

## Audio file

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## Transcript

Speaker 1

It's time for the outspoken cyclists. Your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more. You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at [outspokencyclist.com](https://outspokencyclist.com) or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host. Diane Jenks.

Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to the outspoken cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. The world of bike racing from the high school through pro levels has been predominantly male and predominantly white. So when I saw Ian Dilley's article in outside online about the Richmond Cycling Corps, the kids from the cool lane, I wanted to know more. Founded by Prorace Sir Craig Dawson around 2010, the Richmond Cycling Corps is not just about bike racing. It's about community and education and giving young, disadvantaged youth a perspective that expands their horizons through cycling. Ian will be with me in a moment to talk about his article and his experience being embedded with the core. In the second-half of the show, we're going to head to Bogota, Colombia to speak with touring company owner Tomas Castrillon. Tomas's company is called Arriba, and its meaning refers to both the heights to which you can ride and a place to which you can ascend in the sense of consciousness in the picturesque surroundings of the Colombian landscape. We talk about the country and the safety of riding there. We talk about coffee and flowers. And gold mines and food. It may be a bucket list tour you haven't even considered, and perhaps will after our conversation. Ian Dilley is a journalist, a writer, a producer, and learned about the Richmond Cycling Corps some time ago when he had the opportunity to embed himself into the group. In May of 2022, he did just that and wrote a great article about it called the kids from cooling. Just want to ride bikes. I wanted to know more so I made a date to chat with Ian to unpack some of the questions ahead about the origins of the team and where it might be going today. Hi, Ian. Welcome back to the outspoken cyclist. Thanks for joining me today. How are you?

Speaker 3

Hi Diane. I'm doing well. Thanks for having me again.

Speaker 2

It is my pleasure. And you write cool stuff. So we're going to talk about cool stuff and cool has a couple of meetings here. The article appeared in outside online. The kids from Cool Lane just want to ride bikes. It's more than an article. It's sort of this like, I don't know, what is it, 10,000 words.

Speaker 3

Ah, good question. I think it just over 7000 words maybe, yeah.

Speaker 2

Seven. OK. It's a it's a fabulous read, though, and it's got some great photographs, many of which you did not take, actually, if any.

Speaker 3

Yeah, they hired A photographer from the Washington, DC area, Jared Soares, and he did an incredible job. He did multiple trips down to Richmond to hang out with the kids and photograph them at events and and in their community. And yeah, especially the pictures of Corey. I was really blown away by his work.

Speaker 2

Yeah, really, really nice.

Speaker

So.

Speaker 2

The article is about a group of young riders in Richmond, VA. Mountain biking is sort of the center of their. World. In some ways it helps them to also grow into adults. How did you find the story? Where did that come from? This cause? It's just an amazing story.

Speaker 3

Yeah. So a racer that I used to compete against, Craig Dawson, who also was racing, you know, at the at the national, you know the at at professional level events on on the East Coast at the same time I was started the program. I'm gonna say I think in 2000. 8 and I just kind of kept up with Craig and and what he was doing with the program and there was never a right moment or, you know, opportunity for me to pursue it as something that I was going to cover. Until I guess it was 20. 22 the spring of 2022 I brought it to an editor at outside and yeah, we we kind. Of. I I think I I came to the editor and in my head I was like well man, it would be cool to hang out with this team for a week or more and go to a number of events and really just sort of in. Bed with them and. Spend as much time as I can and they they they have the same thought. So yeah. Really fortunate that that outside. You know, invested. Amount of time and time and energy in the store.

Speaker 2

It's the Richmond cycling core and I'd like to know so you call it the kids from Cool Lane and they're cool kids. What is cool lane? Cause I do want to talk about the locale where these kids come from and how that area came to be. The the area that it is, which I talk about this a lot on the show because of the way we built highways and the way we divided cities and the way we redline real estate and all those kinds of things. And this is one of those examples. So tell me who the cool kids are and where they come from.

