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ROPE IS  
ENOUGH?



**+**  
**OUTDOOR  
CLUBS**



One half-day tour (\$110 plus GST) covers only 15 kilometres in four hours, but it's an eventful trip to the National Gallery, the Museum of History, Leamy Lake Park, Leamy Lake Beach, Casino du Lac-Leamy, the Parliament Buildings, Victoria Island, Ottawa Locks, and the Bytown Museum. The \$50 Ottawa Express is a two-hour tour around Ottawa's major attractions for visitors with limited time to explore the city.

The tours have a set ratio of six cyclists to one guide – no mob scenes here. Each rider is fitted to a hybrid bike (you tell them your height so you get the right size frame). Before you ride, guides adjust seat, handlebar and helmet.

Escape Tour rents "comfort hybrids" from RentABike and Cyclo's, on Rasouli's theory that their operations are complementary. "They are respected companies that have been providing bike rentals in Ottawa for decades, with more than 200 bikes available." Using their resources makes sense for Escape, which focuses on thematic sightseeing, she explained.

While bringing your own bike and helmet gets you a small discount, Rasouli prefers riders use Escape bikes since they are properly serviced and have the right sized accessories such as spare inner tubes. Rasouli says riders have shown up with bikes in poor condition or the wrong size, and she wants to avoid that kind of discomfort for riders and hassle for herself.

"We provide major safety instructions before we begin cycling, including turn and stop signals, distance to keep from other cyclist, passing, using the bell," she says. "We start very slow for the first 15 to 20 minutes so the cyclists can get comfortable with each other."

Escape has partnered with the Otesha Project, a youth-led environmental charity based in Ottawa to establish the Escape Bursary Fund, contributing two per cent of each sale to give young activists the opportunity to make a difference.

•Like that borrowed bike long ago.

For more information, email Rasouli at [maria@escapebicycletours.ca](mailto:maria@escapebicycletours.ca) or contact her by phone at 613-608-7407. ■

# ESCAPE ON A BIKE

*New bicycle tour outfit offers an escape for tourists and "staycationers"*

By Sheila Ascroft

The word "escape" has extra significance for Maria Rasouli. It's not just the name of her new business, Escape Bicycle Tours, it's a part of who she is.

Rasouli grew up in a village in northern Iran near the Caspian Sea and says her greatest joy as a child was riding her bicycle every day after school with her best friend. They rode past young men playing soccer as they headed through open fields and the nearby forest.

But at age 11 her parents told her cycling was inappropriate for a young woman, took away her bike, and gave it to her brother.

She put her energies into her studies but never lost the passion for cycling. It took her another 13 years to get back on a bike – in Canada. On her first day here – at age 24 when she came to study at Carleton University – she borrowed a colleague's bike for a ride.

"Words cannot describe how I felt the moment I got on that bicycle – what a rush of excitement, freedom, and joy!" said Rasouli, who says she lives by the motto: "a bicycle, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

She started Escape Bicycle Tours in May so she could share "the joy of bicycling in nature. It's about celebrating our freedom to explore and connect with our Canadian heritage, magnificent nature, history, and culture – on our bicycles!"

"The Ottawa area is rich with natural beauty, history, art, and fantastic locally sourced food," says Rasouli. "Escape tours are about unwinding from our daily hectic

pace and experiencing this great region in a relaxed, fun way."

Rasouli, who guides for her company as well as running it, emphasizes that its tours offer tourists and staycationers "the sights, sounds and secrets of Ottawa ... on a bicycle," using the city's extensive bike path network as well as quiet, safe roads into the nearby countryside.

The company offers half-day and full-day tours, weekend getaways and special-occasion tours like Perth's August Garlic-Fest. And custom tours for business groups or family celebrations.

Escape provides bicycles, helmets, maps, water bottles, snacks, museum admission fees, and guides with bike-repair and first aid skills. They take clients to both urban and rural destinations in Ottawa, the Valley, and the Outaouais.

