

Teaching you the basics of bike touring and inspiring you to get out and ride.

**A free book from [TravellingTwo.com](https://travellingtwo.com)**

With contributions from  
members of the  
bike touring community

# Bike Touring BASICS



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*"Adventure is not in the guidebook.  
Beauty is not on the map.  
Seek and ye shall find."*

-Terry & Renny Russell, On The Loose

# Bike Touring Basics

This is a free guide for anyone interested in taking a bike tour. It's been written and compiled by Friedel & Andrew of [TravellingTwo.com](http://TravellingTwo.com).

Let us know what you think about it and tell us what you'd like to see in future editions. You can get in touch through the [Contact Form](#) on our website or drop us a line: [us@travellingtwo.com](mailto:us@travellingtwo.com).

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This book draws on the experiences, quotes, photos and ideas from many people in the bike touring community. Thanks go out to everyone who has shared thoughts with us through our website, email and various online forums.

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# Why Bike Tour

*"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](#)*

## There are few better ways to explore the world than by bicycle.

Unencumbered by the rigid schedules and routes of public transport, free of the sterile environment of the car and travelling at a pace just a little faster than walking, you can easily cover distances between towns, while still appreciating the details along the way.

The change is constant and full of sensations. With a steady breeze on your face as you propel yourself forward, you might be entertained one moment by a bird flying across the road, then thrust into full concentration as you spin your legs round furiously and tackle the next 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. The hard work over, you can sit back and relax for the ride back down, before stopping at the next store for a well-deserved ice cream, where inquisitive passers-by almost always come over to say hello.

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.

Go for a day trip or on a world adventure. Take your whole family and the pets or strike out solo. Pack a little or a lot in your bags. Stay in hotels or explore the wilderness. 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.

All that really matters is that you are having fun and enjoying the sights and experiences along the way.

Like any journey, there's a lot to think about when you're doing it for the first time but, at its core, bike touring is really quite simple. The most crucial ingredients are a bike and a desire to ride that bike somewhere beyond your front doorstep. Experience and equipment are helpful but by no means required.

Karl Creelman, the first Canadian to ride around the world, had never owned a bicycle and only learned to ride one a few weeks before making his decision to circle the globe in 1899. His bags were slim. He had just one change of clothes. His wallet was empty.

Don't be put off if you're unfit either. Training can almost always 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. This book aims to help you make those choices but in the end it's up to you and figuring it out is half the fun. Don't get wrapped up in how many pairs of underwear to take, just get out and enjoy the ride.



*With your bike and your tent, you can reach some truly magical places, like the fields around Lake Song-Kol in Kyrgyzstan.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)



# Our Story

*"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 and Gus*

**Here's a little secret: we aren't cycling fanatics. In fact, before we set out to ride around the world, we'd barely biked further than our local pub.**

There wasn't a single piece of lycra in our closets (there's still very little – we rarely wear traditional bike shorts), we were both a little pudgy from years in the office and we didn't know how to change a flat tire.

We were simply two people with a dream to see the world and hunch that maybe – just maybe – it might be possible and even fun to do it on bicycles.

When we hit the road, we imagined 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 cross the globe on bicycles.

What we found couldn't have been further from the truth. On the road, we met people from every walk of life riding their bikes. Students. Retired folks. Solo cyclists. Families. People on their first tour. Veterans who'd been at it for years.

Perhaps we should have taken some advice from the veterans because our first few days were a comedy of errors. We put in far too many miles, giving Friedel a bad case of tendonitis in her ankles.

We loaded our panniers with things we didn't need (anyone want two plastic champagne glasses?) and decided our first wild camping site would be in full view, in the middle of a popular local park. As we learned that night, visible isn't better when you're trying to find a free place to sleep... unless you want to provide some entertainment for the local teenagers.

We learned quickly though, picking up tricks with every day that we pedalled further from home. Soon, we got the hang of fixing flat tires. We figured out how to 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 in a city, weaving gracefully between the heavy traffic, instead of riding nervously between the cars.

Three years and nearly 50,000km later, we were back 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 that's only left us dreaming of the next big trip.

Why are we telling you this?

To make the point that bike touring really is something anyone can do. You don't need to have a certain physique, be below some imaginary age barrier or possess magical knowledge to have a successful bike tour. All you have to do is get out there and do it. Whatever you don't know upon setting out, you'll learn slowly as you meet others and get experience along the way.