Speaker 3

Yeah, that's a good point. I guess we sort of skipped over that point at at at the jump, but the kids all live or have lived in, in public housing, in Richmond, VA, you know, AKA the the projects or, you know, in their own words the hood. And Richmond has one of the highest concentrations of public housing in the US. I think there are five public housing sort of complexes still in existence in the city. They're known as the courts, and many of the kids come from this one area. Where sort of Fairfield Court and Creighton court come together and there's a road that runs along alongside. Ride this part of Richmond. It's actually right on the right on the sort of northern boundary of the city in the East End and the road is called Pool Lane. And many of the kids live in subsidized housing on cool lane. And of course, you know, like, a lot of communities, there are small variations. Just within that community in terms of where you live and you know some of the hardships that the kids face and the challenges that they face depending on where they live and cooling happens to be 1 little pocket within this community where a lot of the kids live that. They they tend to encounter a little bit less trauma in in that area of public housing and so. The the program was also based right there on Cool Lane. It's since moved, but they built a a bike park right there across the street from Fairfield Court and and the public housing units there in Richmond. And you know the main character Corey grew up on Pool Lane. He helped build the bike park with Craig Dodson, who started the program. And so the story, you know, kind of follows Corey through his final year in in high school.

Speaker 2

Let me take a moment to reintroduce you and then we're going to talk a little bit more about the actual. Story leading up to this sort of final race that that you followed, I just, I don't usually read everything top to bottom, but I I couldn't like it's one of those. You can't look away. You gotta keep reading it. We're talking with Ian Dilly. He is the journalist, writer and producer. He lives in Austin, TX. But he was in Richmond, VA and I want to make a. A comment about Richmond, VA what's new? A few years ago that Richmond? Old. Was it the World Championships?

Speaker 3

I think that was 2015. I held the road Cycling World Championships, which, yeah, was a a super cool event. And I met other riders, young riders, young riders of color who are

not part of the Richmond Cycling Corps who you know, were inspired by that World Championship. Event and you know have gone on to become competitive cyclists themselves. Many of the kids I talked to in the program. When and and watch that World championship and we're exposed to, you know, obviously the top level of riders in the world and and you know people from all over the world that came to watch that event and also too I guess I didn't answer your your previous question of how the you know these public housing projects in Richmond came to be yeah you're. You're totally dead on that. There was a period, you know, in the 1950s with the construction of our Interstate system that cut through downtown Richmond, you know, demolished, thriving, black commute. These and in place of those communities that were demolished, these public housing projects were built and, you know, citizens of Richmond, most of which are in the black community, who've, you know, been oppressed for centuries, ended up, you know, sort of. Moving into these public housing projects and yeah, for decades, having having trouble getting out.

Speaker 2

So you think? Of Richmond as being in Virginia and being in the South. So it's not as I guess I hate to say this. But it's not. As unusual to hear these stories, but it never feels good ever to hear what happened to these thriving communities we were talking because I think you mentioned in the story how much. What kinds of businesses were destroyed and and what happened? To this community, the same thing has happened. I think in there's one in in Texas, there's one I think that that I reported on at one point, OK, that's beside the point. Let's move on a second. I wanted, I want to know about what obstacles these kids face. When they want to ride and how educate cause education is a big part of the Richmond Cycling Corps. For these kids, it's important that they still get an education.

Speaker 3

Yeah. So you know, the program has gone through a number of different phases over the course of its, its its existence and from the educational standpoint. You know Craig Dodson, who's no longer with the program the the directorship has been passed over to a gentleman named Matt Koon, who's just an incredible coach and and mentor to the the Young people in the program. But Craig had actually started a sort of like a a charter school that the kids would go to, and they had two full time teachers that work there and, you know, working hand in hand with the, you know, the athletes. They had really incredible results and I think they graduated like 7 or 8 kids from that program. I spoke with a number of them while I was in Richmond. Monty Crosby is Cosby is probably the most, the most well known and he's also the first. He's had a lot of. That's based on his success coming out of the program, and he's also the first writer in the program to go on to get a college degree. He graduated from Warren Wilson College recently.

Speaker 2

Which is very cool, isn't it? Isn't there somewhere in the the article toward the end that Corey says he wants to eventually be the director of the program? He's thinking about it. He could be that he might be.

Speaker

I don't.

Speaker 3

I I you know, I think everybody that's you know, one of the hopes of the program is that one of the kids will, you know, go on and get an education and return and be a director. I think a lot of people or kids in the program felt that that. Person might be Corey since he was the the leader of the team. And at that time, since he had such long tenure in the program, I think of course, like as adults that, you know, our our belief or ambitions that we put on kids, I don't know if if that was too late Corey's dream or or if that's something that was sort of projected onto him, but I think.

Speaker

Ah.

