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The emergence of the bicycle as an integral part of Kenya's culture

It had been several years since I traveled to Kenya, and what I found was unexpected and intriguing especially for a bike addict like myself. Bikes were everywhere. In my absence, Kenyans built bikes, bike shops and created somewhat of a social shift.

The bike population has exploded since the 90s becoming an integral part of village livelihood. This due, in part, to a 2002 government ruling that eliminated the bike import duty tax enabling the cost of a bike to plummet. The action provided a boost in low cost transportation like the *boda-boda* (bike taxis) and a significant reduction in time spent hauling water and goods.

Prior to the ruling, most everything was hauled by women, who trudged along, doubled over against the weight of their loads. Very rarely did I ever see a man haul anything. These days, men push bikes overloaded with grass, coal, lumber or anything else in between. The women? They are perched on the back of a *boda-boda* on their way to market or work.

I was told the bikes are manufactured "somewhere overseas," shipped to Kenya in parts and then assembled. The majority are single speeds, have basic metal frames with a double top tube, narrow wheels that will never see Maxxis tires and a wide saddle. I did see some children with primary hued tiny bikes, but they were the lucky few. Tourists that take bike safaris do ride mountain bikes, which are sometimes available with suspension.

Tour operators are now offering bike safaris as another way to generate tourism dollars and provide a unique perspective to safari. If the company you have booked through does not offer bike tours, there is a possibility that some of the lodges and camps you would be staying at will, such as Mt. Kenya Safari Club and Shompole Lodges and Camps. Biking is a great way to be a part of Kenya and experience its culture.

For more information on Kenya and mountain biking: www.magicalkenya.com
www.shompole.com
www.fairmont.com/kenyasafariclub/