*Friedel finds a lost lamb while bike touring across remote fields in southern Kazakhstan - just one of the many unexpected joys of bike touring.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

# Planning & Preparation



*Are you ready to hit the road? Here's what you need to know to get ready for a bike tour.*

Photo © [CycloCamping.com](https://cyclocamping.com)



# Budgeting & Saving

*"I already have days of panic thinking 'What the heck are we doing. Have I gone mad?' I do know that I also would be very unhappy continuing to work 9-5 in an office 5 days a week when I knew that I had the opportunity to meet people around the world and experience life in more balanced, healthy and fulfilling way for me."*  
- [Sheila Poettgen](#)

**It is hard to appear wealthy when you're on a bike tour but somehow, on our world trip, we managed to carry it off.**

"Must be nice to be rich," people said over and over as soon as they learned we were on a three year bike tour. Looking at our faded t-shirts, worn socks, and scruffy haircuts, it was hard at first to see what caused this reaction. A little more discussion revealed the answer. To quit work and travel for an extended period of time you must have won the lottery, inherited great-grandma's fortune, or sold a multi-million dollar business – or so the logic goes.

Actually, bike touring can cost very little (even on a moderate budget, our daily budget was half the cost of our backpacking trips) and saving for even the biggest bike adventures is within everyone's reach.

Like any other activity, you can burn through cash if you want to tour with top quality equipment, eat in restaurants and spend your nights in hotels. But equally, a budget of \$300-500 U.S. can buy a second hand bike and the basic accessories you need for touring, like racks and panniers. You might even do it for less by borrowing or making your own gear. Anyone for a pair of [panniers out of plastic buckets](#)?



*Thick plastic bags can be strapped on top of panniers instead of dry bags, if you're short on cash.*

Photo © [John & Gayle](#)

The trip itself could cost as little as \$100 U.S. for a week-long tour around your home area (camping, cooking your own food and travelling only by bike). About \$10,000 U.S. is enough to fund a year of pedalling in places like Europe or Australia and up to 3 years in cheaper, developing countries.

## Start Saving

Whether you're dreaming of a small trip or something bigger, the principle remains the same. Set a financial goal, depending on the trip you have in mind, and start saving.

The best way to do this is to live as though you are already bike touring. When you're cycling, you won't have satellite TV and be ordering pizza every night, so cut back on the extras that you don't really need. Put the savings into a bank account dedicated to your trip. The bigger the cutbacks you can make, the more quickly you'll be able to start travelling by bike.

Can you move to a smaller house? Go vegetarian to lower your food bills? Give up your car and share a ride to work with friends or get there by bicycle?

Hold a huge de-cluttering at home and see what you can sell at garage sales and on eBay. There will be less in your house to worry about or store when you leave and you'll have extra money to spend on your trip.

For the expenses you can't eliminate entirely, be a smart consumer. Shop around for the best deals. See if you can get what you need second hand. It's amazing what some people simply throw away.

At the heart of all this scrimping and saving is the idea that money spent is money you can't put towards your dream. That doesn't mean you should never treat yourself but try to be more conscious of your spending. Put your purchases into perspective. When you're tempted to spend \$20 U.S., ask yourself: "Would I rather have this, or one day on my bike?"

Though it may seem hard to believe when you start saving, you really can stash a lot of cash away quickly by separating your wants from your needs. In the final year of getting ready for our world trip, we went from living on two pay checks to one, just by forgoing what we outlined as unnecessary extras.



*Bike touring is inexpensive, especially if you explore the back roads.*

Photo © [Going Slowly](#)

Don't worry if you find yourself slipping into periods of self-doubt as you prepare. Every future traveller runs into these from time to time. Just try to focus on building your bank account and living a simpler lifestyle. While you're saving up, daydream about places to go and things to experience. These dreams will help keep you motivated.

## On The Road

Once you're out there bike touring, a budget of \$20 U.S. a day will let you easily see most parts of the world. In Thailand, that kind of money buys a feast of street food throughout the day plus a beer or two and a hotel every night. You might even have change leftover. In places like North America, Australia and Europe you'll have to camp and cook most of your own food, but you can still experience the region on a fraction of the average backpacker's budget.