Speaker 3

Very stream really was to become a professional cyclist himself and he was kind of one of the first athletes in the program who openly expressed his desire to, you know, race bikes for a living, which is. A pretty bold dream for, I think anybody to express, you know, especially knowing coming from a community in in which you're encountering, you know, hardships from, you know, lack of financial resources. A lot of the kids struggle with access to high quality food you know. As you as we talked about access to just a consistent and structured education system. So yeah, to to say that you want to become a a pro bike racer is is is pretty cool that he could be that bold and in in his aspirations.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I think it's awesome. Let's take a break. And when we come back, we'll speak with Ian Dilley some more. You're listening to the outspoken cyclist. We are back on the outspoken cyclist. I'm Diane Jenks. We're speaking with journalist Ian Dilley about his experiences being embedded with the Richmond Cycling Corps back in 2022. Anna's article the kids from Cool Lane just want to ride bikes, appears in outside. Online and in the current print edition of Outside magazine. So where is the funding for the Richmond Cycling Corps coming from? And that includes equipment. As we all know, bike racing is not a cheap sport. Now this is mainly a mountain bike racing organization, not Rd. so it's slightly different, but Boy Mountain bike saying cheap these days either.

Speaker 3

Yeah. So they primarily compete in the high school mountain biking series in Virginia. It's a Nika League national Interscholastic Cycling Association League. In the fall. And then there's another series called DAHS in the spring. And equipment wise, as as of recently or when I was there, they had received. A huge shipment of equipment from Shimano and they were riding. I think, you know, carbon fiber pivot frames with XT componentry and they had Shimano shoes and endura clothing and they were really well equipped which was cool. I mean they would roll into races. And you know the the other high school teams, their jaws would kind of drop by seeing how well outfitted the Richmond Cycling Board was. This and that was something that they took a lot of a lot of pride in, which was which was really neat. You know, they're coming from a very disadvantaged community to, you know, bike races that are at private schools, where the tuition runs, you know, forty, \$50,000 a year. So it's it's a real contrast in terms of. Being exposed to this this Cycling World as, as you mentioned, which it tends to be a very privileged, you know, dominantly white world. But you know that that exposure is kind of one of the core tensions of the story as well.

Speaker 2

Are you seeing and did this story sort of emphasize? It. It changed a shift. In bike racing, are we seeing more people of color racing? Do you think you're out there more than me? Ask you, you know?

Speaker 3

I I I don't have any sort of statistics to back that up. Anecdotally, just from, you know, what I've witnessed personally and and you know what I saw right there in Richmond. Which was kind of surprising to me, was that on the road and and the road cycling it, it seemed to be more diverse and in the mountain biking world it was, it was less so much less so. You know, that's not to say, like, I don't want to diminish the people who are coming from backgrounds that aren't normally associated with bike racing that are participating in it. But you know, obviously as we all know, we we certainly still have a long ways to go. And yeah, I think programs like the Richmond Cycling Corps are doing a good job. Of just bringing different groups of people together and letting them all bond over this one thing that we that we truly love, which is bikes.

Speaker 2

So it's not a huge team. It's like, what, 12 riders, Max.

Speaker 3

Yeah, it it it. It it varies. It varies. You know they have a lot of other programs I didn't fully get into in the story that are sort of tangential to the actual Richmond Cycling Corps. So they do like after school programming, where they're both, they'll go into schools and the community, you know. Middle schools and they'll take they'll they'll take kids on rides, they'll take them to the BMX track, they'll take them. Mountain biking and a lot of the kids in the program will help out with the like that are on the actual team will help.

That with that to be on the actual team, it's not like anybody can sign up like you have to ask to be on the team. You know, the coaches will kind of go out and ride with the kids and see what they're, you know, if they're, if they're ready to ride at that level and and whatnot. And so yeah, it's. It's a little bit. Collective and you know, I think Monty, as I mentioned in the story. He had been kicked out of the program for behavioral issues couple times and invited back and and things like that. So it it is a privilege for the kids to to be on the team and but the coaches that they work hard to recruit kids from, you know a a variety of of. Of different backgrounds. And yeah, when I was riding with the team, there were kids that were just, you know, discovering mountain biking for the very first time. You know, the kids like Corey, who'd been riding since they were, you know, 11-12 years old.

Speaker 2

So recently I had a conversation with the professor at Virginia Tech. Strangely enough, in Virginia, Ralph Bueller, who did a study not too long ago, and it's finding that there's a huge decline in parents teaching their children to ride.

Speaker

Hmm.

Speaker 2

So the question then becomes, how did these kids learn to ride? Did they have bikes as? Youngsters, were they? I mean, if they're living in the projects, are they abjectly poor or did they have some means? You know, those became questions for me. It didn't exactly show up in the story of the fact they all had these cool bikes because they were sponsored riders now.

