

Bike Touring BASICS

BIKES & GEAR

Choosing a bicycle and the accessories you'll need for touring.

LIFE ON TOUR

Planning a route, finding a place to sleep and what it will cost.

INSPIRATION

How to get started, where to go and stories from experienced cyclists.



Inspiring you to explore on two wheels

A free magazine from www.TravellingTwo.com

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PHOTO BY ALICIA ACKERMAN, WWW.CYCLINGWITHOUTAHELMET.BLOGSPOT.COM

ABOUT US

WE'RE ANDREW & FRIEDEL. WE FELL IN LOVE WITH BIKE TOURING IN 2006, WHEN WE SET OUT ON A BICYCLE TRIP AROUND THE WORLD.

At the time, practical bicycle touring information was hard to find on the internet, so we started TravellingTwo.com — a place to share tips, equipment reviews and experiences.

The site has grown from a personal blog into a community over the past few years, and our email box has become increasingly full of questions such as **Which bike should I buy?** or **What do I need to know for my first bike tour?**

We created *Bike Touring Basics* to answer those questions. It's a free guide to the essential things you need to know when getting started. This magazine is our way of giving something back to the bike touring world that has given so much to us.

GOING ON A BIG TRIP?

For even more long-distance touring tips and advice, check out our *Bike Touring Survival Guide*.

Inside you'll find hundreds of pages of advice for extended and international tours, including **route planning**, what to put in **your repair kit** and how to **extend the life of your camping gear**.

Even better - the book comes in 3 formats. This will allow you to print it, to read it on your computer or to load it onto tablets and eBook readers like the iPad, Kindle and Nook (PDF, .mobi and .ePUB files).

At just €7.50, it might be the best bike touring bargain going.

Buy The Book:

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Thanks for your support!



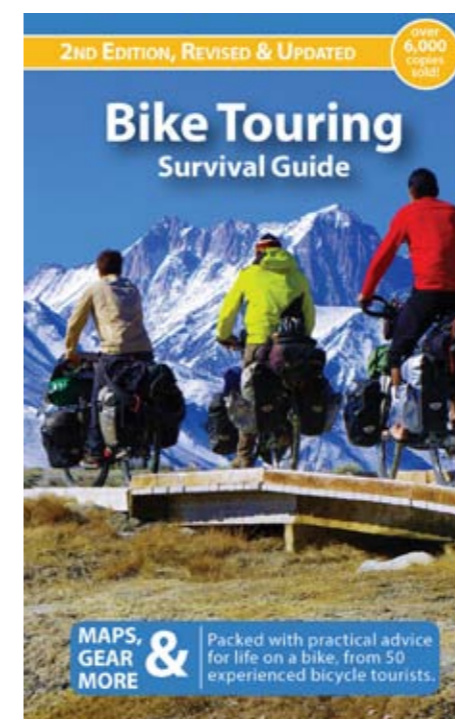
BIKE TOURING BASICS 2015 EDITION COVER PHOTO
CYCLING IN BOLIVIA. PHOTO BY HARRIET PIKE, WWW.PIKESONBIKES.COM



Bike Touring Basics - 2015 Edition

This edition was updated by Grace Johnson of Bicycle Traveler publications.

Download **Bicycle Traveler** magazine and other FREE cycle touring PDFs at www.bicycletraveler.nl



WHY GO BIKE TOURING



PHOTO BY ANGELA & STEPHANE GIRARD, WWW.OUESTEF.NET

There is no better way to travel and explore than from the seat of a bicycle. With two wheels under your feet, the world goes by at a perfect pace; fast enough to get somewhere and slow enough to admire the details along the way.

On your bicycle you are free. You can ride anywhere you like, and stop anywhere that takes your fancy.

You can nap when you're tired, knowing that you don't have to rely on a bus to reach your next destination. Just stroke those pedals to zip into town for a hearty meal, or head down a quiet dirt track and make dinner on your camp stove. The choice is yours.

Back on your bicycle, you'll pedal along to a constantly changing series of sensations. One moment you might be daydreaming and watching the birds. The next, you'll be thrust

into full concentration as you spin your legs furiously to tackle a big hill.

A sense of achievement greets you at the top of every climb as you crest the summit proudly, if a bit weak in the knees. With the hard work over, you can fly down the other side with ease, stopping at the next store of course for a well deserved ice cream.

Later in the day, you might pitch your tent in a campground for the night, get a hotel, be invited to spend the evening with a local family or head back home again.

In that flexibility is the most wonderful thing about bike touring: it can be anything you want it to be.

DO IT YOUR WAY

Go for a day trip or on a world adventure. Take your whole family and the pets or

“Bicycle touring is heightened awareness. It's the difference between microwaving and cooking a meal from scratch. It's the difference between standing awe-struck in front of a painting and clicking past it on the internet. Now imagine this feeling every day, all day. Something as simple as **THE GROUND** becomes very important. Is it level? Soft? Wet? You really begin to **SEE** the ground. You see people. And landscapes. And food. You might even see yourself.

-RJ, An Adventure Called Bicycling
www.anadventurecalledbicycling.blogspot.com

”

strike out solo. Pack a little or a lot in your bags. Splash out on a posh B&B or camp in the woods. Have a plan or no plan at all. When the going gets tough, take time to wait it out or put your bike on a bus, train or plane bound for the next appealing destination.

Above all, don't be put off by an obsession to figure out every last detail. Like any journey, there's a lot to think about before you take those first steps but, at its core, bike touring is really quite simple.


The most crucial ingredients are a bike and a desire to ride that bike beyond your front doorstep. Experience and equipment are helpful but by no means required.

Karl Creelman, the first Canadian to ride around the world, only learned to ride a bicycle a few weeks before making his decision to circle the globe in 1899. His bags were slim. He had one

change of clothes. His wallet was empty.

Don't be discouraged if you're unfit either. Training can be done on the road, as long as you're willing to take it slowly at first.

As for the other details - what kind of bike, panniers or trailers, old fashioned maps or a GPS - it's all a matter of choice. If something doesn't feel right, try another option until you find a better way of doing things.

In the end, the best preparation is to get out there and do it. Once on the road, you quickly find out what does or doesn't work for you. 

NO EXPERIENCE? NO WORRIES



HERE'S A LITTLE SECRET: WE HAVEN'T ALWAYS BEEN CYCLING FANATICS. BEFORE WE SET OUT TO RIDE AROUND THE WORLD, WE HAD NO BIKE TOURING EXPERIENCE. WE WERE UNFIT FROM YEARS IN THE OFFICE AND WE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO CHANGE A FLAT TIRE.

When we launched unprepared into bicycle touring, we were simply two people with a dream to see the world and hunch that maybe – *just maybe* – it would be possible and even fun to do it on bicycles.

We hit the road imagining that everyone would have more experience than us: two city slickers, in our 30s, who'd never even done an overnight tour before thinking up this crazy venture to bike around the world. What we found couldn't have been further from the truth. We met students and retired folks. Solo cyclists and families. People on first tours and veterans who'd been pedalling for years.

It's true, we had a steep learning curve those first few weeks. Our panniers were filled with things we didn't need (anyone want two plastic champagne glasses?) and our first wild camping site was in the middle of a popular local park. On that night we

figured out that the best wild camping spots are hidden, unless you want to hang out with local teenagers.

Despite - or perhaps because of - our early mistakes, we learned quickly. Every day we picked up new tricks such as how to fix flat tires and set our tent up in record time. We developed an eye for the perfect camping spot. We sent the champagne glasses back home. And one day we found ourselves weaving gracefully between heavy city traffic, instead of nervously dodging cars.

Three years and 50,000km later, we were home. Despite setting out with no bike touring experience at all, we made it all the way around the globe, with a newly discovered passion and dreams of dozens of trips to come.


We're telling you this to make the point that bike touring really is something anyone can do. You don't need to be super fit or below some arbitrary age barrier. You don't even need to

FRIEDEL SMILES FOR THE CAMERA
DURING OUR WORLD TOUR.
PHOTO BY ANDREW GRANT,
WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM

know a lot about bike touring, and you certainly don't need a fancy bike.

That doesn't mean you should drop everything now and run out the door unprepared. Every tip you pick up beforehand will make life easier. It might even save you some money and frustrations along the way.

That said, you can learn about and deal with almost anything on the road as long as you go slowly and remain flexible. One of the great joys of bike touring is discovering just how capable and independent you can be. Don't underestimate your ability to adapt to situations as they crop up.

And remember: people of all types and descriptions are out there right now, pedalling across their countries, continents and even the world. You can too, and you'll have the time of your life along the way. 



PHOTOS BY DENNIS KOOMEN, FROM A TOUR OF THE SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES. SEE MORE PHOTOS, VIDEOS AND HELPFUL BIKE TOURING TIPS ON HIS WEBSITE: WWW.TOKO-OP-FIETSVAKANTIE.NL



PHOTOS BY WILLEM MEGENS, WWW.THEMEEG.NL (LEFT) AND RUDI VERHAGEN, WWW.THEMEEG.NL (RIGHT)

HOW MUCH WILL A BIKE TOUR COST?

Bike touring doesn't have to cost the earth. By cooking for yourself, providing your own transport and sleeping in a tent, your daily budget can easily be half of what a typical backpacker might spend to travel the same route.

That said, it's easy to burn through cash if you want to spend your days jumping from café to restaurant and your nights in comfortable hotels.

Most people find a happy medium between the two extremes. Spend a few nights camping, for example, and you'll quickly offset the cost of a hotel and meal out in the next city.

Here are a few examples of how far you could get on \$500 U.S. in countries such as America, Australia, Canada and much of Europe, depending on which style of touring you decide to adopt.

3-4 Weeks: You can travel for up to a month but you'll need to stick to a very low budget. This means finding ways to sleep for free (wild camping, staying with friends or using hospitality groups like [WarmShowers](#)). You'll cook all your own food (mostly pasta), and travel solely by bicycle.

10-14 Days: With \$35-50 U.S. a day to spend you'll have enough for small luxuries like entry to a museum. You'll free camp or stay in

campsites most nights but you might go to a cheap hotel if the weather is bad. It's possible to afford a short leg by bus or train, if you don't want to cycle the whole way.

3-5 Days: You'll be cycling lightly because you probably won't need bulky camping gear. Instead, you can stay in a hostel or B&B most nights. Alternatively, if you enjoy camping you can take the tent and use your budget to eat most of your meals in restaurants. You may also be able to travel to and from your tour by public transport.

LONGER TRIPS

If you save \$10,000 U.S., you have enough to tour for 10-12 months

in most developed countries and 2-3 years in cheaper destinations such as Thailand and China.

Our total bill for a world tour through 30 countries averaged **\$23 U.S. per day, per person**. That covered routine daily expenses and one-off costs such as flights, visas, vaccinations and bike repairs. It also included treats such as bottles of wine, meals out and nights in hotels.

How can you save so much money in the first place? [Here's how we did it](#).

STARTING COSTS

Plan to set aside \$2,000-3,000 U.S. if you want to start touring with a new bicycle and high-quality gear - certainly good enough to see you through many happy years of bike touring.

If you're suffering from price shock, remember that things like a stove and a tent save much more money in the long run than their initial cost, and they give you a great degree of independence.

Here are some approximate costs:

- **Touring Bicycle** (*Surly Long Haul Trucker*) - \$1,300 U.S.
- **Bike Accessories** (*pump, water bottles*) - \$50-75 U.S.
- **Campstove** (*MSR Whisperlite*) - \$100 U.S.
- **Headlamp** (*Petzl Tikka*) - \$35 U.S.
- **Luggage Racks** (*Tubus*) - \$250 U.S.
- **Panniers** (*Ortlieb*) - \$400 U.S.

- **Sleeping Mat** (*Thermarest*) - \$100 U.S.
- **Tent** (*MSR Hubba Hubba*) - \$400 U.S.

For more on gear, see p. 56.

DOING IT ON THE CHEAP

Can you do it for less? Of course! Start by looking for second-hand equipment. Plenty of people have unwanted bicycles and lightly used camping gear hanging around in their basements.

Search eBay and Craigs List, and place a 'wanted' ad that tells people what you're looking for. Check with local cycling clubs and ask your friends if they know of anyone who might have equipment to sell. This takes more time than buying things new, so start searching as soon as you know you want to go bike touring.

As an example of how far you can go on a small budget, we spent a summer cycling around Europe on bicycles that we bought from a charity shop for just \$100 U.S. each. We invested another \$150 U.S. in a few accessories (including new saddles), unearthed some old camping gear and set off for 5,000km of cycling adventures.

Our bargain bikes weren't without their mechanical faults. At that price, you can't expect a totally smooth ride. But we overlooked the niggles and treasured the freedom they gave us to go touring when we didn't have the money to buy anything better.





“ Greg, our favourite Hungarian, was going low-tech from Beijing to Budapest with a tent that cost \$12 U.S. from the supermarket. When we asked what it was like in the rain, he told us it was s**t. Greg, if anyone, showed us what is possible if you're determined enough.