Some people get by on as little as \$5 U.S. a day but this takes more determination. You'll need to love wild camping because even basic campgrounds will eat up your modest budget. Visiting popular tourist destinations (where prices are always inflated) will be out of the question. You'll focus instead on empty landscapes and small towns. Meals will be simple but filling and based around cheap staples like pasta and rice.

Our total bill for a world tour through 30 countries averaged out to **\$23 U.S. per day, per person**. That included the 'bare bones' daily expenses, extras like flights, visas, vaccinations and bike repairs and occasional treats on the road like bottles of wine, meals out and nights in hotels.

## Read More

- ➔ **The Cost Of Bike Touring** - Our budget for a world bicycle trip, broken down by category and country .
- ➔ **Bike Tour More, Spend Less** - Ways to keep your budget low and make your money go further.
- ➔ **What We Did To Save Money** - Steps we took before we left to save money for our trip.



# Picking A Destination

*"Be Carefree. Be Mad. Be a little bit bad. It's the unknown around the corner that turns my wheel." – motto on Heinz Stucke's bicycle*

**Unless you are trying to escape winter, you don't have to go far. Fun and interesting adventures can be found close to home.**

Head out your front door, find the quiet back roads and start pedalling towards that museum in the next county or the home of a friend living a few days down the road.

Travelling by bike brings a new perspective so the journey might surprise you with what you notice, even on roads you have driven many times before by car. Starting out in familiar territory also helps calm first-time jitters.

As the bike touring addiction starts to take hold, it's impossible not to consider destinations further afield. Will it be a few weeks exploring mountains and fjords in New Zealand? A curry tour in India? Or perhaps a summer trip across America? You might find yourself making a long list of places you'd like to see by bicycle. When this happens, ask yourself a few questions before making your choice.

## Fun Close To Home

"This may not be a 6 month trip staring out of a yurt at a cow's bum in Azerbyj-wherever, or schlepping my not insignificant arse over the Himalyas. But it is a trip, and as such is going to be EPIC and BRILLIANT." - [Paul Simms](#) on the joys of a bike tour around Holland.

## Is The Season Right?

Some people get a kick out of cycling Siberia in the winter. For most of us, that's just called misery. 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 at the start or end of low season, when there are fewer crowds, cheaper flights and the weather is still reasonable. The website [Climate Charts](#) is the best we've found for information on temperature, precipitation and available daylight for destinations around the world.

## Does The Destination Fit My Style?

Different countries are famous for different things. Southeast Asia is renowned for its fantastic food and cheap hotels that can be found in just about any town, but if you're hoping to go camping, you'll struggle to find anywhere to put a tent. There's no shortage of wilderness to explore in Kyrgyzstan but don't go if your 'essentials' list includes regular hot showers and most nights in a hotel. Hospitality is a hallmark of the Middle East but some cyclists are looking for a more solitary experience and don't want to be the constant centre of attention or invited into people's homes.

## Do I Have Enough Time?

Time is your luxury if you've taken a few years off to tour but most of us only get a few weeks off work and need to think more carefully about what we can reasonably do in the time we have. For tours of a week or less, stay relatively close to home. With two weeks or more, flying somewhere becomes more feasible because the journey there doesn't take up too much of your total time off. Questions of time also apply to the route you hope to complete. Setting yourself an impossible task, like circling Australia in just 3 months (a trip that normally takes a year or more) will only cause stress and unhappiness. It's better to do less but have enough time to enjoy the scenery along the way. Remember to allow for bad weather, rest days and any number of other reasons to take a day off.

# Planning A Route

*"One's destination is never a place but a new way of seeing things." - Henry Miller*

## Now that you've identified a general location for your tour, it's time to pick a route.

This is one of our favourite parts of getting ready for a trip. We could spend hours looking over maps and imagining the possibility for future adventures. But as much fun as it is to dream, marking out a route can also be hard work. How do you choose where to go when faced with multiple roads and destinations?

One of the easiest ways is to start with a tour that someone else has outlined for you. In America, the [Adventure Cycling Association](#) creates fantastic ready-made maps for cyclists that will take you right across the country. Plenty of guidebooks also offer detailed route suggestions. Check out Lonely Planet's cycling series for various countries, [Pedallers' Paradise](#) for New Zealand and the [Bikeline](#) guides for European destinations.

If you decide to go it on your own, start by looking at maps for the area you're interested in. For a safe and enjoyable trip, focus on small roads and country lanes. These quieter roads will be largely free of traffic and tend to have an abundance of spots for peaceful roadside picnics and camping hideaways. You might have a few more potholes to contend with because smaller roads aren't always well maintained but small bumps and cracks are easy to swerve around on a bicycle.