Speaker 3

Yeah, you know, that was a misconception that I had that they actually gave me a little bit of a hard time about when I was kind of asking them, like how long they've been riding bikes, how they learned to ride, yadda yadda. You know, Corey was like, man, I I've been riding bikes since, as as soon as I could walk, you know, like, whatever was around, you know, I had. He learned, you know, as I said in. Story like he learned how to do a wheelie on a old huffy that didn't even have a seat. And you know, falling over and over again until he was able to to ride it. So kids in these economically disadvantaged communities are, you know, they don't have access to like the top end equipment, but they still love to ride for the same reasons that. Anybody loves to ride and they, you know, Corey would describe still sort of the same sense of of freedom and and playfulness that he got riding a a beater around the neighborhood, as you know. Now he's on like a. Top of the line, you know, dual suspension Kona with XTR and and all of that. So. So yeah I think the access to high end equipment is certainly limited. Richmond Cycling Core does help out with that but but yeah I think just more bikes of of any kind are are welcome.

Speaker 2

So my last question has to do with the results. The the team gets while you were there for your portion of the of the story, the duration, how did the team do that that season?

Speaker 3

Ohh, they did pretty well I think Corey was kind of hovering around like just like the top ten of the varsity races. And they had a a a number of newer writers, like his little brother Naz was kind of placing mid pack in the JV and then you know, there was a an eighth grader chip who was, you know, kind of just getting the hang of of mountain bike racing. What's been cool is following the team since I've left and and I also want to emphasize that like high school mount biking in Virginia is no. Joke like your kids? That are like winning. So like I went and did like, a week night race in in Richmond, like a road race with Corey. And and with the team and you know the kids that won, like the top level, you know, the category 12 race they were, they were high school mountain bikers like they were in the breakaway and then they won that race. Then you know, there were kids that were, I think the second high school race I went to with the team, the kid that had won the week before wasn't there because, you know, he was on a trip in Europe with the Canadian National team. So the kids are winning these high school mountain bike races in in Virginia and even, you know, placing in the top 10 or, you know. National level mountain bikers. And so yeah, the the the results were were good. They weren't like astounding. But it's been cool to sort of follow the team since I. Left and see the progression of some of the racers that I met. You know, I think Chip is a good example. Also, Corey's little brother Naz. And seeing them continue to progress and and turn into turn into really accomplished racers has has been really cool and and fun to watch and you know, as the coaches told me like. They don't, really. They don't care about results. You know, like it's not like they're the, you know, mountain biking for them. It's just it's just.

Speaker 2

OK.

Speaker 3

The hook to. To develop relationships with the kids, you know, to see what unmet needs they have and and how they can meet them. You know whether that's help with, you know, finding dental care or tutoring help or you know if they're struggling with a court case or just basically navigating. Or adult world. You know, their parents are often really stressed and working multiple jobs, and they just need support. And so the coaches on the Richmond cycling team are are there to help provide that support and and connect them with places that can allow them to thrive. You know they they definitely push the kids and they, you know, they prioritize improvement and and and you know, they want them to to have success. They want the kids to have success for their for themselves.



But at the end of the day, yeah, they, they just want them to come and and hang out and and ride bikes.

Speaker 2

Is there a place?

Speaker

This.

Speaker 2

That the Richmond Cycling Corps has as a headquarters.

Speaker 3

They do? Yeah. They just. I think last year they they they found a a new physical home near downtown Richmond. I believe it's in the East End. I'm not sure of the exact address, but they do a number of events there like fundraisers, the kids. Can go there and do indoor training. A lot of them come there to, you know, do school work after school or work on project. You know, they'll bring more friends and the coaches will help their friends work on a resume and things like that. So cool. It's just kind of like a low key hang out where you can just they can just go chill and work, work on something where they're that's like riding munching on a bike or or. For education.

Speaker 2

Yeah, we've been speaking with Ian Dilley, his article, the kids from Cool Lane just wanna ride bikes. It's in outside online from February 24th I. Think.

Speaker 3

Yeah, it's also on the on the, on the cover of the current issue, the March, April issue. About Time magazine.

Speaker 2

Awesome. Nothing like having a cover story there, buddy. Good for you. Congratulations.

Speaker

Yeah.

Speaker 2

What are you doing next? This was a big story. What's but it never ends.

Speaker 3

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I have a I have another feature coming out in Bicycling magazine soon and the April issue. And then, yeah, just, you know, looking for other projects. So you can find me on Instagram at Ian Dilly or my website. Billy.com and yeah, anybody that has a good story idea, don't hesitate to reach out.

