

How to Ride a Bicycle in Jakarta

Want to ride a bicycle in car- and motorcycle-gridlocked Indonesia? If you know how, when, and where to go about it, you'll give yourself a good workout and avoid wasted time sitting in traffic. This article assumes you know the basics of...

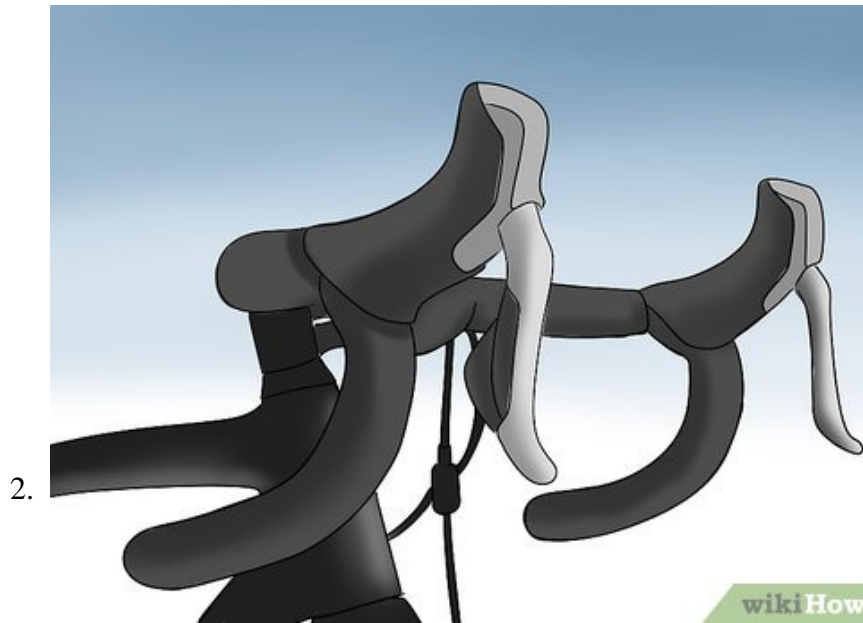
Part 1 of 2:

Before hitting the road

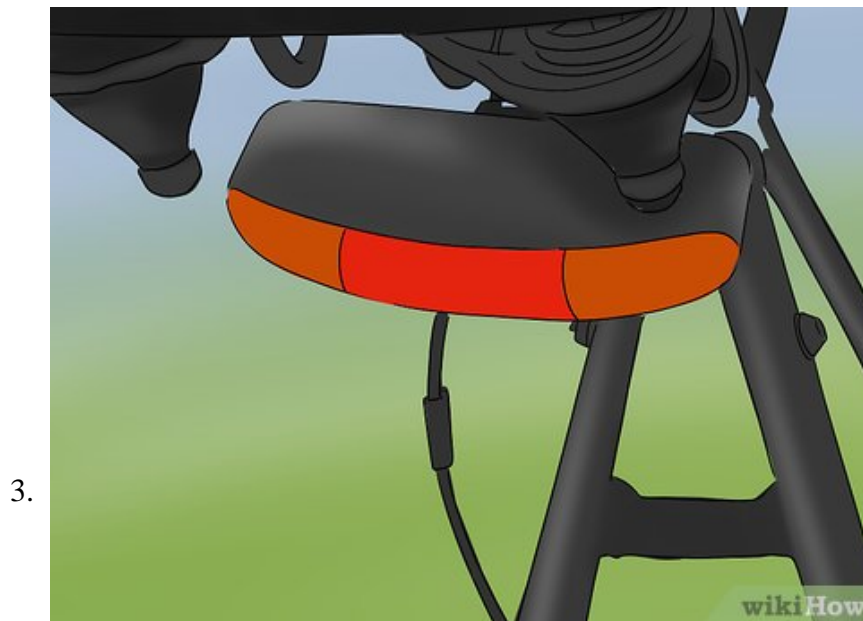


Choose between a folding bike or a lighter bike. Some cross-city commuters have taken to buying folding bikes which can be taken aboard the TransJakarta Busway shuttle. They ride it from their house to the Busway, and from the Busway to their office. Others who do not have to commute so far prefer light non-folding bikes that can be carried up highway crosswalks without much effort.