*Remain spontaneous. Do some of your route planning on the road.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

### Which maps?

[Google Maps](#) is a good starting point for an idea of what's in an area. Eventually though, you'll want to buy paper maps. They allow you to see a much wider area at a glance than your computer screen will.

When you buy maps, try to find reasonably detailed ones. A scale of 1:200,000-1:400,000 is great for getting a good idea 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 (Michelin produces some excellent atlases for Europe) for a reasonable price. You can then just rip out the sheets you need and throw away parts as you go. Check too with your local Automobile Association. They often give away wonderful maps to members for free.

The more remote your destination, the harder it gets to find detailed maps. The good news is that more remote destinations also mean fewer roads to choose from. There's often less traffic too, so it isn't as crucial to find the smaller roads. We have been on national highways where more than 3 cars an hour constituted a busy day and we've planned trips with maps on a scale of about 1:1 000 000 for countries like Kazakhstan and Laos.

Once you have your map, get out a highlighter and start outlining the route you'd like to take. Take note of which routes are likely to have little traffic. 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 cars and trucks racing up behind you.

As you're considering taking different roads, do some research. Find out what you'd like to see in the area, where the campgrounds are and where you can likely restock on food and water. You can jot this down on the map itself or in a notebook.

The more you look at the map, the more you'll start to notice clues to the landscape, especially elevation. Sometimes peaks of mountains are marked. If the road passes close to the peak, you're probably in for a climb. 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.

### Don't Plan Too Much

With an idea of the terrain and sights along the way, you can begin planning a rough itinerary. Some people do this in great precision, putting each day's expected distance and destination into a spreadsheet. Others pick a start and end point, a few milestones along the way and 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 heatwave, all because you had to get to the campground marked on your schedule.

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 offer the opportunity to get off the bike and go hiking for a day, while coastal routes often have nice inland diversions that will let you discover a different landscape, just a few miles away from the ocean.

### How Far In A Day?

Our rule of thumb for determining the number of days to cover a given distance is to divide by an average of 60km per day. That allows for a usual riding distance of about 80km a day, with 2 days off a week to rest or go sightseeing.

### How To Read A Map





# Getting Information

*"It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them. Thus you remember them as they actually are, while in a motor car only a high hill impresses you, and you have no such accurate remembrance of country you have driven through as you gain by riding a bicycle." - Ernest Hemingway*

**There are many ways to find out about bike touring possibilities in the destination you've chosen.**

## Ask The Audience

The internet has tons of bike touring resources. Among the best are [CrazyGuyOnABike](#) (with thousands of tour reports from other cyclists) and online chat forums. Try [Bike Forums](#) for a largely U.S. audience, [Cycle Chat](#) for questions aimed at the UK and Europe and Lonely Planet's [On Your Bike](#) forum for adventurous global excursions. You can also send messages to members of the cycle touring hospitality group [WarmShowers](#) about their local area.

## Local Tourist Boards

It's hard to find a country or region these days that doesn't have a tourist bureau or Chamber of Commerce responsible for promoting the area.

Look up their website for information. Sometimes they will even send you free maps and brochures. Some, like the Australian island of Tasmania and the U.S. state of Oregon, cater specifically to bike tourists with cycling maps and guides.

## Guidebooks

Guidebooks come in many different styles and levels of usefulness for bike touring. All books will give you some background and sightseeing ideas for the area you'll be visiting. Well known guidebook brands like Lonely Planet, however, tend to focus on cities rather than smaller off-the-beaten-track areas that cyclists pass through. On a day-to-day basis we found general guidebooks were useful no more than 25% of the time. Cycling books for a whole country tend to provide a series of 3-4 day routes but not one long path from end-to-end across the land.

The best are guidebooks that focus on a specific route like the Danube Cycle Path or the Camino de Santiago. They can have great maps and information on campgrounds and bike shops along the way.

## Cycling Groups

America has the [Adventure Cycling Association](#). The UK has the [CTC](#). These types of cycle touring groups exist around the globe, offering advice and great bike-specific maps.