Speaker 2

Well, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today and well, you can probably follow the Richmond Cycling Corps by all means read the story. It's really, really interesting. It's good. It's up. Lifting and they're great photographs. Great photographs, Ian, thanks so much for talking with me today.

Speaker 3

Well, thank you, Dan. All right.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Ian Dilly for joining me on the show. You can read his article the kids from Cool Lane. Just want to ride bikes at outside online or in the current print issue of outside magazine. We also have a link to the article on our website [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com). Let's take a break and we'll be back to speak with Thomas Kastron about touring in Bogota, Colombia. You're listening to the outspoken cyclist. We are back on the outspoken cyclist. I'm Diane Jenks. Thomas Castron started his touring company Ariba 12 years ago. His tight knit team of seven provides a fully supported experience for his two signature tours, Bogota to Medellin and a tour in the coffee region of the country. He also offers non riding partners. And equally exciting experience. Here's our conversation. Hello, Thomas. Welcome to the outspoken cyclist. Thanks for being my guest today. I have a lot of questions about your company, Ariba, and Tours you offer.

Speaker

Hi.

Speaker 2

This is going. To be my first touring company for 2024, so I'm very excited and I have a lots of questions. So what is a Reba? What is it people? They're going to find out about you right away.

Speaker 4

Well, first of all, thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be in your, in your podcast and. Well, what's Arian Arian? For me, it's more than just a cycling tour. It's basically a sort of a working process and it's basically what it has been cycling to me for. All my life and what I want to transmit people about it. So what? What it means are real. It's in Spanish. Ariba means higher or a high up. So it's a physical location. So it's the top of the mountain. Think of it. But it's also a word of encouragement. What? I want people in

the end. And this is where I want people to go to. It's to get to an emotional state as much as as to a physical place. So that's basically what a real means for me. And that's what I want people to experience as well. So how we pack all this is into cycling tours here. Colombia.

Speaker 2

So I don't know if you know of a program that's on television on Sundays called Sunday morning on. It's a CBS show and they had a piece this week on all of the floral. Places in, they said Medigene.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

They didn't say Meta Yin, which is what I thought it would be but, but yeah, it was Lucia. Luciano was the was the. Most of it, and I did not know that Columbia or Medicine grew all these amazing flowers and that they're all. That's what you buy when you go to places are flowers that come from you or from that part of the the world.

Speaker 4

Correct, correct. Well, I mean, basically you have Valentine's Day. So I mean, flowers as a gift for Valentine's Day. For thanks to flowers growers in Colombia. And funny enough. It's really, I mean again it's known. For its flower. But many of the flowers that you get for for the facilities are closed are growing close to all that we have like these greenhouses, like kids. And when when you're once you're landing in Bogota, you see all these greenhouses and many of them are cultivating flowers actually. So we have like that's one of the things. That really struck. In Colombia, like how green it is, how how lush the vegetation can get so and the diversity of it. So yes, we are very, very well in that regard.

Speaker 2

Well, it's interesting. I did do an interview with somebody else in Bogota who works on urban planning and streets. Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 4

It's a small community. It's a small community. It's.

Speaker 2

I am sure, but I'm excited that what we're going to talk about is taking you out into the countryside more so than in the city. So tell us a little bit about you and how you got involved with cycle touring and then who else is working with you at?

Speaker 4

Yes. Correct.

Speaker 2

Arriba.

Speaker 4

Well, I'm a I'm an economist turned into cyclist. Well, I've been a cyclist all my life. Like like my first memory of a bicycle are very small and very much attached to childhood. Not for many people, I guess. And then what happened was that I never really fell out of love. There is. And my during my high school years and even during the university, I still go by consulting how how this became a business was because back in 2008 or something like that, some, some, some friends were. You know, I think race it adventure racing. My my background is in adventure racing and and we race in Costa Rica and we were quite quite struck about like the number of people ready to race in Costa Rica. And for me, at least, it was like, OK, I mean, it was a, it was a tough race, but it's really nothing in comparison to what we have here. So I said like, OK, we have something in our hands that we. Really need to. Bring it up and Long story short, like that developing to serious of casual and. Encountered during my life that made it possible for for the business to grow and to and to become what it is right now. Now coming to what? Who is the team? Well, we are currently. Team of seven people that are 100% working in the office or or in the tours, and then people that are higher basically on the for guiding or for supporting the tours, right. So we are I mean we are very, very capable team and we and we all go way back like. There are people that I've known for 20 to 20 years, 25 years already, so and all of them exactly related that that that's basically according of who we are now.