-John & Gayle
<http://slothsonwheels.blogspot.com>

”

FIVE GREAT PLACES TO RIDE



Dream destinations:
The Netherlands (above)
and Southeast Asia (top right).
Photos by Friedel & Andrew,
www.travellingtwo.com

CHOOSING WHERE TO GO CAN BE THE TOUGHEST PART OF BICYCLE TOURING. THESE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE DESTINATIONS, AND THEY'RE ALL WONDERFUL CHOICES FOR A FIRST TOUR.

THE NETHERLANDS

No country caters for cyclists as well as The Netherlands.

There are thousands of bike paths to follow, so you rarely need to ride in traffic. When you do have to cycle on a road, car drivers are very respectful of bicycles and leave lots of room.

For a glorious sight, come when the tulips are in bloom (late April to early May). You can also explore windmills, museums filled with the paintings from the likes of Rembrandt and Vermeer, and endless beaches along the North Sea.

Dutch food is cyclist-friendly too: hearty pancakes and apple cake with whipped cream can be found at almost every café.

From the Netherlands, it's easy to continue on to more super cycling countries such as France, Germany and Denmark.

TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

Hop on a ferry from the city of Melbourne, and within a few hours you'll be rolling your bicycle onto the small island of Tasmania.

They're trying to encourage bike touring here, so your first stop should be the tourist bureau for free maps and information designed just for cyclists.

It gets better. The landscape is truly beautiful. Expect everything

from high mountain passes to thick forests and roads that hug the coastline.

Finding a place to stay is also breeze. Aside from the usual options such as hotels and commercial campsites, Tasmania has dozens of free or very cheap camping areas, usually run by the local municipality.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

For an international winter getaway, we highly recommend a trip to Southeast Asia.

Thailand and Malaysia have fantastic food. Cambodia boasts the famous Angkor Wat temples. In Laos, you can climb high into rain-forest covered mountains on nearly empty roads.

Costs are reasonable across the region. You can feast on street food and get a basic hotel room for just \$20 U.S. a day.

The only downside is the heat and humidity. Get up early to avoid the worst of it, and take breaks in the middle of the day.

JAPAN

Japan always seems to get glowing reviews from the many bike tourists who cycle there. It's not just the temples, sushi and hot springs that make Japan so much fun.

The people are friendly and love to help foreigners. It's also



very safe. There is almost no violent crime in Japan.

Obviously some areas were devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami but there's still plenty to explore here by bicycle.


For inspiration, check out [Journey of 1000li](#) and [Finding Sachi](#).

MOROCCO

Perched at the western tip of North Africa, Morocco's exotic kasbahs, ancient markets, high mountains and magical deserts are easily reached by ferry or low-cost flights from Europe.

The tourism industry is well developed so you can choose to sleep in formal accommodation or to simply pitch your tent in the wild: maybe in a dip between mountains, under a palm tree or beside nomad tents in the

desert. Morocco also has a strong tradition of Arab hospitality. It's very common for travellers to be invited to share a cup of tea a meal with a family.

You do have to be slightly careful; in tourist areas the cup of tea is often just the start of a long sales pitch to buy a carpet but in the countryside the offers are usually genuine. 

“ Slovenia’s broad range of geo-cultural diversity in such a small country lends itself to nicely bike travel. Pedal 60km in any direction, and you’ll feel like you’ve travelled to another land.

Tyler Robertson
www.twowheeltravelblog.com ”



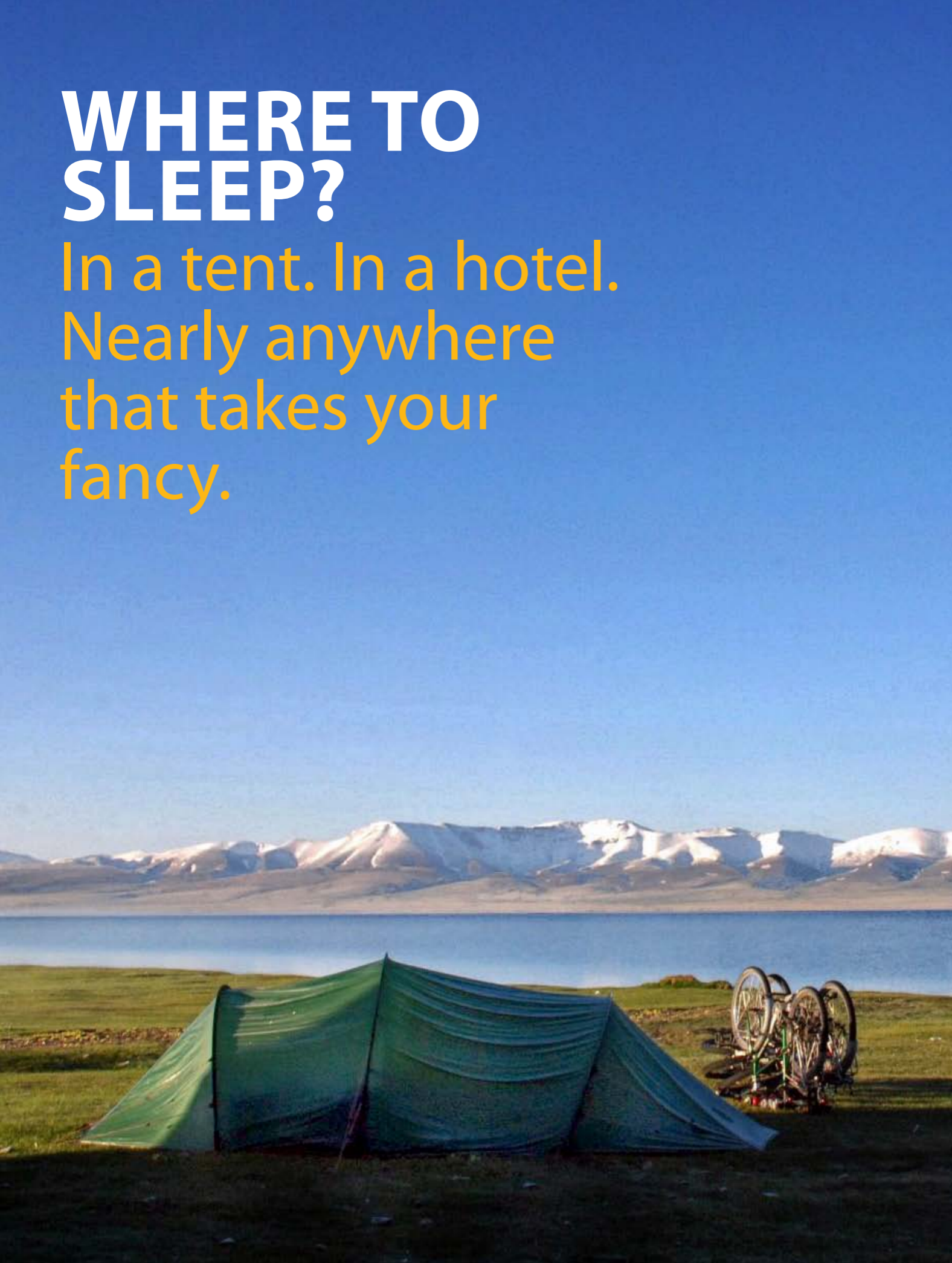
A REST STOP IN SLOVENIA. PHOTO BY CHRIS GRUAR, WWW.CYCLING4CANCER.COM



“ Curious African children often make memorable experiences on the road. ”
-Peter Gostelow
www.petergostelow.com

WHERE TO SLEEP?

In a tent. In a hotel.
Nearly anywhere
that takes your
fancy.



Hostels are the mainstay of backpackers. Travellers with more cash to spend will splurge on hotels. Where does a bike tourist go? Just about anywhere.

Here are some of the options, starting with the ones we rely on most frequently:

WILD CAMPING

Put your tent up in a field, behind some trees or alongside a river. Camping in nature, outside of the confines of traditional campgrounds, offers total flexibility, costs nothing and is wonderfully tranquil.

In many parts of the world, where tourism isn't yet common, wild camping may be your only option and is a great way to really get a feel for a country's natural beauty.

Nothing is perfect though. First you have to find your ideal spot. It should be out of sight of people and roads and preferably free of any garbage or graffiti that might indicate a local hangout. Don't be afraid to haul your bike over fields or through a stand of trees to find a good spot, far from the road, and avoid dirty roadside rest stops at all costs.

If you're new to wild camping, it's natural to have some fears in the beginning.

You may worry about the police coming to move you on or trouble in the middle of the night from strangers or animals.

The more you camp out, the more you'll realise how peaceful wild camping generally is, as long as you follow the golden rules. Stay as hidden as possible (don't get a yellow tent!) and respect anything that indicates private property like fences, signs and cultivated fields.

We have never been bothered by anyone approaching our tent at night, though shepherds in the Middle East often came to invite us home or offer us treats like fresh bread.

Wild Camping Tips: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/wild-camping-a-few-tips 

CAMPING BY LAKE SONG KOL
IN KYRGYZSTAN. PHOTO BY
FRIEDEL & ANDREW GRANT,
WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM

CAMPGROUNDS

A warm shower and a place to lay your head at a budget price. Sounds great, right? At their best, campgrounds are indeed a haven for the passing bike tourist but some cater better than others to the needs of a cyclist.

In the developed world, try and steer clear of the swankiest privately-run campsites that are more like holiday parks than a place for a cyclist to spend the night.

Such places tend to prefer big-spending RVs (some will even turn cyclists away) and charge \$25-35 U.S. for what is often a pathetic piece of unshaded grass.

If you're lucky, you'll find a small campground with reasonable prices and a dedicated, grassy spots for tents. Sometimes use of a kitchen or lounge area is even included. The further off the beaten path you go, the more rustic the campgrounds become. These primitive spots are also often very scenic, so we think it's worth putting up with the pit toilets!

“ I carried all my camping supplies with me (tent, sleeping bag, air mattress, et cetera) so that I could camp in some of the most beautiful places in the world like the World's Highest Monastery near Mt. Everest Base Camp; and many kind strangers hosted me in their yard, often treating me to a home cooked meal.

-Scott Stoll
www.theargonauts.com



Our favourite campgrounds tend to be run by municipalities and national governments. They make the most of their natural surroundings and seem less prone to late night parties or the drone of generators that plagues more commercial sites.

WITH NEW FRIENDS

Everyone you meet is a potential new friend and many are willing to let you stay for a night.

To arrange a night with a new friend, start by checking out sites where people offer free accommodation to passing travellers. Of the many such sites on the web, two stand out: [WarmShowers](#) and [Couchsurfing](#).

UNCONVENTIONAL OPTIONS

We have dozed behind churches, in schoolyards and beside official buildings like police and fire stations.


We've also laid our mats out in the common

areas of mosques and monasteries and enjoyed free camping in America's local parks. Just ask at the town hall and beware of sprinklers set to come on in the early hours of the morning!

Since most of these options involve private land, always ask permission if at all possible. If you can't find the person responsible for a building, ask the neighbours. In small communities (and these options work best in villages), they'll know who to contact or will just give you permission directly.

When you can't spot anywhere immediately obvious, ask the locals if they know of a safe place where you can put a tent for the night.

The wording is critical here. Don't ask for a place to camp, or they may assume you want to stay for several days. Make sure they understand you're just passing through.

By asking around, we've ended up sleeping blissfully on the floors of factories and under the disco ball of a Greek bar. 

“ My favourite place to sleep in Southeast Asia was at temples. I would arrive at sunset and after a bucket shower with the monks I would find a quiet place to sleep on the side of the temple floor. At 5am the sounds of the gong and prayers would wake me, and before hitting the road I would enjoy recently blessed food prepared by the local women. There's nothing like snails and sticky rice before you climb on the saddle for a new day!

-Chris Guar
www.cycling4cancer.com

”

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT:
SLEEPING IN AN AFRICAN SCHOOLROOM. PHOTO BY PAUL JEURISSEN, WWW.PAULJEURISSEN.NL
SOME SHUT EYE IN ARIZONA, U.S.A. PHOTO BY CASS GILBERT, WWW.WHILEOUTRIDING.COM
CAMPING IN A THAI MONASTARY. PHOTO BY AMAYA WILLIAMS, WWW.WORLDBIKING.INFO





A HOTEL ROOM IN SUMATRA, INDONESIA. PHOTO BY MARK WATSON, WWW.HIGHLUX.CO.NZ



PHOTO BY CHRIS & LIZ, WWW.BIKEABOUT.CO.UK

Planning a route for your bike tour is almost as much fun as the cycling itself. It can also be a little overwhelming the first time you find yourself staring at a map, wondering where to go, but don't worry; we have lots of tips for planning the perfect bike tour.

CHECK THE SEASONS

Weather can have a big effect on your happiness so research the seasons to get an idea of what you're in for. You can deal with almost any weather, as long as you know what to expect. Take note: the 'best' season for general tourism is not always the best for bike touring. You may prefer to go just outside the high season, when there are fewer crowds, cheaper flights and the weather is still reasonable.

HOW FAR YOU CAN GO?

We have a simple formula for determining how much distance we can cover on a bicycle tour. First, we think about how far we expect to go on an average day. For us, this is about 80km, give or take 20km depending on the terrain. Start with a distance closer to 60km if you're new to bike touring.

We then multiply this average figure by 5 for every week we plan to be on the road. This gives us a good idea of how far we can cycle, while still leaving room for rest days, bad weather and sightseeing along the way.