1. Even if you can afford a really expensive and fancy bike—don't get one! Get a bike that's reasonably priced. Don't provoke thieves unnecessarily.
2. Find out whether your company provides any parking for bicycles. As in many developing countries, the bicycle ranks low on the totem pole and it is the odd person (read: eccentric) who chooses a bicycle as a commuter if that person has the means to get a motorized vehicle. That said, you may have to train your company's security personnel to provide you with a sheltered and secure bike parking/stowage area.
3. Buy bike locks for both front and back wheels. Locks that can be extended to anchor against something immovable. If you have a fancy seat and seat post, buy a lock for that too. Jakarta is, after all, a big city.



Know which lever corresponds to which brake on your bicycle. American market bicycles have rear brakes connected to the Right hand lever while Japan and China (and Indonesian) bikes connect to the Left. This is important information if you do not want to be thrown off your bike in a panic stop.



Accessorize properly. Contrary to the common conception of accessories being optional, there are accessories that are absolutely necessary if you're going to bike:

1. Buy lights. Head lights and tail lights. Pack lights. Do not depend on the dynamo driven front lights, if you have them. Add battery powered LED lights. The visibility sets you out to drivers as different from the run-of-the-mill cyclist, and this awareness of you could save your life. Take care not to obstruct your taillight when stowing your backpack on the passenger carrier.
2. Buy a bike bell or any sound device. A clear-ringing bike bell. It could save you from some very minor crashes in the back streets and may alert many pedestrians, and to overtake a cart or rickshaw.

3. Have goggles or polarized clip-ons. You don't have to wear them all the time, but they are particularly useful in certain seasons of the year, when traveling at dawn or dusk, when there are lots of flying insects that could easily get in your eyes.
4. Have a basket (if possible) and certainly a passenger rack/seat in back. Two or three short strap down bungee cords as well. A basket is a very useful utility tool. The bungee cords will stow your backpack perfectly on the passenger rack. Panniers are nice but they are uncommon and expensive in Jakarta.

4.

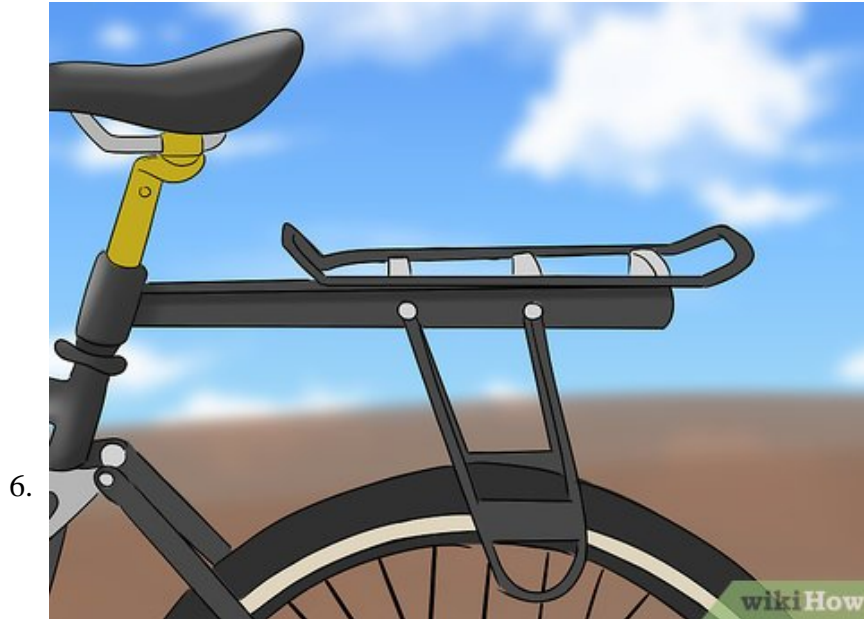


Dress differently. It does not pay to dress plainly if you're going on a bike. You want to stand out, be different, be visible and thus be treated differently, hopefully deferentially. It does not hurt to dress like a person who can very well afford a car but prefers to ride a bike. This results in policemen and container truck drivers taking extra care around you.

