changing that image.

Hilly Lisbon may not seem the ideal place for cycling, but there are already some 40 kms of routes within the city limits for the exclusive use of pedal pushers – and the figure could more than double in two years if things go to according plan.

Last year's local elections were a spur to the project. Of the projected total cost of laying them, some €5 million, most is set to come from EU funds and much of the rest from a special levy on gambling receipts at the Casino Lisboa.

The cycle network extends well out into the suburbs but of most interest to visitors to Lisbon will be the seven kilometres of now smooth cycling along the River Tagus between Cais do Sodré and Belém. In a delightful bid to make the functional truly poetical, Fernando Pessoa's "Ode to the Tagus" spools out in the original Portuguese along the length of the cycle lane. "Pelo Tejo vai-se para o mundo" – "the Tagus leads you to the world" – is one of the most famous lines from the poem, which harks back to Portugal's Golden Age of Discoveries. (Ponder as you ride why, while the words run left to right, that is west to east along the river, the stanzas appear in reverse order.)

The path hugs the river except for a detour around a large wharf owned by the port authority. In



Bicycling in Marquês de Pombal Lisbon was made for cars, not for bicycles, but measures are being taken to make the city more bicycle-friendly

Belém, it peters out; there are similar stretches further on in Oeiras, but the local council there limits cyclists' access to promenades to before 10am and after 5pm in winter, and before 9am and after 8pm in summer. Further west, in Estoril and Cascais, cyclists are barred from the prom. But beyond Cascais is the coast-hugging cycle route to Guincho beach; you can pick up a free bike (leaving your passport) from BiCas outside the rail station, at the marina, or at Casa da Guia on the Guincho road.

Back in Lisbon, another option for keen cyclists is the Parque Florestal de Monsanto, the forest that serves as the city's green lung criss-crossed with cycle trails. These now link up with the city: one route snakes south to Alcântara and the river, another takes a viaduct over the Eixo Norte-Sul highway to reach almost into the city's heart at the top of Parque Eduardo VII.

Downtown, it is now possible to hire bicycles of various shapes and sizes downtown at Bike Iberia (Largo Corpo Santo 5, 21 347 0347/www.bikeiberia.com). Rates range from €5 for a kid's bike or €7.50 for an adult's for two hours, to €75/€90 for a week.

Out east in Parque das Nações, whose open riverside spaces make for pleasant cycling, bike hire fees start at €2 at Tejo Bike (21 891 9333/www.tejobike.pt).

Lisbon by numbers

2 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the region; Jerónimos Monastery and Tower of Belém count as one, Sintra's 'cultural landscape' the other

110 Mean number of days a year with rainfall in the city

17 Length of the Ponte Vasco da Gama in kilometres

10 000 Pastéis de nata sold by the Antiga Confeitaria de Belém on an average weekday

3 Total Michelin stars awarded to Lisbon restaurants

120 Species of animals in the city, 50 of them in Monsanto forest park. (There are another 360 in the Zoo.)

15,000 Lisbon residents who died in the 1755 earthquake and tidal wave, from a population of 190,000

4 People killed in the 1974 Revolution

160 Number of *becos* (dead ends) in the city

4600 Official estimate (a conservative

one) of how many abandoned buildings there are in the city

37 Uzbeks legally resident in the city (against just one Fijian)

1500 Total number of inhabitants of Baixa and Chiado

285 Number of years it took to complete the church of Santa Engracia, now the National Pantheon