Speaker 2

So you don't look like you're old enough to be in this business as. Long as you get.

Speaker 4

I think I think that cycling that has that great benefit that we all look way younger than that.

Speaker 2

True. No, that's a really good point. That cycling helps to keep you young. Let me take a moment to reintroduce you. We're speaking with Thomas and I hope I get this right, castrillon.

Speaker 4

Catherine. John. Yes, you got it.

Speaker 2

Astrium from Arriba, a touring company in in Bogota at Columbia.

Speaker 4

That.

Speaker 2

Being in the United States, some of the things we hear about your country are not always good. So I want to address the safety factor before we talk about the tours and all of that. And you do make a point on your website of talking about safety and. And so I want to reassure people that these tours are safe. So what makes your tours safe? And where is it that people might feel unsafe if they weren't taking a tour? If they were trying to do this on? Well.

Speaker 4

I think that there are two parts to that question. I would say Mike, and I'm going to take you as an example. What, what, what have you heard and what you're thinking about when you say when you think about Colombia and what what do you think about Colombia?

Speaker 2

Well, what we hear about are, of course cartels and drugs and all of the problems.

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 2

And it's hard to trust the news in the United States, and you don't know who to listen to and what what to especially right now. Politically, things are such a.

Speaker 4

Correct, correct.

Speaker 2

Yes. So I just, I just want to address it because I think that's, I mean my audience is mainly US. I won't say it's all US. I also have a European audience and a South American and an Australian audience. But for the most part, it's here in this country and.

Speaker 4

Yes, correct.

Speaker

MHM.

Speaker 2

I mean, it's like I know Costa Rica is a place, a lot of people go, but I think I think that what you say and what you're showing on your website is beautiful countryside and sounds like wonderful tours. So I want people to feel like it's something they want to do.

Speaker 4

Yes, correct. I actually thank you for that question, because we we were featured on Peloton magazine when it was still available. One of the and and the first line of the article was saying the customers carry a concealed weapon when it's his enter. Hey. So so we. Get it very clear straight up but but but the safety issue is always like, as you said is the is the number one concern about. Having said that, so how do we make sure that we have a safe tour? So it's clear that we have like all these background or we have a background that it's violent, that we have a history that is perceived as violent by so many people, right? And and it's not something that we should. Shy away from it's it's part of our history. Having said that, the the country as a whole has changed a lot over the past 25 years, 20. I mean this has been constantly changing as you say, like the political landscape in the states is changing. It's also changing constantly here in Colombia as well. The moment that we are right now, it's the moment. The the the the places that can be troublesome are far away from the places that we. So where those where are those troublesome areas right now they are closer to the border with Venezuela. They are closer very, very far from in the South of the country. Those are areas that that I wouldn't take anybody right. Having said that, we have been doing tours for 12 years and of course like the main. Concern that you have is is it can people feel safe all the time and that's a resounding yes. We can feel safe all the time here in. Not because of what we do, not because as I was saying, it's not because I'm carrying a concealed weapon. It's not because of that. It's because the country. And when you start reading about, for example, travelers that are coming to Colombia, they find a country that is extremely welcome, like welcoming people here in Colombia, we are extremely warm. If you are, if you have and to have the chance to get close to the climbing community, these people that are always welcoming, warm and and and that's something that is a transversal to a whole country that to a whole way of life of Colombians. And even more so in rural areas are super, super people. People are, like gentler. I mean, it's pretty much the same everywhere that perhaps people in rural areas are a little bit have a slower life. So they are more welcoming. They are even more curious about you and taking care of you. So I think that that's that happens everywhere, everywhere in the world like this. Like you usually get in more trouble areas in in urban areas rather than rural.

Speaker 2

So it's interesting you say that because as soon as you started talking about it, it occurs to me that people coming to the United. States can be exposed to a lot of violence and a lot of bad things, and yet if you get out into the countryside or you get out into more rural areas, into onto trails or or paths, yeah, you meet, you know, I know people who

have gone cross country several times on their bikes and and the thing they have to say more than anything else is how wonderful.

Speaker 4

Yes.

Speaker 2

People are, so why would it be any different in Bogota than it would be here? And I totally get that and. I appreciate that.