*By researching beforehand, you can learn about the attractions on the road ahead.*

Photo © [Heidi Hvarregaard](#) and [Martin Thorsoe](#)



# Alone Or With Friends?

*"A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." - Lao Tzu*

**The experience of bike touring can be vastly different, depending on whether you're going with friends or striking out solo.**

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. Be prepared to compromise too. Touring with other people means trying to reach a group decision and that 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 head organiser, which means you are freed of the responsibility of planning a route or even carrying a map – just follow the person in front! 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 there's always someone coming up alongside for a chat. Things that are simple for solo cyclists or small groups of friends, like wild camping, become impossible in a bigger group.



*Even if you set out alone, you'll make friends along the way.*

Photo © [Marija Kozin](#)

## Questions To Ask Potential Partners

- How far do you want to go in a day?
- How fast do you cycle?
- How much money do you want to spend?
- Hotels, campsites or free camping?
- How early do you get up?
- What do you like to see on a tour (landscape, museums)?

# Training

*"Train for the tour or let the tour train you." -bike touring saying*

**When most people hear the word 'training' they think of physical training but that's only half the story when it comes to bike touring.**

There's also logistical training to consider: what to pack, how to pack it and how to deal with the daily routines like navigating a route, cooking your evening meal over a camp stove and finding a place to sleep.

You can easily become comfortable with these things over the course of a few weekends. Nothing works the kinks out like an overnight trip, close to home. By starting small, you know that if things go wrong it's not a big deal because you can call friends to help you out or just cycle back the next day.

## **Start In Your Backyard**

Before you even do a short trip, get to know your bike and equipment. Set up your tent in the backyard. Make sure you know how it goes together and packs back up. Get out your stove and make lunch on it. Then move on to the luggage. Pack up your panniers or trailer, load up the bike and do a few loops around your driveway or up and down the street. See how the bike feels and re-arrange the weight if the bike doesn't seem stable.



## **Build Cycling Into Your Daily Routine**

Start using your bike for daily tasks like going to the supermarket or attending a class. 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.

*After a trial weekend or two, you'll start to feel at ease with bike touring.*

Photo © [Going Slowly](#)

## **Do A Day Trip**

If you have no biking experience, start with an unloaded bike (just bring a handlebar bag with some snacks or maybe one pannier with essentials like a jacket and your phone) and a moderate route of 60-80km in an area that you're familiar with. Nervousness can be overcome with a back-up plan. 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.

## **Add Weight And Challenges**

Once you're comfortable with the unloaded day trip, plan a series of day and weekend trips. 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, but after a few of these shorter trips (including at least a couple overnight excursions) you'll have a good idea of how ready you are to tackle the bigger journey you have in mind. 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 the road before you leave.

### Do you need to train?

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

Bike touring isn't the Tour de France. You're not out to be the fastest rider on the road or cover the most miles. You're just there to have fun. And with longer bike journeys, you usually have a more flexible schedule. That means 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, like starting with modest daily distances (50-60km is good), having a specific end-point in mind for the day and knowing where the campgrounds or hotels are in that area apply doubly to you because you won't have refined your routine as much as someone who's trained before leaving. More than anything, this approach relies on a Zen-like attitude, as you're figuring out exactly 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, aggressive dogs and flat tires. When these tough moments come along, don't be too hard on yourself. You've taken on a lot of change and learned many new things.

What seems easy to more experienced bike tourists might still be tough for you, so don't feel bad if you decide to take a hotel in bad weather or eat out instead of cooking your own meal. Sometimes this break from the rigours of the road is 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.

### As you start bike touring, avoid these common pitfalls:

**Not enough water** – Start out with 2-3 litres of water and scope out where you'll be able to get more along the way.

**Not enough calories** – Whether or not you plan to eat in restaurants, always have some high-energy snacks with you. Trail mix, bananas and power bars are good choices.

**Over exhaustion** – Go slowly. This is not a race. Stop to enjoy the scenery. Find shade to rest under during midday. Treat yourself to an ice cream. It's okay to take all day to cover 60km.

**Bad weather** – If it's going to be really miserable, consider putting off your tour for another day. In time you'll learn to deal with rain, wind and other frustrations but it might be too much for your first tour. If you go ahead despite poor weather, cut the distance to compensate.

**Underplanning** – With time and experience, you'll need to plan less and less or not at all. The first time, however, make sure you know where you're going, where you'll spend the night and which roads you'll take.