If we're taking a plane to our destination, we count on one non-cycling day on each end of the trip to prepare for the flight (reassembling or packing the bicycle, recovering from jetlag, getting oriented in a new place).

GET A GOOD MAP

A good map is helpful if you want to find the best roads for cycling. For paper maps, a scale of 1:200,000-1:500,000 gives a good

ROUTE PLANNING

overview of the terrain and secondary roads. These maps can be expensive if you need to buy several for a longer tour but it's sometimes possible to get entire atlases that cover a whole region in good detail for a reasonable price. You can then just rip out the sheets you need and throw away parts as you go.

If you prefer electronic maps, a good place to start is with the mapping option that nearly everyone uses on a daily basis: Google Maps. Is it likely to generate a perfect cycling route for you? No. Will it give you a good idea of the road options and distances for the route you're planning? Yes.

Think of Google Maps as a rough first sketch, which you can then refine using paper maps and the tools listed below. Once you have a route, the 'satellite' setting of Google Maps can also be useful to examine road conditions (eg. is there a decent shoulder for cycling) or to identify patches of woodland that might make a good camping spot. To take Google Maps a step further, try websites like [Ride With GPS](#), [BikeHike](#) and [Cycle Route](#). They are based on

Google Maps but also generate cue sheets, elevation charts and downloadable GPS tracks.

OUTLINE YOUR ROUTE

Once you have your map, start outlining the route you'd like to take. Remember that you're not looking for the most direct route, as you might on a car trip, but rather the one where you won't be constantly annoyed by the sound of vehicles racing up behind you.

As you're considering various roads, research what you'd like to see in the area, where the campgrounds are and where you can get food and water. Jot this down on the map or in a notebook.

Look as well for clues to the landscape. Sometimes mountain peaks are marked. Different colours can indicate topography as can water sources. If you're following a river to its source, you're often going uphill. Vineyards also tend to indicate heavily cultivated land and steep slopes.

PLANNING

Some people love detailed itineraries, where each day's distance and destination is laid out in a spreadsheet. Others pick a start

point and an end point, plus a few milestones along the way. They then let the finer details of the trip work themselves out.

We prefer the second option. By planning too well, you risk losing the spontaneity that adds so much to the bike touring experience.

You don't want to turn down an invitation to spend some time with a new friend or push yourself too hard through a heat wave, all because you 'had' to get to the campground marked on your schedule.

VARIETY IS KEY

One final note on planning: a contrast in experiences and sensations helps keep the tour exciting and enjoyable. If you're planning 3 days of riding in the middle of nowhere, schedule a rest day in a larger town or city for the fourth day, so you can get a shower and treat yourself to a great meal.


National parks give you a chance to get off the bike and go hiking for a day. Coastal routes often have nice inland diversions that will let you discover a different landscape, just a few miles away from the ocean. 



PHOTO BY NEIL PIKE, WWW.PIKESONBIKES.COM



“ If you can't find any reliable paper maps and the Google cars haven't yet visited an area, then satellite images are a great help for route finding in remote regions. Find 4WD routes on Google Earth, store track and waypoint information on your GPS, then follow these out in the field.

-Neil & Harriet Pike
www.pikesonbikes.com

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A SOLO TOUR... Or With Friends?

The bike touring experience can be vastly different, simply depending on whether you decide to strike out solo, go with a friend or in a big group.

Hitting the road on your own means you run the show. You determine how fast to go, when to stop for a coffee break or to take a picture.

You also decide how much to spend on your daily expenses (without any pressure to join the group for lunch in a restaurant) and when you're tired, you can just call it quits for the day. When you're alone, there's plenty of time to ponder your thoughts.

At the end of the trip you'll have a special sense of achievement, knowing that you had the resilience and strength to overcome all the challenges along the way.

Touring on your own can be lonely though, especially in desolate, monotonous landscapes. When you get the 10th flat tire of the afternoon, there won't be anyone there to help lift the mood.

With friends, it's just the opposite. You'll have someone to celebrate milestones with. There will also be help on hand when you get sick, when the bike breaks or storm clouds roll in.

Choose carefully though: best friends at home aren't always best friends on the road. It's crucial to ensure you have similar ideas of what a good bike tour entails before you set out.

If you want to start cycling at 7am and your friend loves to sleep late, you could be in for more stress than fun.

COMPROMISE IS KEY


Be prepared to compromise as well. Touring with other people means trying to reach a group decision. That in turn means there's always someone who doesn't get what they want.

In big groups, the benefits and downsides to touring with friends are exaggerated. Usually there's a chief organiser, which means you are freed of the responsibility of planning a route or even carrying a map – just follow the person in front! And when disaster strikes, you'll have 20 people willing to assist.

On the other hand, even something simple like stopping for a coffee can take an hour. It's also harder to find the tranquillity that attracts so many people to bike touring. In a small group you can pull ahead of the crowd for a while, but in a big group



PHOTOS BY MARIJA KOZIN (LEFT) AND JARED MITCHELL, WWW.BRAKINGBOUNDARIES.ORG (RIGHT)

there's always someone coming up alongside for a chat. Things that are simple for solo cyclists or small groups of friends, such as wild camping or stopping to take a photo, become impossible in a very large group. 

10 QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before committing to a bike tour with someone else, ask each other a few questions:

1. How far do you expect to go per day?
2. How fast do you cycle?
3. What is your daily budget?
4. Should we stay in hotels, campsites or try to wild camp for free?
5. How often do you want to take a rest day?
6. What time of the day do you like to get started?
7. If the weather turns nasty, do we ride through the storm or seek shelter and shorten the tour?
8. Do you want to cook meals together, or apart?
9. What excites you about touring, and what do you think the most challenging part will be?
10. What would your ideal day on the road be like?

MOM? DAD?

Don't freak out but I'm going to bike across the country.

Diana Johnson writes about the pre-trip fears of many cyclists and of their families.

I know that it's unconventional for a young woman to set out on a trip of this magnitude alone and on a bicycle.

I know it might be dangerous. As my mother pointed out, bears are not the only predators out there. She also pointed out that it would be very easy to stalk me on a bike, to which I replied that it would be very boring to stalk me on a bike.

I know that this trip will be incredibly challenging and intermittently lonely, frustrating, boring, scary, hot, cold, wet, and windy. I understand that this trip could suck. And you know what? If it sucks I'll cut my losses and change my plans. I can alter my route, stop for a few days, or even fly to Georgia. Heck, I can stop in Kansas and settle down if I want to.

I try to explain to the non-cyclists (e.g. my family) that this trip is not as shocking as it might seem at first. Look around, and you'll find that cycling across the country is not that uncommon.

Old people, young people, couples, and kids are cycle touring all over the place. Not only

that, but cycling across the U.S.A. is nothing compared to what some folks are doing.

China! Across Africa! Across the Himalayas! At least I don't have to bring a passport, a head scarf and money to bribe border guards.

I don't want to cause my family undue distress. I don't want them to worry. Trust me, I worry enough about this trip myself. As I see it, there are three types of worry going on here, and the challenge is teasing apart the different types and acting to ameliorate them accordingly.

First, there's the worry and shock my loving family experiences because they are non-cyclists hearing about this trip for the first time.

Second, there is the worry of

concerned parents and grand parents who want their ambitious but sometimes misguided daughter to be safe from harm and unhappiness, especially that which she inflicts on herself.

Finally, there is the type of worry that is absurd and irrational, stemming from one too many Dateline Unsolved Mysteries about the murders of innocent young women.

The first two types of worry can be combated with facts, details, packing lists, websites, and long conversations. The last type of worry I can do nothing about except exasperatedly sigh and shrug my shoulders. I want the blessing of my family. I don't want them to worry about me.

I hope that they'll come around. I think they will.



“It's both exhilarating and mildly annoying when I tell a non-cyclist about my plans to cycle across the continent. “WHAT?!” They exclaim. “You're cycling WHERE?” And then there's the inevitable, “By YOURSELF?!””



DIANA JOHNSON ON THE ROAD. HER JOURNAL: WWW.CRAZYGUYONABIKE.COM/DOC/OR2GA2011



“ Enough planning, just go!
-Loretta Henderson
www.skalatitude.com ”



PHOTO BY CASS GILBERT, WWW.WHILEOUTRIDING.COM

TRAINING for a TOUR

Preparing for a bike tour is really nothing to worry about. Oh sure, it's true that you need to be in semi-reasonable shape to get started and there are a few logistical quirks to work out: what to pack, how to pack it and how to deal with daily routines such as cooking your evening meal on a camp stove.

It doesn't take much, however, to become comfortable with these things. Start in your backyard. Take an hour or two to set up your tent (make sure you know how it goes together and packs back up) and test your stove. Make sure you understand the equipment you'll be carrying, and try packing it in your panniers or bicycle trailer.

Next, put everything on the bicycle and go a mile or two up the street. See how the bike feels and rearrange the weight if the bike doesn't seem stable.

You could also try a day trip. If you have no biking experience, start with an unloaded bike. Just bring a small bag with essentials like snack food, water and a jacket. Pick a moderate route of 30-60 kilometers in an area that you're familiar with. Have a friend on stand-by to pick you up, or plan a route that passes train and bus stations, so there's always a lift nearby if you need it.

At the same time as you're trying out day trips,

build cycling into your daily routine. Use your bicycle to go to the supermarket or to get to work. Although this is more commuting than touring, it will give you experience with all kinds of situations you'll encounter on tour like traffic, dogs and rain.

ADD WEIGHT AND CHALLENGES

Once you're comfortable with the unloaded day trip, plan a series of weekend excursions. Each time you have a successful tour, make the next one a little harder by adding a bit more weight, aiming for a longer distance or picking a route with a few more hills. Little by little, increase your strength until you're building up to the type of days you'd like to do on tour.

The time it takes to reach your goal will depend on your current level of fitness and how ambitious your target is. After a few of these shorter trips you'll have a good idea of how ready you are to tackle a bigger journey.

If you have to fit these trips around work and family commitments, give yourself at least a couple months to complete your training. Block your bike touring weekends off in advance so that 'normal life' doesn't prevent you from getting a feel for life on

“ We are not super-cyclists who put in hundreds of miles a week on the bike. What it really took was the realization that we could do it. I think getting beyond all the ‘what ifs’ and just getting on the bikes is all it takes. We finally realized that all we really needed to do was ‘shut up and pedal’!

-Dan, Alison, Sonia & Gus
www.shutupandpedal.org



the road before you leave.

SHOULD YOU TRAIN?

On extended tours of several weeks or months, you won't necessarily need to train nearly as much as for shorter trips.

That's because bicycle touring isn't the Tour de France. You're not trying to be the fastest rider on the road or cover the most miles. You're just there to have fun. With longer bike journeys, you also tend to have a more flexible schedule, so you can take it slow and build up your strength, endurance and routines over the course of several days.

Opting to train on the road also takes some of the stress out of pre-departure. Who has time to fit in multiple weekend trips when you're trying to re-direct your mail, rent out your apartment, sell all your stuff and find someone to adopt the cat?

There are some caveats to the 'learn it on the road' method. All the usual tips for new bike

tourists apply doubly to you, such as starting with modest daily distances, having a specific end-point in mind for the day and knowing where the campgrounds or hotels are located. That's because you won't have refined your routine as much as someone who's trained before leaving.

Muster up your best zen-like attitude, to deal with the inevitable snags as you figure out what works best for you.

Whether you decide to train diligently before your trip or just leap into the experience and start learning, take it easy for the first few days as you're adjusting to your new lifestyle.

While most days will come easily, others will test your resolve with bad weather, flat tires and other challenges. When these tough moments come along, don't be too hard on yourself - and treat yourself if you're feeling down. Getting a hotel in bad weather or eating out can

give you a much-needed break from the rigours of the road - just what you need to keep your spirits up and renew your energy for the next day.

Before long, you'll find yourself naturally rising to bigger challenges. Longer days. Steeper hills. Free camping. After a few weeks you'll start to feel like a real pro, taking everything in your stride.



HOW TO PICK A TOURING BIKE



Top: a recumbent HP Velotechnik Street Machine. Bottom: a Santos Travelmaster, an ICE Adventure Trike and a Kona Sutra.

THERE ARE ALMOST AS MANY TOURING BIKES, AS THERE ARE TOURING CYCLISTS. HOW DO YOU CHOOSE BETWEEN THEM? HERE ARE A FEW TIPS FOR FINDING YOUR 'PERFECT' RIDE.

Whenever someone asks us which touring bike to buy, we start by reminding them that the bike really isn't so important.

After all, the history of bicycle touring is filled with cyclists who covered vast distances on bikes that seem, on the surface at least, totally unsuitable for the job.

Thomas Stevens circled the world on a penny farthing in the 1880s. Heinz Stücker has covered over half a million kilometers on a bike with only 3 speeds. Even the sluggish rickshaw has been used to span continents.

The point? A nice bike is just that: nice but not essential. Determination and a positive attitude are the most vital factors for a successful trip by bicycle, not the price of your bike. And there's no point in spending so much money that you don't have any funds left to actually travel!