Speaker 4

Exactly. Yeah, exactly. Yes, I and and and and again, I mean it's it's part of our of our history. It's not who we are and definitely that's something that we have we when we are travelling worldwide I think that that's part of who what we need to remember is that in the end I don't think that there are violent communities there are violent. Situations. But like if I'm raising a family everywhere and there are kids everywhere, like these family just want to have peace and they just want to have like, a safe neighborhood for their kids. Like, that's that every human being has that has that need. So whenever whenever I'm traveling, I just think like. Everything's going to be fine in the sense that that what ultimately all humans beings want, it's that it's it's based on, it's come. It's not like being in this constant state of violence. We mean, I don't know anybody who really wants that kind of situation. Right, exactly. You're the same way here in Colombia, so. So that's that's the. That's the situation in.

Speaker 2

Alright, let's take. A short break when we come back. We're gonna actually. Talk about some of the meat and potatoes of the tours. We're talking with Tomas Castrillon from Arabic tours in Bogota, Colombia and we will be right back to listening to the outspoken cycle. List. We are back on the outspoken cyclist, OK Thomas. So let's dive into some of the tours you're offering right now. You have quite a few. You have Rd. you have gravel, you have. You actually have some training camps that are that are available. So what are the most popular tours right now? What are people booking? More than than anything else.

Speaker 4

Our most popular route goes goes from Bolton to Majin. And it's six stages long. It basically meant for being a one week getaway. In that tour, I mean that very, very calming orientated. We are doing stages of about 80 to 90 kilometers long on average, but in total the the climbing that we do in those in that in that during that week is 27,000 feet. So it's a lot, a lot of climbing and. And that's that's the tool that we address to intermediate to advanced kind of. That's right, you will never get in Colombia and I got really flat section because if you see it on the map once they end this going from the South from 1/4 into Colombia, they split into 3 branches and where most of the

population lives, it's just in the mountains. We're basically mountain people, so. The tours are usually they, they do have a little bit of planning like even the ones that have very little planning, they they still have like by comparison more climbing that that you would expect in other in other tours, right. So based on that, like we have all all levels that are perhaps shortest shorter stages in the coffee hub region and and and that's basically like the two major tools that we offer, one in the coffee hub region and one from both automation and we can have extended. All the way to to Cartagena if needed.

Speaker 2

What kind? You have. Food and lodging are are you are you offering to your to your guests?

Speaker 4

People, I mean, sometimes when you look in the map and you look in a flat map, you really don't know, understand how Big Colombia is. So to give the audience an idea, Colombia is as big as putting together Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium and Holland. Together. So it's really not a small country. So when we are doing the tattoo to margin which is 400 kilometers, if you go by car and so we we cover a lot of a lot of ground and the accommodation and the accommodation changes quite dramatically like we stay in. Very, very high in hotels for the most part, but there are two or three places that we stay because a the writing is absolutely. Fantastic. And we privilege the writing over like 5 star kind of accommodation. We prefer like to give you the sense of experience rather than OK this is a Porsche accommodation. So when you're when you're in a book like that in a tour with us, you get good accommodation almost all the time, but always. Always, always great writing like, that's the goal that we. Attain for that's.

Speaker 2

I get it writing comes first.

Speaker 4

Yes, writing comes first. But but I mean it it it but it's not that. I mean we're still there. Somebody said once there are two words in cycling holidays, we still want to have like a great place to have dinner, great place to rest. We do put a lot of lot of effort into that. Just one occasion there is a simple common. So even a or a hotel or simple hotel, they are always spotless. They are always clean. They are always like you get cover on your basic needs high on a very high standard. I mean, compared to Europe like to France, like the place, the small place that you can that you can say we are like even in that regard we are a little bit above that average. Of the European standard in that in that sense.

Speaker 2



So I think that at the end of the day, when somebody's been riding all day, they only want a couple of things, a hot shower. Or a comfortable bed and a great meal. Talk to me about the food in in, in Colombia.

Speaker 4

Food is great. The food that we get, like the protein that we get, it's very, I mean we are very carnivores. We we do need a lot of steak for that matter. But the steak that we get is all grass fed and it's, I mean it's completely different to the things that you get in the. It's in the sense of how tasty food is and how and how things are made, like grown. Basically how how things are grown in the in Colombia. It's very it's very green, for that matter. Having said that, we have like for example, during the day we might get. Simple meal in the sense that we are in rural areas. This is bad because we are always almost always getting to a bigger town, a big city. We get like a very good dinner in a fancy place at night. So it's it's the best thing. I mean, the idea idea is to celebrate life like that's that's the point of Rio. To celebrate life in India and like having a great meal. A great ride in the overall having like a great great experience and and really live up to to a mode of giving you your life. The experience of a lifetime, something that you really can't remember and you're not going to remember the good. If, for example, you were saying like food isn't good or like the hotel isn't great, so like the whole service, the whole package is meant for cyclists just to to enjoy, to enjoy themselves, right? So so basically that's that's that's how we do everything like keeping in mind that. We do want to get give a great experience overall, not not only a second experience but also a holiday person.

