

# Cycling China: Discover Beautiful Fujian

China is a deeply cultural country filled with an assortment of stunning cycling opportunities.

When cycling through Fujian, it will feel as if you are experiencing time travel. You will start out among the busy super highways of the country where laden trucks saunter through their daily routines. Eventually you will reach the wastelands of worker-apartments and then, before long, you will be among the export factories that litter the coast. No matter which leg of the journey you find yourself on, an ancient world full of adventure will be waiting for you.



A good idea would be to take on the hills first and then move onto the smaller roads. Once you've left the roads, seek out the tiny country lanes. The lanes will lead you through small mud brick villages which tend to the farms that produce Fujian's most famous product – tea.

These small farms have done an excellent job preserving the landscape which makes the area an absolute joy to cycle through. It is especially exciting when you can smell the wonderful scent of roasting leaves in the air or when a farmer offers you a sample of their produce. Perhaps you will even get to taste Fujian Oolong, an ancient Chinese tea prized throughout the country.

The farms also mean there will be a number of tea-related obstacles to dodge. In order to dry out the tea leaves, farmers must place them on mats by the side of the road. Also, watch out for pickers. They can often be found pulling out of side roads on motorcycles piled high with bags of leaves.

The rolling hills may look daunting at first but don't let them discourage you. For the steeper climbs, you can find many places to take a quick break. These include tea farms, vistas and impressive tulou architecture. A tulou is a huge circular residence enclosed around an internal well and some livestock. Their thick walls can reach an incredible three to five stories tall giving the building the ability to house up to 80 families. These earthen fortresses are spread all throughout the Fujian valleys. The Hakka Clan built most of the tulous 800 years ago when, after fleeing war and famine in Northern China, they discovered they needed to defend themselves against bandits that had invaded Fujian territory. Because the clan needed to hold out in their forts for a long period of time, they depended largely on preserved food. This particular part of their cuisine is still popular today.



The counties of Yongding and Nanjing are home to the most tulous. Yongding is focused more on the Hakka culture with its rice-laden valley floors and abundant tobacco production. Nanjing, on the other hand, leans more on the Minnan traditions. The Minnan is the main ethnic group of Fujian who were taught how to build tulous by the Hakka. Rather than taking on the crops of rice and tobacco, this culture focuses primarily on tea. Within their large hedged fields, the people of Nanjing produce the famous Fujian Iron Goddess Tea (Tie Guanyin). All of China is obsessed with this sweet and floral-scented tea. However the Fujianese insists that the tea obtains its wonderful taste from being brewed, kungfu style, using local mountain spring water. Either way, this tea is one piece of heaven you won't want to miss!

The tulous have played a large part in preserving the rich culture of the Hakka Clan. UNESCO has even dubbed 46 tulous as buildings of outstanding cultural heritage. This decision has brought in an increasing number of tour buses to the areas which, regrettably, has commercialized the culture. Due to the constant stream of tourists, some tulous have even succumbed to simply being tea and souvenir shops.



In any case, these impressive UNESCO structures are an absolute joy to cycle past just as long as you avoid the aggressive tea-pushers. Cyclists have the unique opportunity to stray from these commercialized buildings and explore some of the more isolated tulous. These fortresses, rapt with Feng shui characteristics, offer visitors tea with an air of genuine warmth. This particular tea is especially distinct because it often comes straight from the farmer's own limited supply.

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