# Choosing A Touring Bike



*What kind of bike will you buy for your tour? An expedition bicycle is best if you're heading for the roads of Pakistan, like Sonya & Ali.*

Photo © [Sonya Spry and Aldrik Mulder](#)



# Factors To Consider

*"I enjoy a spin on my tandem bicycle. It is splendid to feel the wind blowing in my face and the springy motion of my iron steed. The rapid rush through the air gives me a delicious sense of strength and buoyancy, and the exercise makes my pulse dance and my heart sing." - Helen Keller*

**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 kilometres 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. Don't let tight finances stop you from touring. Determination and a positive attitude are the most vital factors for a successful trip by bicycle, not the price of your bike. There's a lot to be said for simplicity as well.

That said, here are some factors to consider when you're deciding what bike to buy.

## **Budget**

A solid second-hand bike might go for \$200 U.S. and the very best touring bikes carry price tags of \$2,000 U.S. and upwards. Costs rocket if you opt for fancy gearing systems and custom paint jobs. Invest in a high-end bike if you can afford it but don't be afraid to hit the road on a refurbished mountain bike if that's all you have the money for.

## **Trip Duration**

For shorter tours, close to home, just about any bike will do. We have done over 1,000km of cycle touring around Holland on \$100 U.S. bikes that we bought second hand. The more remote and lengthy your trip, the stronger the case for a quality bike that won't fail under the strain of heavy loads and long distances. A broken bike can cause endless frustration when you are days or even a whole country away from the nearest decent repair shop.

## **Terrain**

For a trip on North America's Great Divide, the longest off-pavement bike route in the world, a mountain bike with suspension to cope with the bumpy trail might be the best choice. If you're going to Thailand, the paved roads and plethora of cheap hotels and restaurants means a touring bike with skinny tires will do the job.

## **Planes, Trains and Buses**

Taking your bike on other forms of transport can be one of the more stressful parts of touring – even more so if you choose something unusually long or wide, like a tandem or a recumbent tricycle. If you plan many journeys on public transport, try to find a bike that will be relatively easy to pack.

## **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

*"There is nothing more beautiful than the moment before the voyage, the moment where the horizon of tomorrow comes to tell us its promises." - Milan Kundera*

**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 some good advice and who will have a few models for you to try out.

## Mid-Range Touring Bikes

Many companies like Trek, Dawes and Surly are turning out reasonably priced touring bicycles that are well designed, fairly sturdy and perfectly suited to trips of a few weeks or a few months at a time. These bikes will cost anywhere from \$600-1,500 U.S. and are specifically designed for touring.

What makes them so special? Unlike a mountain bike or a racing bike, the frame of a touring bike will be built with a focus on comfort over long distances. Other features that come with touring bikes include:

- **Long Wheelbase** - Prevents your heels from hitting the panniers as you pedal.
- **Attachment Points** - Room for 3 bottles plus mudguards and racks is ideal.
- **Decent Components** - Brand names like Shimano last longer and perform better.



*Surly's Long Haul Trucker, a popular choice among mid-range touring bikes.*

Photo © [Inside Story \(Flickr\)](#)

Don't expect much of a choice, however, when it comes to colours and other custom options like wheel size. Other places where manufacturers often cut corners include:

- **Racks** - Mid-range tourers usually come with racks that are fine for moderate loads but not heavy touring. Often, only a back rack is included
- **Gearing** - Sometimes the gearing tends a bit to the high side and doesn't offer 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 will be challenging.
- **Wheels** - The wheels will probably be machine built and not quite as strong as those built by hand. (see more on p. 28)
- **Tires** - May be a bit thin for dirt road touring
- **Saddles** - They're often not the most comfortable models. (see more on p. 32)

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 can often get a great deal as shops are clearing out older versions.

### Expedition Bikes

The expedition touring bike is the Mack truck of the bicycle world. Big and sturdy, 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.

Frames are often made to measure and steel is the most common material (although aluminium models with excellent reputations do exist). The wheels will be the 26" standard that is most easily replaced anywhere in the world.

Across the bike, the focus should be on high quality Shimano components and there should also be an element of beauty. On an expedition touring bike, custom paint jobs and beautiful welding work is to be expected.

Expedition bikes are also where the innovation is at in the touring world. [Rohloff Hubs](#) – a nearly maintenance-free and sealed gearing system that lets you shift without pedalling – are fast becoming standard on this class of bike.