5.



Bring a change of clothes. Depending on office circumstances, you may or may not have showers. In any case, it feels better to have a fresh shirt at the office.



Load your bicycle properly. It is common for newbies to load the front basket heavily, not realizing that this makes steering tricky and difficult. It is better to place your goodies in a knapsack that you can strap down on the passenger seat behind you with the bungee cords. In the rare instance that you have two heavy bags, tie them like saddle bags to the far rear (away from the path of your feet as you pedal) using tying straws. Take care that they do not obstruct the spokes.

Part 2 of 2:

Riding the Bicycle in Jakarta



Listen for road noises! Do not wear noise cancelling earbuds headphones, as hearing comprises a large part of your road awareness. It is easy to teach yourself to listen for the deep bass sound of container and cargo trucks, but it is more difficult to train yourself to hear the sound of mini-cargo trucks like the Isuzu Elf.

EXPERT TIP

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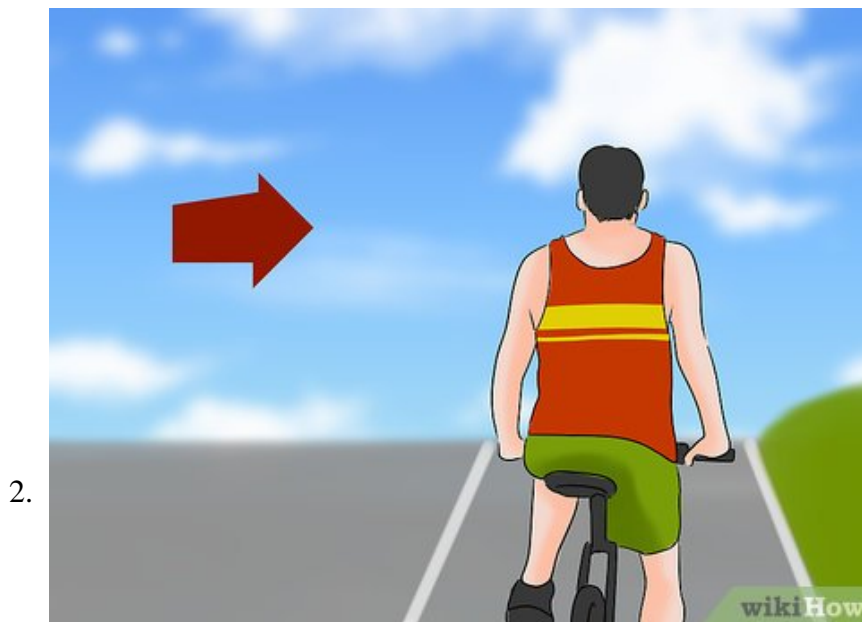
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Use caution when you ride your bicycle in the city. Riding a bicycle can be dangerous in some parts of Jakarta, since the traffic can be very chaotic.



Always defer to motorized traffic. When riding in a pack with them, pull over on the shoulder and stop. Let them pass and then proceed.

3.