Most importantly, don't be fooled into thinking that buying an expensive bike will save you from mechanical worries. It won't.

You'll have to deal with regular maintenance and unexpected occurrences no matter which bike you're riding and, depending where you're cycling, you might have an easier time getting a basic bike repaired, versus a very fancy one with specialist parts.

Even in lower price brackets, you should be able to find a bike with some ideal features

for touring. These include plenty of mounting points for luggage racks and water bottles, and a design that favours a comfortable riding position over long distances, rather than speed.

5 BASIC FACTORS

Before you start thinking of specific brands and models, consider these basic variables. They will help narrow down your choice.

Budget

A reasonably solid second-hand bike will start around \$200-300 U.S. (check at thrift shops and ask local cycling clubs if anyone has a bike to sell).

On the other end of the scale, the very best touring bikes are priced at \$2,000 U.S. and upwards. If you splurge on an expensive bike, you can expect features such as a frame built to match your specific body measurements, hand-built wheels and the latest technology (Rohloff Hubs and belt drives). You may also be able to choose a custom paint colour.

Trip Duration

For shorter tours, where you're travelling lightly and relatively close to home, just about any bike will do. We personally covered 5,000km on bikes that cost \$100 U.S. from

a junk shop. They weren't always a smooth ride (we invested another \$100-200 U.S. each in replacement parts) but they took us on some fantastic adventures, without breaking the bank.

The more remote and lengthy your trip, the greater the case for investing a bit more in your bicycle. Put a special focus on quality wheels (hand-built if you can afford it), a decent gearset, racks that can handle a heavy load and - of course - a comfortable saddle.

Terrain

For a trip on North America's Great Divide, the longest off-pavement bike route in the world, a mountain bike with suspension might be the best choice. You'll appreciate the extra cushioning on bumpy, dirt roads.

“After seeing the locals transport bananas, car tires and even whole families on the back of their Indian bikes, many western travellers buy an old bicycle, strap their backpack on the rack and take off on an unforgettable vacation.”

-Grace Johnson
www.bicyclingaroundtheworld.nl



MALAWI BICYCLE TAXI. PHOTO BY PAUL JEURISSEN, WWW.PAULJEURISSEN.NL



“ I enjoy a spin on my bicycle. It is splendid to feel the wind blowing in my face and the springy motion of my iron steed. ”

- Helen Keller

MIRJAM WOUTERS (WWW.CYCLINGDUTCHGIRL.COM) HAS BEEN TOURING THE WORLD FOR OVER 10 YEARS. PHOTO BY JANE ST. CATHERINE.

On the other hand, if your trip involves mostly paved roads and decent weather then a touring bike with skinny tires will probably do the job just fine. You might even get away with taking a racing bike, as long as you plan to stay in hotels and travel with a minimal amount of luggage.

Planes, Trains and Buses

Taking your bike on other forms of transport can be one of the more stressful parts of touring. This is doubly true if you choose an unusually long or wide bike, such as a tandem.

It makes sense, then, to choose a relatively standard bike if public transport is a big part of your trip plan. You might even go for a folding bike like a Brompton or Bike Friday - not

the most common touring choice, but certainly a possibility. Visit [Path Less Pedaled](#) to see how 'foldies' are being used even for a cross-continent, fully-loaded tour.

If you do go for an unconventional bike, you may still be able to get it on that plane (or even ship it ahead by courier) but be prepared for a bit of extra hassle.

Comfort

The best bike is ultimately the one that feels best to you. Bike touring is not supposed to hurt.

Before you settle on any bike, go for at least a short ride. Better yet, convince the bike shop to let you borrow it for a few hours or rent it for a weekend. If you return with aching knees, a sore neck or strained ankles,

chances are you haven't found your dream bike or it needs some adjustments.

TYPES OF BIKES

Now that you have a basic idea of what kind of bike might be best, it's time to learn about the most popular types of bikes for touring.

As you shop around, remember that touring bikes aren't commonly stocked by many bike shops and certainly not in department stores. Track down a specialist dealer who can give you good advice, and who will have a few models for you to try out.

Mid-Range Touring Bikes

Trek's classic 520 model, Surly's Long Haul Trucker and the TX-

400 from VSF Fahrradmanufaktur are just a few of the touring bikes currently on the market that strike a good balance between quality and price.

Expect to pay \$1,000-1,500 U.S. for bikes in this category: a significant investment but one that should give you many happy years of touring, and at a price tag that's significantly cheaper than many high-end touring bikes.

Bikes in this category should have:

A Long Wheelbase - This style of frame ensures that your heels have plenty of room to clear the panniers as you pedal.

Attachment Points - Room for 3 bottles plus mudguards and racks is ideal.

Decent Components - The popular and robust Shimano LX and XT groupsets are often used.

Don't expect much of a choice, however, when it comes to custom options like colours and wheel size.

Other places where manufacturers often cut corners include:

Racks - Mid-range tourers are often fitted with racks that are fine for moderate loads but not heavy touring. Often, only a back rack is included and some don't have racks at all. You have to buy them as an extra accessory.

Gearing - The gearing can be a bit to the high side, without a true 'granny gear' for serious hills.

Wheel Clearance - Check to see if there is enough space between the frame and the mudguards to fit the widest tires. If not, dirt road touring could be challenging.

Wheels - The wheels will probably be machine built and not quite as strong as those built by hand.

Tires - May be a bit thin for dirt road touring.

Saddles - They're often not the most comfortable models.

On the whole, none of these things matter much if your goal is to take shorter tours, mostly on paved roads. If you're planning a more adventurous trip, factor in the cost of upgraded racks, wheels and a better saddle.

With a few changes, you can turn a mid-range touring bike into a decent bicycle for longer expeditions and still come in well below the cost of a high-end expedition touring bicycle.

If you decide to make upgrades, try bargaining with your local bike shop. They might give you a discount on things like better quality tires and racks if you're buying a bike at the same time.

Planning ahead also helps make your money go further. If you can buy your bike in the autumn or winter, just as next year's models are coming out. You might get a great deal on last year's version.

Expedition Bikes

The expedition touring bike is the big, sturdy brute of the bicycle world. These top quality machines are ready to take whatever you can throw at them.

Some are made by craftsmen, turning out a dozen or so bikes a year from their garage. Others come with a brand name like Thorn or Koga.

Regardless of their pedigree, these are bikes you should be able to ride around the world, over mountains, through rivers and down rocky tracks with every confidence that they can handle the terrain and the week's worth of food you've loaded on the back luggage rack.

Frames are often made to measure and the wheels will almost certainly be the 26" standard that is most easily replaced anywhere in the world.



THE VERY POPULAR SURLY LONG HAUL TRUCKER TOURING BICYCLE.

Across the bike, the focus should be on high quality components and there should also be an element of beauty. Custom paint jobs and beautiful welding work are to be expected on this level of bicycle.

Rohloff Hubs

Expedition bikes are also where you're most likely to see the latest technology, including the Rohloff Hub – a nearly maintenance-free and sealed gearing system.

Because everything is enclosed, the Rohloff is great for



THE ROHLOFF HUB: A HIGH-TECH PIECE OF TOURING GEAR WITH MANY BENEFITS. IT ALSO ADDS \$1,200 U.S. TO THE PRICE OF YOUR BIKE.

trips down dirty, dusty roads. It also lets you shift without pedalling (if you want to change gears at a stoplight, for example), and a wheel built with a Rohloff is very strong, because the wheels don't have to be 'dished' or arced as they do on bicycles with derailleurs.

On the downside, the Rohloff costs an extra \$1,200 U.S. and in the unlikely event that something does go wrong, you'll probably have to send the hub back to the factory to be fixed. The customer service is, by all accounts, wonderful but how will you feel if you have to stop a tour and wait for your wheel to make the journey to the factory

in Germany and back?

Our personal preference is to deal with the quirks of a derailleur, which we can fix and which every bike mechanic the world over understands but plenty of cyclists are completely in love with their Rohloff hubs. It's not really a case of derailleurs versus Rohloff but being aware of the pros and cons to both, before you make a decision.

Think Ahead

One final thought on expedition bikes in general: plan ahead if you decide to buy one.

They are often made to order, and it can take weeks or even a

few months before your bike is ready. Starting to look six months or even a year ahead of your departure day is not too soon.

Recumbent Bikes & Trikes

Sit back, put your feet up and watch the scenery glide by. With a recumbent bicycle or trike, you'll be doing just that.

These reclining bikes are renowned for being a luxurious way to tour. The generous seat and laid back position takes the pressure off your upper body, eliminating aching backs, sore necks and numb hands at the end of a long day on the road.

Recumbent bikes have other

“Riding a tandem isn't really a fine art, more a messy sketchbook of wobbles and wavy lines before you get the hang of it, especially fully loaded. The important thing is to synchronize at all times. When stationary, pushing off with a chant of '3, 2, 1' helps takes the strain off the knees.”

-Chris & Janyis

<http://thespokeandwords.wordpress.com> ”



ALEX & KAT SPEED ACROSS THE DESERT.
WWW.CYCLINGABOUT.COM
PHOTO BY ALENA PESAVENTO,
WWW.FRISCHLUFTTOUR.CH

benefits too. They're aerodynamic and their unique style means less worry about your bike being stolen. Most thieves wouldn't have a clue how to ride one away! A trike can be great for people with stability problems, and doubles as a seat when you stop for lunch or to camp.

What's the catch? Like expedition bikes, these specialist bicycles aren't cheap. Expect to pay more for a recumbent than you would for an upright bike of similar quality.

Their unusual shape and relatively heavy weight also makes them harder to pack for bus, train and plane travel.

Big hills can be harder to climb than on an upright bike because you can't get out of the saddle to really pump the pedals.

For two-wheeled recumbents, you will have to learn how to ride them. It's different than an upright bike but 10-15 minutes of practice is usually enough to learn this new way of balancing.

Other concerns include the potential challenge of sourcing non-standard replacement parts on the road and the fact that recumbents are still rare enough to make you a tourist attraction.

Only you know whether you will revel in the atten-

tion and use it to make new friends, or find being in the spotlight overwhelming.

If you're considering a recumbent, find a specialist dealer and try a few out before you buy.

Tandem Bikes

You know all the words to 'A Bicycle Built For Two' but does that mean you should consider touring on a tandem? For many riders, the answer is yes.

If you're a cycling couple, where one person tends to ride much faster than the other, a tandem is one option for keeping both of you together on the road.

Families on tour like tandems because they lessen the worry of young riders straying out into traffic. A tandem can also allow people with poor eyesight or other disabilities, who couldn't ride a bicycle on their own, enjoy the pleasures of bike touring.

Your ability to form a good team will be the key factor in tandem touring success. The captain sits up front and must take responsibility for steering and keeping the stoker happy by choosing appropriate gears for both riders. Warnings about bumps ahead in the road are also appreciated.

From the back seat, the stoker has to develop total trust in the captain and pedal steadily. A tandem partner who leans back and reads a book all day won't be anyone's favourite!

Be aware that a tandem is long and heavy, so tasks that are relatively simple with standard bikes - like carrying your bicycle up a set of steep stairs in a hotel - could prove nearly impossible with a tandem.

Packing for a tandem tour is another challenge because two people have to share one set of luggage. Some pannier manufacturers have risen to the challenge and made extra large bags for tandem riders. You can also tow a trailer (see p. 77).

You may also want to consider extra-strong wheels. A standard touring bike often has a 32 or 36-spoke wheel. More common on tandems are 40 or 48-spoke wheels, built with the best rims that money can buy.

Used Bikes

Buying a second-hand bike is an ideal way to make your touring budget go further.

Setting aside \$300-500 U.S.

should be enough to buy an older bike and make some upgrades like adding a better saddle and robust racks.

With \$1,000 U.S. to spare, you might pick up a bike that sold for twice as much when it was new. Often people get rid of brand-name touring bikes because they simply never use them.

Whether you go for something old and simple or a high-end bargain, you'll be saving a lot of money. That's cash you can use towards the rest of your trip.

Begin your search at garage sales and second-hand shops. Websites like eBay and Craigslist can be good hunting grounds. Even your local bike shop may occasionally have trade-in bikes for sale.

A steel touring bike is the ideal find, but mountain bikes

are far more common and easily adapted for the job.

To help sort the good from the bad, focus on brand names like Trek, Cannondale, Marin and Specialized. This usually guarantees components of a reasonable quality and protects you from buying a shoddy supermarket bicycle.

Look also for a 'hardtail' bike without back suspension so you don't get cornered into buying specialist racks for carrying your luggage.

When you examine the bike, look closely at the frame.

Touring puts a lot of pressure on a bike frame and serious damage will be expensive or impossible to fix. Be cautious if you spot dents, cracks or anything more than a tiny amount of surface rust.

Other things to check:

Wheels - Do they spin in a perfect circle? Feel the spokes to see if they are loose. Examine the rims for any sign of cracking.


A Loose Headset - There shouldn't be any movement when you grip the brakes and push or pull on the handlebars.

Gears - Run through all the gears and make sure they change smoothly.

Chain rings - Look for sharp points on the teeth. This indicates heavy wear and a need to replace the chain ring.

Attachment Points - Look to see if the bike has braze-ons or attachment points for racks, mud-

guards and bottle cages. These could be challenging to fit if the bike wasn't designed with this in mind.