Speaker 2

You do have an option for non riders who might accompany somebody who's riding. So say a wife who doesn't ride, or a husband who doesn't ride or So what are the kinds of things that a non rider might do while a partner is riding?

Speaker 4

The difference between an the idea for the non writing tools came because we had groups that. Or people that might become interested in coming over, but they they would say like, Oh my wife can. There is nothing for my wife or I mean, you know what, guys who? Who's who brought it? Up and what we came up with was to run parallel to to to a cycling event, so to move in as well. Point to point. And the idea is that at night we will meet and have dinner together basically. So the non writing group gets I. I'm actually very excited about it because I mean it's still very. Active because we are, for example, on day one we are still going to a coffee plantation and getting to see the whole coffee process. On the second day we get to work a little bit on the path that were built by during the Spanier colonization in Colombia. And we get to work on the same on this ancient towns that were. During the colonization, so we get like this sort of Spaniard. By then we have. We dive a little bit more into a city that was that used to be related to gold extraction and were completely lost for basically 150 years and it's been

brought back now into life and but this is in the middle of the jungle. So it's basically then we go.

Speaker 1

And you.

Speaker 4

You are farmed where and you can see hummingbirds and you can see all the flowers that you were talking. So we have like in Colombia we have one basically whose largest. The and number of orchids, so we do go into this place and we get to experience that and then we have, I mean we have like several activities to keep everybody interested and experience and one side or the other of Colombia all the time. So so we can in the end both riders and riders. That I really, really authentic Colombian experience for themselves.

Speaker 2

If we're looking at your bookings for 2024, how are your openings? Do you still have openings for all of your event?

Speaker 4

Yes, we still have openings now for June. We will have, we'll be hosting tours in June thinking about both that imagine because I mean if you would only have like 1 opportunity to come to Colombia gone and and and you write a lot come and do that too because it's absolutely fantastic it's and I don't know how how you how, how to put it into words. Do it 5-6 times myself during the year and I'm still like. So this is so, so, so beautiful. I mean, I'm feeling all about all the things that that you see during, during, during this tour. So say that, but that mean you will be like the best the, the, the, the, the the. Best call for. That one, and I would say that I mean, and we have tours during 2024 for. June for August for December. During those, those are the three tours that we're hosting and then January 2025 for those who want to skip. The the winter.

Speaker 2

How many people can you accommodate on a tour?

Speaker 4

We we we like small groups with really bad to keep groups as as small and we prefer to keep the groups as many as top. We top it as we go we top it at 10 people.

Speaker 2

OK, Ohh that's awesome. A very intimate group.

Speaker 4

Yes, it's very, very intimate and we provide, for example, for a group of things, we always, I mean we always are providing like to support vehicles, to guides on the road, making sure that everything is running smoothly and making sure that everybody is look after during, during the tour.

Speaker 2

So the last thing we need to do is let listeners know how they can find out more. Why don't you give them the website and that information and whatever social media you have?

Speaker 4

Yeah, sure. Like. Thank you. So the the website is Arriva, that's with double R, Ariba dot travel. And you can find us on Instagram with the same name or on Facebook with the same name as.

Speaker 2

Well, it's been a pleasure to talk with you. Someday I will maybe get to South America and be able to meet you in person. We've been speaking with Thomas Castrillon of Ariba Tours in Bogota, Colombia, and I think it sounds like something a lot of my listeners would like to do. I appreciate you talking with me. Thank you.

Speaker 4

Thank you. Thank you for having me, Diane. Thank.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Thomas for giving us a picture of Bogota and the surrounding countryside. You can find out more about his company at Ariba dot travel and you can follow on social media too. In fact, you can follow outspoken cyclist on social media as well as on our website, [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com). Each show episode is available for download with photos, links, and a transcript. Of course, you can subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast app, too. Thank you for listening today. I'll be back soon with the new episode. I hope you have a great week. Please stay safe. Stay well and remember, there is always time for a ride. Bye bye.

Speaker

I have.

Speaker 1

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