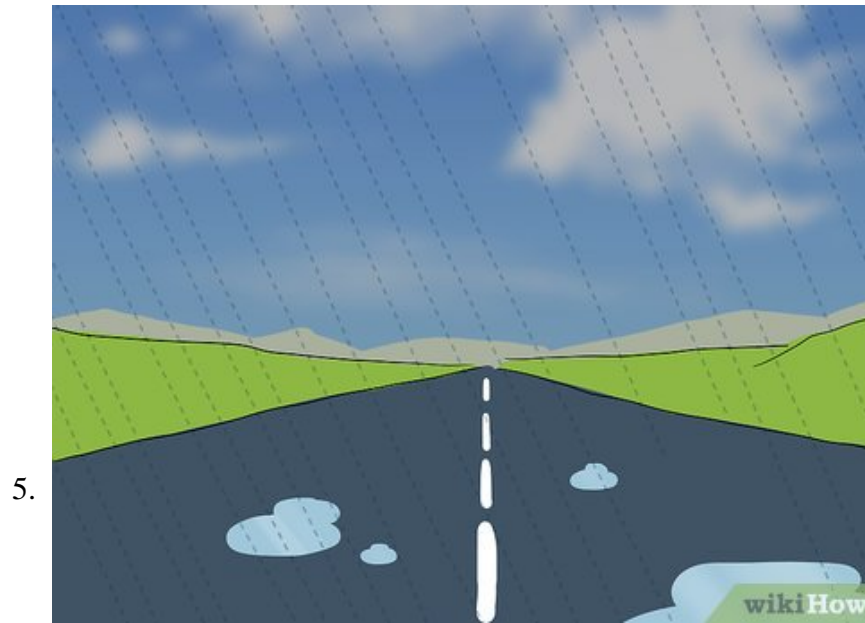


Beware of motorcycle riders. They are, for the most part, your biggest nemesis on the road as most are undisciplined and reckless. Always assume they will cut your path or charge ahead instead of slowing down. Let them pass when they are bunched together, such as at a stoplight.

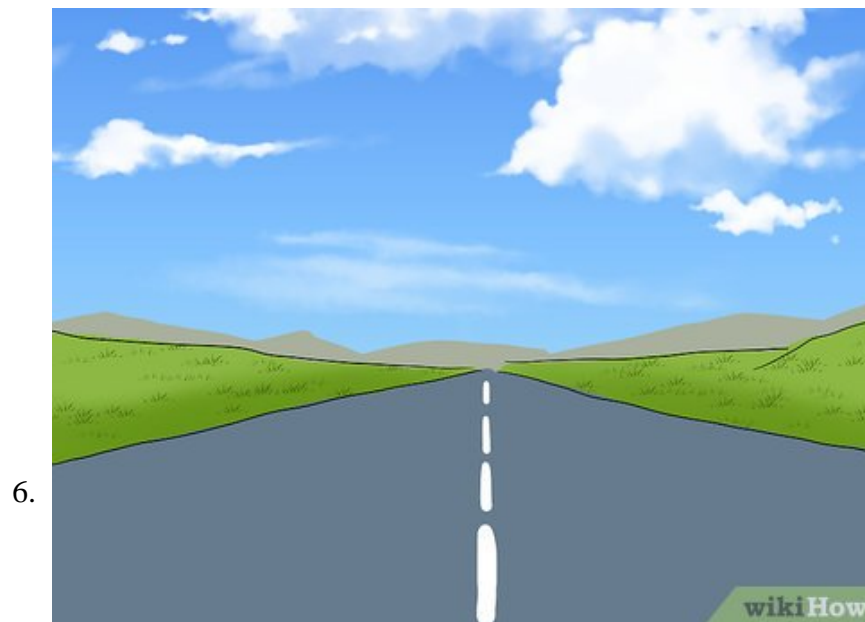
4.



When a public transportation suddenly stops ahead of you and you are not certain of the traffic behind you, stop rather than overtake. It may be a nuisance, but it is certainly better than bodily injury.



Do not travel on a bicycle after or between rain squalls. The road will be slick and it's not worth the risk.