If in doubt, take a bike-savvy friend along or see if a local bike shop can quickly assess its condition. Although slightly tricky to arrange, these checks could save you hassle down the road. 

“ **Everyone's journey, and the way they go about it, is unique - stamped with their own interests and flavour. My mountain-bike inspired setup reflects the fact I like to ride dirt roads as much as possible, both to escape the hectic traffic that plies the modern highway, and for the simple joy of weaving my way down a quiet and remote backcountry trail.** ”

-Cass Gilbert
www.whileoutriding.com

CASS GILBERT'S BIKE: A SURLY
KRAMPUS WITH 29+ TYRES.
WWW.WHILEOUTRIDING.COM



“ Life is either a
daring adventure
or nothing.

- Helen Keller

”





PHOTO BY FRIEDEL & ANDREW, WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM

BIKE BUYING QUESTIONS: ANSWERED!

Touring bicycles can be made of nearly any material. Steel and aluminium are the two most popular choices. Titanium is also increasingly an option, and if you want to stand out from the crowd you could even consider a bamboo or wooden frame.

The vast majority of people will go for a frame made of either steel or aluminium and for good reason. Most bikes are made of one of these two materials, so you'll have the widest choice in touring bikes if you focus on steel and aluminium frames. Both are robust and affordable choices for a touring bike. Titanium is another possibility, although bikes built with Titanium frames tend to be more expensive and for that reason alone most people will turn their attention elsewhere.

On touring forums and in books, you'll find a never-ending debate about which of these frame materials is the 'best'. We believe it's largely a question of personal preference, and the short answer is that the frame material doesn't matter so much as long as the bike is designed and built by someone who knows what they're doing **and** as long as you like it and find it comfortable to ride.

If you want the long answer, read on.

STEEL

It's the traditional choice, tends to be the favoured material of

high-end custom bike builders and is renowned for giving a lively, almost springy ride. Compared to aluminium, steel is also a relatively straightforward material to weld and this is a key part of the pro-steel argument.

The logic goes that you're more likely to find someone who can fix damage to your frame en route if it's made of steel, rather than aluminium. That's true to some degree but a lot depends on the skill of the welder and the severity of the problem.

In Cambodia, we were able to find a welder who could fix small cracks in our steel frames. The cracks were then repaired a second time in Australia. At the same time, we had some of the drop-outs and mounting points for luggage racks repaired as well. They had corroded away.

It was nice to be able to repair our much-loved bicycles. It's also possible to argue that we might not have faced these problems in the first place, if we had chosen an aluminium frame. The cause of the cracks was a small welding error when the bikes were

initially built, while the corrosion was caused by paint rubbing off our steel frames, allowing rust to set in.

If you find yourself with a more seriously damaged steel bicycle, it might not be possible to find someone with the appropriate welding skills and understanding of bicycles to make the repair. For seriously warped and damaged frames (after a crash, for example), it's almost certainly better to look into buying a new frame or having one shipped to you, rather than trying to bend it back into shape.

ALUMINIUM

Aluminium touring frames are often (but not always) a bit cheaper and weigh a little less than those made of steel. They won't rust, which means you don't need to be as vigilant about covering up small chips and nicks to the paint as you do with a steel bike. You may hear people say that aluminium frames are inherently weaker than steel frames but unless the bicycle in question is particularly old (in which case an aluminium frame can be more vulnerable to fatigue cracks), its strength comes much more from the design and overall build quality than the base material.

TITANIUM

Titanium frames are becoming more popular, although they're still a niche part of the touring bike market. They have three notable advantages: they're extremely strong, completely immune to corrosion (you don't even need to paint the frame, it simply won't rust) and of course they're very lightweight compared to touring frames made of steel or aluminium. The downside is that titanium is an expensive frame material. Prices are coming down as titanium bikes become more popular but for most people, steel or aluminium will still be the best choice based on budget alone.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Frames made of steel, aluminium or titanium can be good for touring. What is certain is that you should choose an all-metal frame (no carbon fibre, please — it's too prone to damage). Don't worry too much about small differences in the weight of one frame versus another. Unless you're planning an ultralight journey, a few hundred grams of extra weight on a frame is unlikely to matter by the time you load up your bike with clothing, a tent and other gear. What **is** important is the com-

pany you buy the bike from. You want a bike that's backed by a company with good customer service in case something does go wrong. Ask yourself:

- Will this company send me replacement parts if necessary?
- Are the bikes that they make solid, well designed and well tested, meaning that major problems are unlikely?

No matter what material your touring bike is made of, the answer to both of these questions should be 'yes'.

GOOD WHEELS FOR TOURING?

The first decision to make when it comes to wheels is which size to use. There are two main choices: 26" or the slightly larger 28" / 700c.

Wheel size doesn't matter so much if you're planning to tour mostly in the developed world. Excellent wheels can be built in both sizes and both are common enough that they should be easily repairable or replaceable by most bike shops.

Once you start travelling further afield, a 26" wheel becomes the better, internationally available choice. That way, if your wheel fails while you're on tour, you can be much more sure of finding a replacement."

Other factors to consider are:

Hand-built – If you can only afford one luxury item for your bicycle, make it a hand-built wheel. No machine has yet been able to match a talented wheel builder when it comes to reliability and strength. Anything that saves you the hassle of broken spokes and wheels that fall out of alignment is worth paying for.

Spokes - Most touring wheels will have 32 or 36 spokes. Anything less and the wheel will struggle to support the weight of your body and all your bags. A good wheel will also have spokes that cross each other at least 3 times.

Double-walled Rims – Cheaper rims are made from a single layer of metal. If you're in a pinch, a single-walled rim will get you to the next decent bike shop. It might even last a few thousand kilometers but don't invite trouble. Start out with solid, double-walled rims.

Decent Hubs - We've traditionally used Shimano hubs, and we find that they'll last thousands of kilometers with minimal maintenance. Go for LX rather than XT because the newer XT models aren't as durable as they used to be. If you have more cash to spend, you might look at hubs by manufacturers such as Phil Wood and Hope. To generate your own electricity, a SON dynamo hub is fantastic - although quite pricey.

More on hubs: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/which-hubs-to-use-for-bike-touring

BRAKING SYSTEMS

Like the argument over bike-frames, you can spend hours weighing up the merits of various braking systems.

Rim Brakes

Rim brakes in the V-Brake design are a common choice. They have two arms which extend over the tire and grip the rim to stop the bike. These types of brakes are relatively inexpensive to buy and easy to repair.

You can take care of V-Brakes yourself using basic tools. Any bike shop around the world should also have the parts and knowledge to fix and adjust them.

On the downside, V-Brakes are not as powerful or responsive as other types of brakes, especially in the rain. On a wet day or a steep descent, you may find yourself gripping the brakes for longer periods than someone with disc brakes.

For more stopping power, you might consider hydraulic rim brakes. Magura makes the HS33 brake, which we had fitted to our

“ I'd feel very confident taking my Avid BB7s for a long tour. The pads are so small you could carry enough for a year or two in your back pocket, the cable is standard, and it's not difficult to straighten a disk if it gets whacked and bent, although it is hard to get it perfectly flat again.

-Stephen Lord
www.adventurecycle-touringhandbook.com ”

Santos touring bikes (see: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/santos-travelmaster-review). They are extremely responsive and have a great reputation for reliability.

Nevertheless, make sure you know how to maintain them - just in case. It's not hard to bleed the brakes, once someone has shown you how to do it. You'll also want to take spare parts on longer journeys through less developed countries, and it doesn't hurt to make sure your bike frame has the necessary V-Brake bosses. That way, you can always fit a new set of V-Brakes, if disaster strikes.

No matter which type of rim brakes, you buy, be aware that they will slowly wear away your rim, making it thinner and eventually causing the side of the rim to crack or break away. This rarely happens before you've cycled a significant distance (about 15,000km, in our experience). Dirt between your brake pads and the rims can accelerate

this process, so clean your rims with a rag occasionally, especially after riding on muddy roads.

Disc Brakes

Traditionalists scorn them, but disc brakes are becoming more common in the cycling world.

They're a little more expensive than their rim brake counterparts, but for the price you get unparalleled braking power (especially in rainy conditions).

You'll be able to stop more quickly and with more control than ever before. This may prove to be especially important if you're planning on tackling rough trails and steep mountain passes.

Disc brakes also don't wear down your rims like V-Brakes do, and that means your rims should last much longer.

In terms of repairs and replacements en route, be prepared to do it yourself, in case you can't find an experienced mechanic.

Which disc brakes are best?



PHOTO BY AMAYA WILLIAMS. WWW.WORLDBIKING.INFO

The usual advice is to pick mechanical or cable-operated disc brakes over hydraulic versions, but you'll find tourers using all types.

Avid's BB7s are a popular cable model, and the experienced adventure cyclist Tom Allen has reviewed [Magura's Louise hydraulic brakes](#).

CAN I TOUR WITH SUSPENSION FORKS?

It's not common to tour with suspension forks and the average bike tourist probably doesn't go off road enough to offset the risk of mechanical problems with the suspension forks en route - potentially a costly or difficult repair job.

If you're planning a trip that will take you predominantly off-road, however, you may appreciate the extra padding between you and the bumpy surface underneath your wheels. Equally, if you already have a bike with suspension forks, you may prefer to adapt it for touring rather than

buying another bike.

If you do choose to use suspension forks, make sure the suspension is in good shape before you set out and keep your load as light as possible in the front.

Normal racks don't work with suspension so look at special models from Tubus and Old Man Mountain. Both companies make high quality racks that will do the job. Trailers are another option for carrying luggage on a bike with suspension forks (see more on p. 59).

WHAT ABOUT GEARS?

It's easy to get drowned in technical details when it comes to gears but it all comes down to this: get gears low enough so you can pedal uphill at barely more than a walking pace.


These low gears are often called granny gears and you'll be happy you have them the first time a mountain looms in front of you. Not only will you be able to climb calmly to the top, being

able to spin quickly in a low gear takes pressure off your joints and prevents knee damage in the long run.

The range of your gears is measured in *gear inches* and a good range for a touring bike is usually about 20 inches at the low end to 90 inches at the top end. For more about gear inches, check out Sheldon Brown's [Gear Calculator](#).

Alternatively, look at the number of teeth on the chain rings. A standard set up is 3 rings with 22, 32 and 44 cogs on the front and back rings covering a range of 11-34 teeth.

If in doubt, always give yourself a bit more range on the lower end than you think you'll need. You'll never regret having the ability to spin up that killer climb.

You may not want to think about gears at all, in which case you can invest in a Rohloff Hub; an internally sealed gearing system that requires almost no maintenance but is very expensive. (see more on p. 42). 

Bikes to consider



Surly Long Haul Trucker - Steel frame with 26" or 28" wheels. From 2014, with disc or rim brakes. Great value at \$1,300 U.S. www.surlybikes.com



Paula Bradshaw on her Fahrrad Manufaktur T400 (the current version is the TX-400).

Fahrrad Manufaktur TX-400 - Rohloff or derailleur equipped. Steel. 26" wheels. Choice of ladies frame. Cost: From \$1,800 U.S. www.fahrradmanufaktur.de



Trek 520 - Steel frame with 700c wheels. Shimano Deore components, Bontrager back rack and classic drop handlebars. Cost: \$1,400 U.S. for the 2014 model. www.trekbikes.com



Santos Travelmaster - Dutch built. Loads of options. Steel or aluminium frame, 26" or 700c wheels. Belt drive, Rohloff hub or derailleur. 24 colours. Cost: From \$1,900 U.S. www.santosbikes.com

Tout Terrain Silkroad - Flat bars, Rohloff hub or derailleur. Disc brakes. Can accommodate suspension fork. Integrated rack with 40kg capacity. 60mm tire clearance. Made in Europe. Cost: From \$2,700 U.S. www.toutterrain.de



Emma cycling in Laos on her Thorn Sherpa expedition touring bike. www.rolling-tales.com



Thorn Sherpa - A sturdy expedition touring bike, with steel frame and derailleur from a UK builder. Cost: From \$2,200 U.S. www.sjscycles.com

A Surly Long Haul Trucker, loaded up and touring the coast of California. www.slowcyclor.wordpress.com



Ridgeback Panorama - With Shimano Deore hubs and derailleur, steel frame, SPD pedals. Upgrade to include racks, better gearset. Cost: From \$2,000 U.S. www.ridgeback.co.uk





CYCLING IN SOUTH INDIA PHOTO BY PAUL JEURISSEN, WWW.PAULJEURISSEN.NL

GEAR FOCUS

Which tent should you buy? Which stove is best? The following pages will help you choose.

It's all about the gear; or at least that's what some people would have you believe. Just start researching what to take on a bicycle tour and you'll find there are a million things to spend your money on.

We've highlighted some of our favourite products over the following pages but no journey or cyclist is identical. What works for us may not be *your* ideal solution. In addition, there are so many different options that we couldn't possibly summarize all of them. That's where you come in.

We encourage you to do your own research. Read the experiences of other bike tourists. Try things in person. Go to your local camping shop so you can flop on the sleeping mats and crawl inside the tents.

