

Ride Into Red Square With Downside Up

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Participants in last year's charity bike ride getting set to take off to Red Square from Novodevichy Convent. This year is the 16th installment of the event.

Imagine yourself riding a bicycle into Red Square amid a throng of cheering fans with your hands held high in the air. Local charity Downside Up is offering anyone that chance with its annual Charity Red Square Bike Ride.

The 16th annual ride runs Aug. 26 to 28 and — after a 166-kilometer journey through the Kaluga region — ends with a final stretch of six kilometers along the Moscow embankment and into Red Square.

Downside Up raises money for children born with Down syndrome. Each year nearly 2,500 children are born with the syndrome in Russia. Nearly 85 percent of those children, due to a general misunderstanding of the condition in the country, are rejected by their parents and never given a chance to fully flourish.

The entry cost for each adult in the race is 1,000 euros (\$1,400). Even better, the price drops to

only 3,000 euros when entering as a four-person team. The price includes accommodation, food, translation, bikes and helmets, as well as 24/7 support for the three-day affair. It also includes transportation both to and from the airport and to and from the venues.

Many of those who take part are backed by their work places. Others raise the money through sponsors.

“Not everyone has 1,000 euros for participation, but everyone has at least 100 friends on Facebook,” said Ksenia Chernyavskaya, fundraising manager at Downside Up.

The charity’s goal is to raise 11 million rubles (\$395,000) from the ride. Since its inception 16 years ago, the Charity Red Square Bike Ride has raised more than 60 million rubles, boasting an alumni list of nearly 1,600 participants from more than 200 companies.

Many participants compete annually.

“It is great to see the faces of the children who are directly aided by Downside Up. It benefits our company as a vehicle for team building, but it is also fun,” said Denis van Diemen, who will take part in the race for the sixth time. “It is important, as well, to help those less fortunate than ourselves. It helps put our problems into perspective.”

Besides creating and disseminating literature concerned with how families can cope with a child suffering from Down syndrome, Downside Up also prepares children to successfully enter preschool, organizes group learning sessions, offers individual speech therapy sessions and provides psychological consultations aimed at arming parents with the tools they will need to maximize their child’s potential.

“Roughly 2,500 kids are connected in some way to the charity right now, and every month between 100 and 200 new families become involved,” Chernyavskaya said.

More than 150 people have already committed to participate.

Registration forms and a deposit of 10,000 rubles (\$350) must be submitted no later than Aug. 8 for those wanting to take part.

Charity Red Square Bike Ride takes place Aug. 26 to 28. To register, contact the Downside Up Charitable Fund, 14a 3rd Parkovaya Ulitsa. Metro Izmailovskaya. Tel. (499) 367-0333, www.downsideup.org.

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