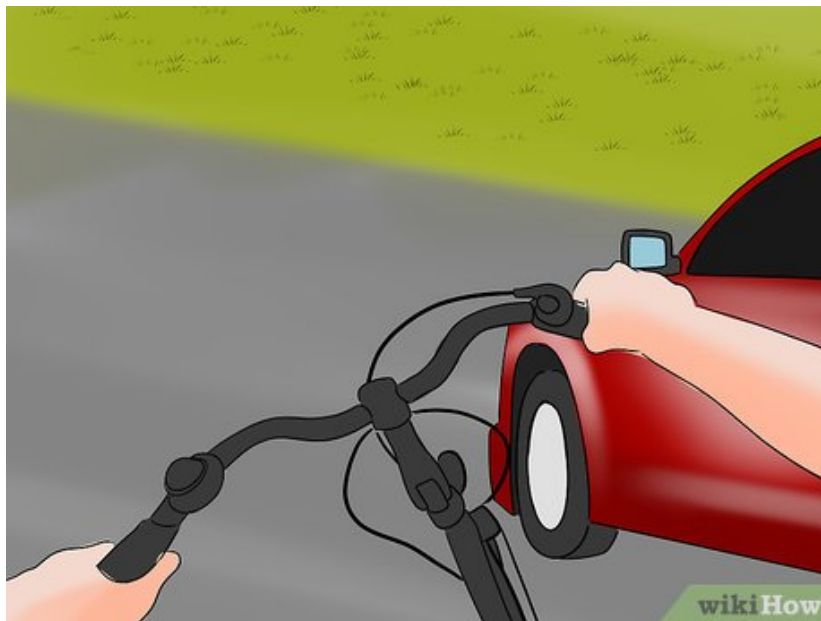
Always choose to travel when it is still light. Only travel at night or at dawn/twilight when absolutely necessary. Be extra careful and deferential to motor vehicles when traveling at night.

7.



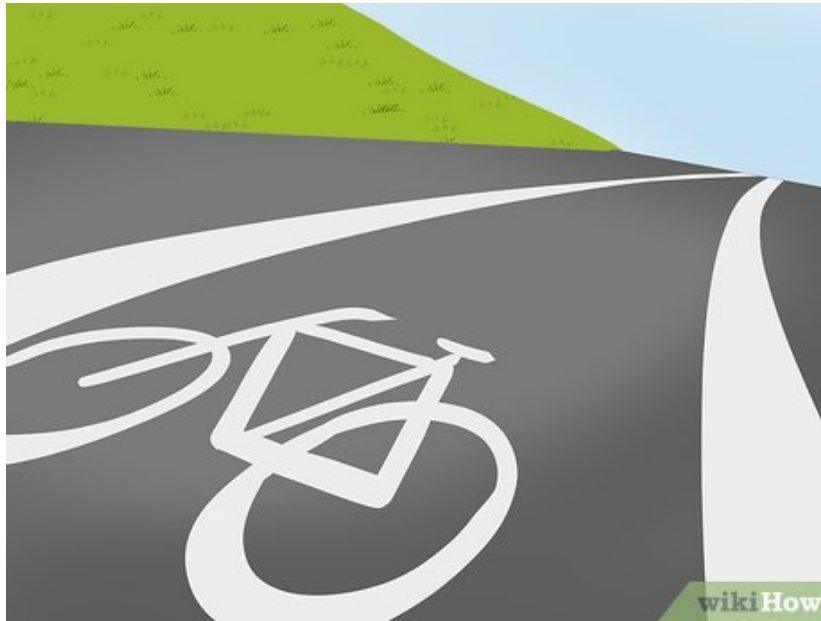
Smile and wave at the guards and regulars along your path. It is common practice in Indonesia for companies to hire blue guards to stop traffic to allow their employees to drive in and out of their company compounds. Knowing the guards makes it more likely that these guards will be aware of your presence on the road and be more considerate of stopping you cold unless absolutely necessary. Besides, it makes for a great morning when your 'road friends' greet you on your way to work.

8.



Listen for driver's alerts. If you hear a vehicle honking behind you trying to overtake you, pull aside immediately and decrease your speed and let the vehicle pass you. Many of Jakarta's streets are quite narrow.

9.



Bicycle lanes. In the city, bicycle lanes are very rare, so if there are no bicycle lanes on the street/road, ride your bike at the very left side of the street/road too let other vehicles pass you.

10.



Signaling. If you are turning right or left, do not immediately turn. Check to see traffic coming up behind you. If you are mid-lane, a series of head turns toward the direction you intend to go will serve to indicate you intentions. But still, do so slowly and carefully. Remember that the motorcycle guys are the most unpredictable.

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