Remember as well that you don't need to go on a mega shopping spree. Ingenious thinking and compromise goes a long way. Your voice can be as effective as a bicycle bell. Just shout 'hello' or whistle a tune as you're cycling. Similarly, a new tarp is nice to have but you can also make your own out of a sheet of plastic.

With those caveats out of the way, read on for some of our equipment recommendations.

Bicycle Accessories

ERGON HANDLEBAR GRIPS

For longer trips, it's essential to have handlebars that give a variety of riding positions. This helps to prevent conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tingling hands.

We've used [Ergon Handlebar Grips](#) and extensions since 2009, specifically the GC3 model.

They have a supportive rest area for your palms and - with the extensions - offer plenty of options for different hand positions.

Also worth considering are traditional, simple bar ends (the cheapest option and by no means a bad one) and butterfly bars - a large figure-8 shaped handlebar.



MUDGUARDS OR FENDERS

Unless you plan on touring exclusively in the desert, you'll want mudguards or fenders. A good set protects you and the rider behind you from the dirt being kicked up off the road.

We use [SKS Mudguards](#). They come in several sizes, to fit almost any bicycle, and they're incredibly durable. After 50,000km of use, ours were still in good shape (there was a small



crack on one of the mudguards).

If you're feeling creative or skint, you can also make your own mudguards out of things such as plastic bottles. Just search online for directions.

One small warning: if you're hauling your bike through a wet field or down a muddy road, mudguards can quickly become clogged

with mud, and this stops the wheels from turning.

Cleaning the mud away from your wheels is a messy, time consuming job. The lesson? If you see roads covered in thick clay-like mud, take the mudguards off first.

A LOUD BELL

Every cyclist needs a bell, and the louder the better! We like the [DingDong Bell](#). As its name suggests, it gives a classic sound and is one of the loudest bells on the market.

Your bell can be used to alert cars and pedestrians to your presence, to communicate with other cyclists if you're riding in a group (for example, to signal that you're stopping), and to 'sing' hello to people by the roadside.

A bell also attracts great attention when you stop by the roadside. It's often the first thing people touch. If you're inside a shop you merely have to listen for your bell being rung by local folks, to know that your bike is still where you left it and hasn't been stolen!



LIGHTS

Don't set out on a bike tour without decent lights. Even if you don't plan to be riding after dark, you never know when you might get caught out. Lights also come in handy if you have to ride through a dark tunnel, or in foggy and rainy conditions.

Of all the lights on the market, German manufacturer Supernova make some of the best. We've been using their dynamo-powered E3 Pro lights for several years now and are very impressed with the quality. They also make battery-powered lights, if your bike doesn't have a hub dynamo.

Other options include:

- **Cateye HL-EL530**
Cateye's brightest front light. It will last up to 90 hours on 4 AA batteries.



- **Knog Blinder Lights**
A slick little light that is held in place on your bike by a silicone strap. It weighs just 15g and can be recharged by USB.
- **Planet Bike Superflash**
Don't be fooled by its small size. The Superflash has LED bulbs that blink bright enough to be seen up to a mile away. It lasts up to 100 hours on two commonly available AAA batteries.

A COMFORTABLE SADDLE

You're going to be sitting on your saddle for several hours each day so it's worth getting a decent one. Despite the importance of this accessory, many bikes come with terrible saddles.



Expect this to be one of the first things you upgrade.

Brooks leather saddles change shape to fit your bottom over time and fans of Brooks evangelise about how comfortable they are. The most

popular model for touring is the [Brooks B17](#).

Not everyone fancies the long break-in period. On the other hand, not everyone finds it as painful to wear in a Brooks saddle as you might imagine from the online chat forums! We found ours comfortable from the first outing.

[Terry saddles](#) are also popular, especially their women-specific range.

Whichever saddle you go for,



remember the counter-intuitive rule that harder is better. Softer saddles are actually less supportive than their firmer rivals.

PEDALS

Like saddles, the pedals that come with most bikes tend to be cheap. Happily, it doesn't cost much to upgrade to a better pair.

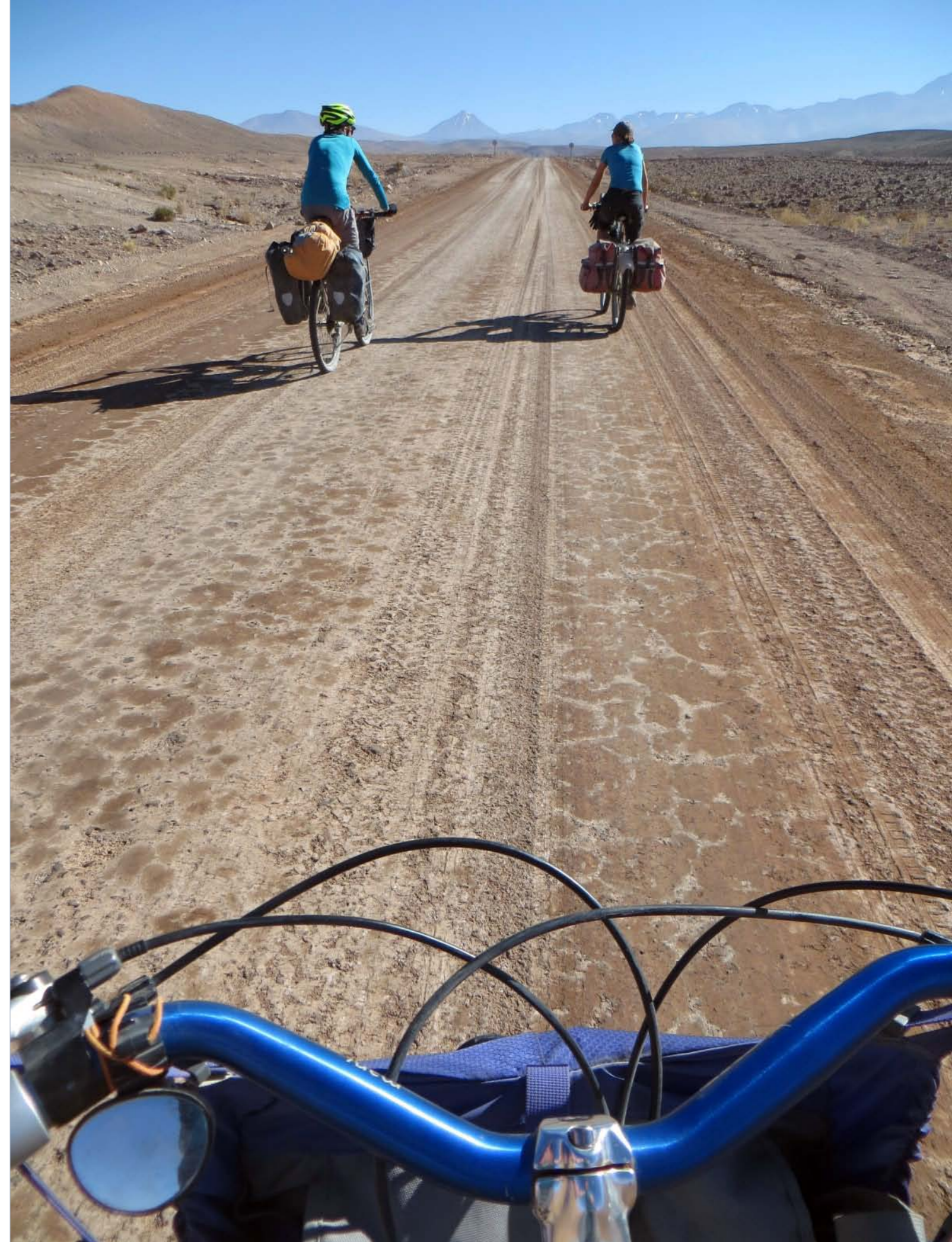
Deciding which type to buy is a little more difficult. Ideally you'll want something

with a bit of grip, that helps your feet stay firmly in place on wet days.

We use a cleated mountain bike pedal such as the [DMR V8](#). The little cleats or spikes on the pedals give you more grip than normal flat pedals. Your feet won't move an inch, even when you're riding through pouring rain or on muddy, bumpy roads. The only downside is that if your pedals do somehow happen to hit your legs (when you are pushing your bike uphill, for example) it can really hurt!

SPD pedals are another common option. They require you to wear special shoes with cleats, which 'click' into place on the pedals, locking your feet firmly in place. When you need to stop, you twist your foot slightly to release the lock.

More About Pedals:
www.travellingtwo.com/resources/pedals



CYCLING IN BOLIVIA.
PHOTO BY HARRIET PIKE,
WWW.PIKESONBIKES.COM



“As ours is a long ride across multiple continents we decided strength and reliability were more important than speed, and so we prioritised steel frames, steel racks and well-built 26” wheels. When we’ve met other cyclists on the road, broken 28” wheels have been the most common tale of woe by far.

-Ryan Davies & Rebecca Holliday
<http://worldcyclingtour.org>

”



PHOTO BY WILLEM MEGENS, WWW.THEMEEG.NL

TENTS

HILLEBERG NALLO GT

Our tent of choice comes from Swedish tent maker Hilleberg. We have the 3-person model, the [Nallo 3GT](#). At 2.9kg it's light in weight but heavy on your wallet. Expect to pay about \$830 U.S.

Price brings quality, however, and this tent, with its roomy vestibule and separated sleeping area, has never failed us. In 15+ hours of a down-pour in New Zealand, we were perfectly dry. In strong winds, our tent gracefully flexed with the gusts, without ever breaking a pole.

The customer service from Hilleberg is also



top-notch. If you can afford it, you won't regret this tent for serious expeditions.

Nallo 3GT Review: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/hilleberg-nallo-3gt-review

MACPAC CITADEL

We recently had a chance to admire the Macpac Citadel - a tent that good friends of ours have been using for long-distance touring.

Like Hilleberg's Nallo 3GT, it's a great option for



couples planning a long bike tour together.

In terms of design, the Citadel offers 2 entrances to the sleeping area, and 2 porches - a large one for cooking and a smaller one for reading or relaxing. This is a nice convenience, and should also

improve ventilation. On the downside, it weighs about 500g more than the Nallo 3GT.

MSR HUBBA HUBBA

For warm-weather trips, this freestanding tent could be an excellent choice for a solo tourer or two very good friends.



The [MSR Hubba Hubba](#) has a frame that is based around the inner layer, which means you can leave the fly-sheet off in dry weather for great ventilation and evening star gazing.

At a mere 2kg, it's hardly going to weigh you down and in 2011 MSR brought out a green model (much better for wild camping than the earlier bright-yellow models).

The Hubba Hubba is also excellent value: less than half the cost of a Hilleberg. Both [Peter Gostelow](#) and [Shane Little](#) used this tent as they cycled through Africa.

BIG AGNES COPPER SPUR

The Big Agnes Copper Spur tent has been used and loved by many bike tourists, including [GoingSlowly](#) and [PathLessPedaled](#).

It's roomy and relatively light (2.2kg for the

3-person version). Doors on each side make it easy to get in and out, and it's relatively good value at around \$500 U.S.



TARPTENT CONTRAIL

This tent took top place for solo travellers in Backpacker Magazine's 2009 buyer's guide. It weighs just 700g, costs \$210 and gets rave reviews.



What's the catch? Some say it's prone to condensation and can let in quite a breeze - not good at higher altitudes or in chilly weather.

Also, because the tent is mainly aimed at backpackers, the company assumes that you have a trekking pole to add extra support to the structure. Since, you're probably not carrying a trekking pole you'll have to buy a tent pole from Tarptent.

HOW TO PICK A TENT

A tent is an important piece of equipment for the independent bicycle tourist.

It will be your home away from home and a key to travelling on a budget.

In an ideal world, you'll choose a lightweight tent in a muted colour for easy wild camping, and a tent that is a cinch to set up - even in the dark!

You may also prefer a freestanding tent (one that doesn't require pegs), although we've personally never had a problem putting up our non-freestanding [Nallo 3GT](#).

More Tent Advice: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/tent

"Terra Nova Duolite Tourer is our choice as a cycle touring tent."

@davebikenotes

"Macpac Citadel - plenty of space and not heavy. The #Minaret is a smaller, lighter 4-season alternative."

@oddbikes


"Big Agnes Seedhouse 2, easy to pitch, light, and plenty of room for 1. Also a subdued green colour for wild camping"

@cycle4india

"Vango Tempest 300. Cheap, ok weight, ok packsize, spacious, porch big enough for a bike with wheels off."

@aegisdesign

EVEN MORE TENTS

As suggested by [@travellingtwo](#) 
Twitter followers...

"MSR Mutha Hubba is a great size for two sharing. But if weather permits I love to sleep outside in a bivvy bag!"

@tomsbiketrip

"MSR Hubba Hubba for the tropics, Hilleberg for the rest; the Hubba is surprisingly weather proof during this rainy South African summer"

@shanecycles

"Vaude Hogan Ultralight. It was my second home during my bike ride. I had to change one zipper, the rest is still great."

@mk4220

"Christine & I love our Big Agnes Seedhouse SL-2"

@kentsbike

"Our group uses the @ENOHammocks - with a little rope we have no problem finding trees in the southeast U.S."