*A custom built, expedition touring bike. Beautiful and sturdy, but expensive.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

### Making Sure The Bike Fits

**Frame Size** – Put your cycling shoes on and straddle the bicycle. Look for about 1" of clearance between your crotch and the top tube of the bike.

**Saddle Height** – Get a friend to hold the bicycle while you hop on. Pretend you are cycling. When your foot is at the bottom of the pedal stroke, there should be a slight bend in the knee. Your leg should never be completely extended.

**Saddle Position** – Saddles can be flat or angled slightly. They can also move forwards and backwards. This [video from Bicycle Tutor](#) gives a good summary of the options.

**Handlebars** – Keep asking that friend to hold the bicycle. Lean forward and grip the handlebars. Make sure you can happily hold on to them and grip your brakes without straining your back or neck. Your elbows should be slightly bent, not rigid and locked.



If you really want to be on the cutting edge of bike technology, Dutch bike manufacturer [Santos](#) makes expedition bikes with a belt drive instead of the standard chain.

The caveat is, of course, the price. Brace yourself for a minimum \$2,000 U.S. price tag. A final bill of \$3,000-4000 U.S. is easily reached. If you have the money, great. Don't worry if this seems too steep though. There's plenty of value in the mid-range selection of touring bikes, and you don't want to blow so much on a bike that you're left too poor to actually go on tour.

The fear factor is another downside to an expensive expedition bike. Once you've forked out for such a beautiful bike, you'll feel obliged to carry a big lock to match and you won't be happy leaving it just anywhere when you want to do some exploring out of the saddle.

Finally, don't forget to think ahead if you decide to buy an expedition touring bike. Because they are often made to order, it can take weeks or even a few months before your bike is ready. Starting to look 6 months ahead of your departure day is not too soon.

## Recumbent Bikes

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 benefits too. They're aerodynamic. They can double up as a seat any time you stop for a picnic lunch or make camp and their unique style means less worry about your bike being stolen. Most thieves wouldn't have a clue how to ride one away.

What's the catch? Like expedition bikes, recumbents 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 and the learning curve is sometimes steep as well, especially with two-wheeled recumbents. Falling off a few times is common as you adjust to a new way of riding.

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

If you're considering a recumbent, make the effort to find a specialist dealer and try a few out before you buy. A long test-ride is an excellent idea, if you can swing it.



*Sit back and relax with a recumbent bike.*

Photo © [Scott & Becky, Going East](#)

### Why Ride A Recumbent

"There are quite a few benefits after a days ride: no tingling feeling in my hands because blood flow is obstructed, no sore shoulders, no back pain (depending on hardness of the seat and correct sizing), and usually a smooth ride because of suspension (almost all touring bents have rear suspension). When you ride in summer, it is like you are on a lounge chair soaking up the sun, while riding." - [Eddo Kloosterman](#)

## 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 riders struggling to find a common pace on separate bikes, the answer is yes.

Tandem bikes don't just keep couples together. The combined strength of four legs pedalling in unison means tandem cyclists go like greased lightning over flat stretches and down mountains. With a bit of practice and determined pedalling, you might even beat solo cyclists up the hills, though it's not considered polite to whistle while you breeze past!

Families on tour lean towards tandems because it lessens the worry of young riders straying out into traffic. A tandem can also let 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!

Like other unusual bikes, transporting a tandem can be daunting because of its weight and size. Carrying it up steep flights of stairs in old-fashioned hotels could prove near impossible.

Packing for a tandem tour is also challenging 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 to help ease the space crunch but you'll still have to be careful to avoid putting undue stress on the wheels.

Some people worry about the view from the rear of the tandem. In fact, the back is a wonderful place to be for appreciating the scenery. Freed of the responsibility of steering, you can let your legs fall into a pedalling rhythm and use the rest of your senses to take in the scenery, snap a few photographs, help with navigation and even give your captain a back rub once in a while.

The one thing you can't do with a tandem is just jump on and go. It's especially important to allow time to figure out the quirks of your particular team through day rides and the occasional overnighter. After a little practice, you'll start to develop an intuitive sense of what each other needs. This special form of silent communication is one of the things that makes a tandem tour so rewarding.



*Tandem bikes are ideal for families who want to stay together.*

Photo © [Family On Bikes](#)

## 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 to pay for a plane ticket somewhere exotic. The money saved can also make a serious contribution towards the rest of your equipment shopping list.

