

## Urban AdvenTours

# Rental and Tour Business Lets Visitors Discover Boston by Bike

**A**ndrew Prescott navigates Boston's streets with the ease of a bicycle messenger. But he recognizes that riding in a busy city center can be daunting for the uninitiated. His business, Urban AdvenTours, which offers bike rentals and tours, aims to help people see the city in a new light.

"People think of Boston as having narrow roads and unsafe places to ride. We're fighting that on a daily basis. But in some ways it helps us that it has that bad reputation in terms of the tours. Instead of navigating it on their own, we have professionals to guide people," said Prescott, who calls himself chief wheel officer of Urban AdvenTours.

Prescott said Boston is actually an ideal city for visitors to experience by bike because of its size and lack of hills. "It's flat, relatively compact, and the unique neighborhoods make an interesting story as you ride through," he said.

Prescott started the bicycle tour and rental business in June 2004 out of his

house. For several years he worked out of area bike shops including Boston Bicycle and Landry's Bicycles until he outgrew the space.

In February he opened his own shop in Boston's North End neighborhood. Prescott said he expected the location, near popular tourist attractions like Faneuil Hall and the New England Aquarium, to draw tourists. But he was surprised by its acceptance by residents.

"Being in an area where there are no bike shops to service the neighborhood, we were very welcomed by the community," Prescott said, adding that the rental model has been popular with locals with small apartments and no space to store bikes.

Urban AdvenTours offers rental packages, which appeal to locals who can rent bikes instead of purchasing their own. It has a fleet of 100 well-maintained rental bikes. Most of the bikes are Globe hybrid bikes, but it also has Specialized road and fixed gear bikes as well as kids' bikes, tandems



Andrew Prescott

and trailers. Bikes come with a helmet, lock and staff recommendations on good routes.

Rentals account for 21 percent of revenue but the majority of the business—42 percent—is guided bike tours. Along with private and custom tours, Prescott offers two standard tours a day that last approximately three hours. "If people come here and don't know the city, they want a little bit of hand-holding," he said.

Urban AdvenTours also sells merchandise, parts and accessories and has a repair shop in the basement. Prescott said he's had a hard time transitioning from tours and rentals to service, but service is the fastest-growing part of his business.

Prescott said he wants to support independent bike shops and refers any requests for new bike sales to local retailers. In turn, he gets referrals from area bike shops for rentals. "To most bike shops, rentals are painful," he said. —Megan Tompkins

## Cambridge Bicycle

# Art, Bicycles and Retail Combo Draws Discerning Customers

**K**ip Chinian is all about culture—bike culture that is. And his main store, Cambridge Bicycle, reflects a creative bent when it comes to store design, fixtures and keeping a laser-like beam on Boston's cycling trends.



Kip Chinian

"We're getting more and more artful than ever before," Chinian said, citing his second store, Superb Bicycle on Boston's Beacon Street, as his testament to integrating art with bicycles and retail. The name is a spinoff of Suntour's Superbe components.

Still, at the end of the day it's about solving customer problems, he added. And service rates a high priority as well as experience—Abraham Pindo has been wrenching on bikes for 30 years.

"Service is very big for us," Chinian said, pointing out that his main store is on Massachusetts Avenue just a block away from the MIT campus.

There's also plenty of competitors in the neighborhood.

Like many stores, Chinian and his staff were overwhelmed last year with service requests as gas prices boomed.

This spring he saw another spike in business, and generally turns major repairs around in fewer than five days. If it's just a minor fix-it, his staff tries to turn it around immediately. Upwards of 40 percent

of Chinian's revenue comes from parts and service.

Cambridge Bicycle and Superb Bicycle are city-center operations with heavy sidewalk traffic. Attracting walk-ins to stop for a moment and browse is as important as closing a sale.

And once customers are in the store they find creative displays, some of which are custom built, that highlight particular products and grab a customer's attention. His Brooks saddle display is classic.

To get some idea of Chinian's focus on art and the bicycle, go to his Web site and take a look at his second store at superbicycle.com.

Chinian, who has an undergraduate degree from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, spent two years renovating the old brick building, retaining as much of the Victorian ceiling and woodwork as possible.

He also has a degree from Tufts Business School, a unique combination that ties business, retail, bikes and art into a neat package.

And part of his business acumen as well as his eye for design has focused on Boston's single-speed and fixie crowd,

which is alive and thriving.

Demand for track frames is relatively strong and at Chinian's Beacon Street store customers can find Bianchi's Pista Concept, Cinelli's SuperCorsa Pista and Cinelli's Vigorelli among others.

He also carries mainstream brands like KHS (especially the KHS Urban Soul), Jamis, Breezer, Bianchi and others as well as BMX brands Diamond-back, Redline and SE.

He complements his penchant for artisan-driven track bikes by stocking under-distributed accessories like Crane brass bike bells, double-toe straps and vintage wool jerseys.

Chinian launched Cambridge Bicycle in 1999, formerly known as The Bicycle Workshop. Chinian had been the store's manager before purchasing it. The store has been in the same location for about 30 years.

"This is a university town and the city is doing well in terms of promoting bicycles for transportation. In the suburbs, that's taking a little longer," said Chinian, who's always been a commuter. "We're committed to using bikes as much as we can on a full-time basis."

—Marc Sani