@jonahchitty

"Rab Ridge Raider. Light & quick to pitch, but small. If I was camping every night I'd take my Hilleberg Akto."

@bazzargh

"@Hilleberg Nallo 3GT. For two enough space; a bedroom and a front room to sit, eat when it rains and leave muddy panniers."

@worldcyclevideo

“ Bicycle touring
is travel’s live
theater.

- Tom Hale

”



LOCAL TRAFFIC IN CHINA. PHOTO BY PETER GOSTELOW, WWW.PETERGOSTELOW.COM



PHOTO BY PAUL JEURISSEN, WWW.PAULJEURISSEN.NL

CAMPING GEAR: sleeping bags, mats, pillows...

PHD MINIM SLEEPING BAG

This is the sleeping bag we've used for over 4 years. It's a down-filled bag, made by UK company [PHD](#) and retails for about \$360 U.S.

We like down-filled bags because they're warmer and lighter for the size than synthetic fillings. A disadvantage of down is that it won't keep you warm when wet, whereas synthetic fillings will.



Our particular sleeping bag has one unique feature: there's no zipper. You just slide yourself inside. This means no draft coming in

from one side of the bag and no rolling onto an uncomfortable zipper in the middle of the night. It also shaves a few grams off the overall weight of the bag and removes one of the few things that can break on a sleeping bag.

On the other hand, you can't open a zipless bag if you're too hot. For couples, it also rules out the possibility of zipping the bags together.

If you do get a sleeping bag with a zipper (by far the more common design), choose a bag with a 'zip baffle' or 'draft tube' that seals out cold air. The zipper should also be heavy duty. It's the one item on your sleeping bag that gets used over and over, and will almost certainly be the first to wear out.

Sleeping Bag Tips: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/6-tips-for-picking-a-sleeping-bag

THERMAREST PROLITE MAT

Among bike tourists, [Thermarest's Prolite Sleeping Mat](#) is one of the most popular choices. It's light, super compact and should keep you warm as long

as the temperature doesn't dip too far below freezing.

Like all inflatable mats, however, it is prone to punctures and - after several months of constant use - can fail entirely. Thermarest have a great lifetime warranty on these mats, so if you're doing shorter trips and can get the mat replaced easily enough, then go for it. On an extended world trip, however, we prefer a solid foam mat like the [Z Lite](#).

EXPED MATS

For the ultimate in comfort and warmth, [Exped's DownMat](#) (with down feather



filling) and [SynMat](#) (synthetic filling) are definitely worth considering.

Their thick profile will keep you cozy, even in well below freezing temperatures.

On the downside, they take longer to inflate than thinner mats and can be noisy when you toss and turn during the night.

Our Review: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/exped-downmat-synmat-review

THERMAREST Z LITE

If your priority is an indestructible sleeping mat, try the [Thermarest Z Lite](#).

It's a closed-cell foam mat. This means you never have to worry about damage to the mattress. You can throw it on top of a bed of thorns, and the mat will be just fine. It's also half the price of an inflatable mat!

What's not to like?



Some people find it too thin and uncomfortable, although we slept just fine on it. It's also relatively bulky. We carried our Z Lite mats in a bag, on top of the back luggage rack.

Z Lite & Prolite Comparison:

www.travellingtwo.com/resources/thermarest-camping-mats-review

PETZL HEADLAMP

We've had our [Petzl Tikka 2](#) headlamps for 6 years now and they're still going strong - even though they're well past the 3-year warranty period.

We've dropped them, thrown them in our panniers with no special care and lugged them all around the world and they are still fault-free.

You get up to 120 hours of burn time on 3 AAA batteries and they're very light: just 85g, including the batteries.



THERMAREST PILLOW

A pillow is definitely a 'luxury' camping accessory.

Many bike tourists create their own pillows by stuffing clothes together in a sleeping bag sack. We did that too but at a certain point you decide that you want a bit more cushioning.

We chose the [Thermarest Compressible Pillow](#) because it's compact, washable, lightweight and reasonably priced.

For us, it also feels like a 'real' pillow although this is obviously highly individual so 'try before you buy' and see what you like best.

Our Review: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/thermarestpillow



Bicycle Locks

CABLE LOCKS

A good cable lock is perhaps the most useful type of lock for touring. It's relatively lightweight, cheap to purchase and can be stretched around anything from bike racks to telephone poles.



KRYPTONITE COMBINATION LOCK

Make sure you get one that's long enough (over 1 meter) and don't go for the cheapest one. The very thin, flimsy cable locks that tend to be sold in supermarkets won't slow a thief down at all.

There are many types of cable locks. We like two locks from the Kryptonite Kryptoflex range: the [Combination Lock](#) and the [7' cable](#), which can be used in combination with a U-lock or separate padlock.



KRYPTONITE CABLR

U-LOCK OR D-LOCK



These locks are effective and secure but very heavy to carry on a bike tour. It's up to you, whether the

extra security is worth the added bulk. If you plan on passing through a lot of cities on your tour, a big lock like this may be worth it. For many bike tourists, however, a U-Lock is probably overkill. The lock pictured above is the [Kryptonite Evolution Series 4 U-Lock](#).

WHEEL LOCK

This type of lock is known by at least 4 names: o-lock, ring lock, wheel lock or frame lock. It's standard equipment on many bikes in Europe.

The varying names all refer to the same thing: a lock that attaches to your frame. You put the key in and push down on a lever so that a metal ring slides between the spokes of your back tire, locking the bike.



We love wheel locks because they're so darn convenient for quick stops while on tour. Coupled with a cable lock, they also make for a fairly secure setup.

Our current touring setup includes the [ABUS 4850 LH NKR](#) model of wheel lock, plus a compatible cable lock that slots into the wheel lock.

More On Wheel Locks: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/wheel-locks-for-bike-touring

SECURITY TIPS

1. **TIP A LOCAL SHOPKEEPER \$1-2 U.S.** to be your 'bike security guard'.
2. **GET A HOTEL IN CITIES** and keep the bike in the room.
3. **LOCK YOUR BIKE TO SOMETHING SECURE** in a highly visible place.
4. **MAKE IT LOOK UNDESIRABLE.** Cover brand names with tape. String laundry across the back to dry

Stoves

WHISPERLITE INTERNATIONALE

The [MSR Whisperlite Internationale](#) is a bike touring classic. It's also the stove with which we are most experienced. We've fired it up well over 1,000 times and carried it for our entire 3-year world bicycle tour.

You can run it on almost any fuel (from white gas to unleaded petrol) and it's easy to fix in the field using the MSR tool kit. If you need to replenish your tool kit, you'll find that many of the parts in it are basic and can be picked up at plumbing and hardware shops



around the world. We've also found MSR customer service to be fantastic.

On the downside, the burner does get black with soot (only the burner - not the pots you use to cook with) and - despite its name - this stove is reasonably loud. It also needs to be primed. If you release too much fuel during the priming process (or if there's a lot of wind), it's possible to get an impressive flare from the [Whisperlite Internationale](#)!

Our Full Review:

www.travellingtwo.com/resources/msr-whisperlite-international-review

CLIKSTAND

A close second to the Whisperlite on our list of favourite stoves is the [Clikstand](#). The basic Clikstand model is a nifty triangular frame built to hold an alcohol burner. We use the same burner that fits in the Trangia stoves. It's easy to assemble. Once running, the Clikstand is everything the Whisperlite is not. It burns silently and cleanly. There is no soot and no mechanical parts to break or maintain. Even better: the Clikstand packs down flat and weighs a featherlight 150g.



There's also no pressurising of fuel or priming of the stove. To cook you simply pour a few spoonfuls of methylated spirits into the burner and light with a match or (better yet) a fire steel.

In terms of disadvantages, be aware that alcohol stoves don't produce as much heat as a stove running on white gas. It will take longer to boil water so if you're impatient or need to cook for a group, this stove isn't for you.

Turning the stove off can be a bit tricky because you have to close the simmer ring while the stove is still running. We throw ours on top with a frisbee-like motion and then nudge it into place with a fork, if necessary.

JETBOIL GROUP COOKING SYSTEM

A super easy stove to operate. Like all canister stoves, this [Jetboil Stove](#) doesn't need to be primed. It's ready to cook at the flick of a lighter; perfect for a quick cup of coffee by the side of the road.



On the downside, you'll have to be touring somewhere fairly mainstream for this stove to be an option because you won't necessarily find the fuel canisters everywhere in the world and you can't take them on a plane. Also, this stove isn't easy to fix in the middle of a field. If you have problems you may well need to send it back to the dealer for repair.

TRANGIA STOVE

[Trangia stoves](#) are adored by many cyclists. They're extremely quiet, easy to maintain, robust and simmer beautifully. They burn methylated spirits. It's a fuel which is broadly available worldwide but can be tricky to find. Research the local name for this fuel before you fly off to an exotic destination.



Our full review: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/why-i-love-trangia-campstoves

“ Even though a big international tour is a life-changing experience, sometimes a three or four day bikepacking trip into the woods can offer a powerful mental reset .

-Logan Watts
www.pedalingnowhere.com

”



LOADING UP THE BIKE

Now that you have a bicycle, camping gear, clothes and a whole pile of other stuff to take on tour, how will you carry it all on your bicycle?

The options are numerous. You could go for the classic combination of panniers and luggage racks, or you might opt to tow a trailer behind your bicycle. Some people have both luggage racks and a trailer. Other folks travel ultralight and get away with barely more than a handlebar bag.

There's no one correct answer. The only way to know for sure is to try some different combinations yourself and see if you're happy with that solution. That said, here are some starting points to get you thinking about what might be best for your trip.



PHOTO BY PAUL JEURISSEN, WWW.PAULJEURISSEN.NL

Let's begin with panniers. They're the most commonly used option among touring cyclists. In case you're not familiar with the lingo, *panniers* are bags that attach to luggage racks, so you can carry equipment over the front and back wheels of your bike.

Most panniers are commercially made out of heavy-duty fabric but you can make your own out of backpacks or even plastic buckets.

A standard touring set-up is 2 large bags on the back and 2 smaller panniers on the front. You can also strap a tent and sleeping mat across the top of the back panniers.

PANNIER ADVANTAGES

Panniers are popular for several reasons, starting with versatility. A well designed set of panniers will let you clip and unclip the bags from the racks within seconds. That means it's easy to get your panniers off the bike and inside your tent in a rainstorm.



LIKE MOST TOURING CYCLISTS, WE'RE IN LOVE WITH ORTLIEB PANNIERS: WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM/RESOURCES/ORTLIEBPANNIERS

You can also quickly grab a single pannier (for example, the one with your laptop and other valuables in it) to take along as you go supermarket shopping.

In a city, an empty pannier can be used as a day bag while sightseeing.

When you fly with your bicycle, you can check your panniers as normal luggage (a [Chinese shopping bag](#) is helpful for this).

Panniers help you stay organised as well. You can sort your equipment into different bags. One for food and cooking gear, one for clothing and yet another for tools and emergency supplies.

Most importantly, there is very little that can go wrong with panniers, especially if you get a good set to begin with. They have almost no moving parts. Any problems that do arise are usually small and easily fixed.

You might also want to add a:

Dry Bag - A waterproof sack, often used for canoeing or kayaking. Cyclists use [dry bags](#) too because their tubular shape fits a rolled up tent

and poles perfectly. This protects the tent from rain and sun damage and keeps it in one compact package that can be easily strapped onto the bike with bungee cords or compression straps.

Handlebar Bag - Clips to the front handlebars of the bike. It's ideal for storing your wallet, camera and other valuables. It can be easily taken along when you need to leave the bike for a few minutes. This brings peace of mind and makes it much easier to lock your bike up and run a few errands because you know the most important items won't be lost, should disaster strike. Most bags also come with a map case on top to make navigation easier.



WE LIKE VAUDE'S ROAD I HANDLEBAR BAG: WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM/RESOURCES/VAUDE-HANDLEBAR-BAG

Brands to Consider

Everyone wants to know which brand of panniers are best. The better question to ask is "Which panniers are best for you?"

Almost any pannier on the market will be fine for occasional tours. Don't expect cheaper brands to perform well over time or in heavy rain.

When you spend extra money, you're paying for durability and ease of use. That means panniers made with more robust fabric, better quality zips and a system that makes them easier to remove from the bike.

For a good set of panniers, you won't go wrong by investing in a set of [Ortlieb Panniers](#). They're by far the most popular brand and relatively expensive but for your money you get waterproof panniers that are a breeze to get on and off the bike and will last for a lifetime of bike touring.

We only recently replaced our Ortliebs after over 60,000km of touring and we only bought another set because someone sold us their nearly new Ortliebs for a bargain price. The old ones are still working (if a bit sunfaded).

There is one big downside to Ortlieb panniers: most models don't come with pockets and that annoys people who like lots of compartments to organise their things.

Other brands to check out include Vaude, Carradice, Jandd, Lone Peak and – at the luxury end



PERUVIAN KIDS CHECK OUT THE FAT BIKE. PHOTO BY CASS GILBERT, WWW.WHILEOUTRIDING.COM

of the scale – the exceptionally well designed but extremely expensive Arkel bags.

As you are researching panniers, consider these features:

Waterproof or not – Some panniers are 100% waterproof. When it starts to rain, this means you don't have to jump off the bike and put on rain covers to keep everything dry. Other bags are more water resistant than waterproof - fine if you're cycling in a dry climate or are willing to protect sensitive equipment in waterproof bags.

Type of closure – Zippers. Rolling tops. Clips and buckles. Who knew there were so many ways to close a bag? Try to minimise the number of zippers on your bike bags because the dirt from the road and repeated opening and closing motions make zip-

pers prone to failure. Roll tops are like a dry bag. You can roll them very tight in bad weather and they'll be totally sealed. You can also leave them open when you need room for extra food. Panniers that seal with clips and buckles aren't quite as easy to stuff full with extra supplies but they are a little easier than roll tops to open and close, in our experience.

Weight and volume – Like backpacks, panniers come in all different shapes, materials and sizes. There's no point getting a bigger, heavier bag if you don't need the extra space.

Attachment systems – Make sure the panniers are easy to put on and take off the bike. You're going to be doing this at least twice a day, if not more, so it shouldn't be a long and tedious

process. The best panniers unhook automatically when you lift the bag up by its handle.

LUGGAGE RACKS

Once you've bought panniers, you'll need racks to hang them on and - like panniers - you get what you pay for when it comes to racks.

If you plan on doing any amount of touring, it's worth spending a bit of extra money for a decent set that will withstand



THE TUBUS LOGO BACK RACK - JUST ONE OF MANY MODELS PROFILED AT: WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM/RESOURCES/RACKS

months of bumping and jostling on the road.

As long as you don't scrimp on quality, you shouldn't need to do much to your racks during a tour. Just check occasionally to see if any screws or bolts are coming loose.

With a cheap set of racks, pack some hose clamps and zipties in your repair kit. Less expensive racks are more likely to break under the strain of a heavy load.

What to look for?

Our favourite racks are made of steel; not because there aren't good aluminium racks on the market but because steel racks can be easily welded back together, if necessary.

We also look for racks with a high load capacity. The most robust back racks are rated for about 90lbs or 40kg of weight.

You won't likely carry that much but it's nice to know the racks are more than strong enough for the job. As a bit of extra insurance, try and get a rack with a guarantee.

If we had to pick out just one brand of luggage racks to highlight, it would have to be [Tubus Racks](#). They have a well proven track record in terms of strength and durability.

Even better, they come with a 30-year guarantee, including shipping of free replacements anywhere in the world for 3 years.

A final word on racks. No matter which one

you choose, chances are the paint will wear thin with time, especially where the panniers rub up against the racks.

Keep some touch-up paint handy (nail polish will do the trick in a pinch). This helps keep the racks free of rust.

You can also wrap duct tape around your racks at the points where the bags make contact with the metal, to prevent scuffing.

TRAILERS

Trailers are an alternative choice to panniers and luggage racks for carrying your gear around.

They cost and weigh about the same as the standard combination of panniers and racks, with some definite advantages.

For example, trailers allow you to carry a lot of gear if you're planning a bicycle trip through remote parts of the world, where you might need to haul large quantities of food and water.

Trailers are also ideal if you want to tour with young children, or on a bicycle that wasn't designed for touring and therefore doesn't have the necessary braze-ons or attachment points for luggage racks.

For more on trailers, we turned to David Herbold, who writes for the [Bike Trailer Blog](#). He outlined the main differences for us between two types of trailers: versions with one wheel and those with two wheels.

PANNIER PACKING TIPS

Packing your bike panniers can be confusing, especially when you do it for the first time. Here are 3 quick tips to get you started:

1. Everything In Its Place - Sort gear into categories. Cooking equipment and food can go in one bag, clothes in another. Bike tools should have their own spot that's easy to access, so you can quickly find what you need when a tire goes flat.

2. Balance The Weight - Make sure that your bike is balanced. This means that bags on the right and left sides should weigh about the same. Between front and back, most people go for a 60-40 split, though you'll find differing opinions on whether more weight should be up front or in back.

3. Leave Extra Space - Don't fill your panniers to the brim. You'll want extra room for food and souvenirs as you travel. Ideally, leave home with at least half a pannier's worth of empty space.

More pannier packing tips: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/packing-bicycle-panniers


One Wheel Designs

"The weight of the trailer's load is shared between its only wheel, and the rear wheel of the bicycle. Due to the weight being spread between the bike and the trailer, the rear driving wheel of the bike will be pushed into the ground aiding traction tremendously.

When off-road touring or bike-camping, this is a great advantage. Also, the width is an obvious bonus in tight conditions. The compromise however, is that the handling of the bike changes in direct reflection to the weight of the load.

With maximum payloads often being around 45kg, this can be a dramatic difference from the bike alone. Learning to predict the weight shift in tight terrain and quick manoeuvring is key as the bike will occasionally try to find its own direction."

Two Wheel Designs

"The majority of the load rests between the trailer's own two wheels. This leaves the rear wheel of the bike, and therefore the handling of the bike itself, relatively unaffected by the added weight. Actually, it's only the weight being pulled that is felt, for the most part. Tire wear should not increase substantially and using a single kickstand is no problem as the bike remains independent of the trailer. The compromise of course, is the width of the two-wheel design. For any type of technical terrain, or extremely tight areas of operation, this can become overwhelming. Narrow sidewalks and gates can become a real obstacle." 

More On Trailers: www.travellingtwo.com/resources/trailers-for-bike-touring



PHOTO BY STIJN DE KLERK

Popular Trailers



RADICAL DESIGNS CYCLONE III: CLEVER DESIGN THAT ALLOWS THE TRAILER TO BE FOLDED INSIDE THE DUFFEL BAG FOR EASY TRANSPORT ON TRAINS AND PLANES.



CHARIOT COUGAR: CONSISTENTLY GETS GREAT REVIEWS FROM PARENTS WHO BIKE TOUR WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.



EXRAWHEEL VOYAGER: PROVEN PERFORMANCE FOR OFF-ROAD TRIPS. VERY LIGHT AND CAN ACT AS A SPARE FRONT WHEEL.



BOB YAK PLUS: A LONG-TIME FAVOURITE AMONG BIKE TOURISTS. SOLID, EASY TO ASSEMBLE AND CAN BE FLIPPED OVER TO USE AS A TABLE.



CARRY FREEDOM Y-FRAME: SIMPLE AND VERSATILE. PUT NEARLY ANY TYPE OF CONTAINER ON THE BACK, FROM A LARGE PLASTIC BOX TO AN ORTLIEB BAG.

TRAILERS? PANNIERS?

It's not a case of which is 'best' but rather which is right for you.

Trailer Advantages

- Ideal for carrying bulky, heavy items such as lots of water across deserts
- Kids trailers give the children a place to rest, away from strong sun or bad weather
- Handy for home use as well as touring (carrying groceries, collecting large purchases from shops)
- Often built with a wide profile that encourages cars to leave more room when passing
- Easily unhooked so you can ride a 'naked' bike without racks
- Aggressive dogs tend to chase the trailer, keeping them away from your legs

Trailer Disadvantages

- May be harder to pack for train, plane and bus journeys
- More mechanical parts that could need repair or replacement (spokes, tire, skewers)
- Can be tricky if you need to back up, park or navigate through narrow gaps

Pannier Advantages

- Easily carried one-by-one into your tent or hotel room and over obstacles like fences and streams (no single bag is very heavy)
- Your luggage can be sorted into different parts and stored per bag, making things easier to find (in theory!)
- Accessible while riding; you can reach things strapped on top of panniers or stored near the top, without getting off your bike
- Simply designed, with few moving parts that can get lost or break
- Versatile. Use all 4 for longer trips or take just one on a short day trip; carry a single pannier as a 'day bag' when visiting cities

Pannier Disadvantages

- Put strain on a bike, particularly the back wheel, possibly causing broken spokes
- Increase tire wear and wind resistance
- Need to be reasonably well balanced between the left and right sides or the bike will feel unstable



An Amazing Journey

Hilary Searle of the CycleSeven website writes about Louise Sutherland, an adventurous bike tourist who went around the world in the 1950s.

Louise Sutherland was a nurse from New Zealand who was working in London in 1949, when she set off cycling around the world.

She bought a bike in a church jumble sale in Soho for £2.10s and a 'grateful patient' in the hospital where she was nursing made her a small trailer 'to trundle merrily behind it.' She seems to have set off round the world almost on a whim. She had initially only intended to go to Land's End!

Louise returned to London to collect her passport and her £50 savings and set off, first for Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy. She only returned to London in 1956.

"During my first day in Italy I felt most dubious about my chances of survival. I had been offered dire warnings about what happened to small girls travelling alone in that country. I did not wish to forego the camping, but equally, I did not relish the thought of being attacked in the dead of night. Of course no one did attack me."

The warnings grew even more dire as she approached Yugoslavia: 'They shoot on sight,' 'They're communists remember. If you're arrested you might never be heard of again.' and 'They're so poor they'll attack you just to steal the valve rubbers out of your inner tubes.'

The people, however, treated her with great kindness. From Yugoslavia she went to Greece and then took a ferry to Israel. She had an amazingly resilient spirit and refused to be daunted by the fact that having paid the boat fare she had only 13/6d left in the world.

In Haifa she took a job in a Mission Hospital for 3 months, then cycled onto Jordan where she worked as a nanny. From there she cycled to Beirut and spent 6 months working in a sanatorium.

She had hoped to cycle across the desert to Baghdad but was refused a visa so had to travel by train to catch a boat across the Persian Gulf to India. She was refused a third class ticket, with the line: 'We do not sell third class tickets to white

men and certainly never to a white girl. Anyway no girl is permitted to travel third class alone.'


She had, of course, received many warnings against going to India. In Bombay, she was inundated with offers of hospitality but later found herself in a famine region where she went for 3 days without food.

"I knew that only by keeping the pedals turning could I ever get to the dense green jungle that would indicate a rain soaked district, and only by reaching such a district would I again get food."


“ I was never lonely while I was cycling. I had my bicycle to talk to. ”

Unfortunately all the warnings she had received almost came true when she was attacked by 2 men but they ran away when a bus appeared.

"The memories of the attack by the few have now blunted and are fading, but the kindness of the many will always remain clear."

"After the fear had completely left my mind, I could feel nothing but anger for those two men. They had placed me in a position where all the world could say: 'I told you so!' But does one swallow make a summer?" 

More on Louise Sutherland:

www.cycleseven.org/louise-sutherland-around-the-world-before-i-was-born 



PACKING LIST

Here's a 'cut-out-and-keep' guide to some touring basics. Vary the list to suit the destination and season.

Bicycle Equipment

- Bottle cages and bottles (ideally 3)
- Compression straps or cargo net (to hold things to your back luggage rack)
- Lights
- Lock
- Mirror (Take-A-Look Mirror)

Tools & Spare Parts

- Brake and gear cables
- Brake pads
- Chain lube
- Duct tape and zipties
- Mini cassette remover (NBT2 or JA Stein tool)
- Multi-tool (with a chain breaker)
- Patch kit
- Pump (Topeak Mountain Morph)
- Rag for cleaning
- Replacement spokes

Camping Gear

- Flip flops or sandals (for grotty showers)
- Groundsheet (extends your tent's life)
- Headlamp (Petzl Tikka)
- Tent
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping bag liner (preferably silk)
- Sleeping mat
- String, 6-10 meters (numerous uses, including a clothesline)
- Water carriers (Camelbak or Ortlieb)
- Water filter (MSR Miniworks)

Clothes (We love Merino wool clothing and - in general - anything light and versatile.)

- Bandana (soak it in water to keep your head cool in hot weather)
- Cycling shoes
- Cycling shorts (1-2 pairs)
- Hat with a wide brim

- Long-sleeved shirts (one lightweight to protect from sun and one warmer for cool temperatures)
- Long-johns (to sleep in and cold days)
- Padded cycling gloves
- Rain jacket and pants
- Socks (3-5 pairs)
- Sunglasses
- T-shirts (2-3 pairs)
- Underwear (3-5 pairs)

Your Kitchen

- Cleaning supplies (dish soap, scrubber)
- Cookware (MSR Alpine)
- Kitchen sink (Ortlieb folding bowl)
- Screw-top bottles (for oil, honey...)
- Spices (our top 3: an italian seasoning, curry and cinnamon)
- Stove
- Thermos
- Utensils (spork, cup, bowl...)

Toiletries

- Basic kit (shampoo, toothbrush, sun screen...)
- Baby wipes (an 'instant' shower)
- Laundry powder for hand washing
- Menstruation cup (Mooncup)
- Toilet paper (or use water to wash yourself so there's no dirty litter to dispose of!)
- Travel towel

First-Aid Kit

- Band-aids
- Emergency blanket
- Gauze
- Medicines (for colds, diarrhea, head aches, dehydration)
- Scissors
- Tiger balm (for mosquito bites)
- Tweezers

“ Away, away, from men and towns, to the wild wood and the downs.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley



THE HILLEBERG NALLO 3G TENT. PHOTO BY FRIEDEL & ANDREW GRANT, WWW.TRAVELLINGTWO.COM



PHOTO BY JARED MITCHELL, WWW.BRAKINGBOUNDARIES.ORG

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