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 keep an eye out for you, if you ask nicely.

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 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, pay particular attention to the frame. Light cosmetic damage, like the odd scratch, is nothing to worry about but serious dents or rust are dealbreakers.

Touring puts a lot of pressure on a bike frame and a damaged frame will be expensive or impossible to fix. Otherwise, most other things on a bike can be fixed or replaced. Just remember to factor the cost into the price of the bike.

Before buying, make sure you do the following checks:

- **Wheels** - Check to see if they spin in a perfect circle and feel the spokes to see if there are any loose ones.
- **A Loose Headset** - There shouldn't be any movement when you grip the front brakes and push or pull on the handlebars.
- **Gears** - Do they change smoothly?
- **Chain rings** - Sharp points indicate heavy wear.
- **Gritting sounds** - Spin the hubs or pedals and beware if you hear rubbing sounds.

As you're assessing the bike, award bonus points if the bike has attachment points for racks, mudguards and bottle cages. Handlebar extensions and lights are also extras worth bargaining for.

If in doubt, take a bike-savvy friend along for the hunt, ask online bike chat forums for advice and see if it's possible to take the bike to a local shop for an estimate. With the help of a few experts, you'll soon know exactly what you're getting into.



*This bike cost just \$100 U.S. and has done over 1,000km of touring around Holland.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)





*Don't fret too much over which bike to buy. Stopping to smell the flowers is more important than the bike you choose to tour on.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

# Bike Buying Questions: Answered!

*"Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."  
- T.S. Eliot*

**There are some questions that every new bike tourist seems to have on their mind when it comes to picking out a touring bike.**

## **1. Should I get a frame made of steel or aluminium?**

Steel versus aluminium is a never-ending debate in the bike touring world.

Steel is our personal favourite, and it's also the traditional choice. Cyclists like steel for its lively, almost springy ride. Steel is also an easy material to weld, making roadside repairs theoretically possible, though much depends on the skill of the welder and the severity of the damage. We have had small cracks in our frame fixed on the road, which wouldn't have been possible with aluminium.

Don't rule out aluminium though. Touring bikes made out of aluminium are cheaper, lighter and more widely available than steel. Many people have done extended tours on aluminium frames without complaint. Some even prefer the feel of a more rigid ride. On the downside, older aluminium frames tend to be more vulnerable to fatigue cracks than steel frames of the same age.

Which material one you go for is a matter of personal choice. For most tours, both aluminium and steel frames will perform well. If you're going on an extended trip to less developed countries, however, where decent bicycle shops are few and far between, you may get some peace of mind from knowing you could weld a steel frame, if you had to.



*You won't regret spending money on good wheels for your touring bicycle.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

## **2. How do I choose good wheels for touring?**

The first decision to make when it comes to wheels is which size to use. Your choice is between 26" wheels or the slightly larger 700cc size.

If you're planning to mostly tour in North America or Europe, then wheel size doesn't matter so much. Both are common sizes and should be easy to replace if your wheels fail during a tour.

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



Other factors to consider when it comes to wheels are:

- **Number and Pattern of 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 - maybe even as much as a few thousand kilometers down the road - but don't invite trouble. Start out with solid, double-walled rims.
- **Decent Hubs** - Shimano XT hubs are a popular and durable choice. If you clean your hubs 1-2 times a year and replace worn bearings, they'll see you through thousands of kilometers.
- **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.

### 3. Are disc brakes better than rim brakes?

Disc brakes are becoming more common in the cycling world and they certainly have their advantages. They offer strong braking power (especially in rainy conditions) and don't wear down your rims. For touring though, we believe rim brakes are still your best bet.

Most importantly, both types of rim brakes - V-Brakes and Cantilever - are easy to understand and maintain. This means you can take care of them yourself using some basic tools. If you don't want to do the work, bike shops around the world should have the required parts and knowledge to fix them. Even in places where you'd think it would be easy to get disc brakes fixed, like Italy, we've met cyclists who couldn't find what they needed in the local shop and had to make a special trip to a big city instead.

Rim brakes are also lighter and cheaper than disc brakes and less prone to being bent when you take your bike on public transport.

That's not to say that rim brakes are perfect. The action of braking slowly wears 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 (over 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.

Another annoyance can be brake pads that fall out of alignment. Inspect your brake pads regularly and if you see a brake pad starting to wear unevenly (far thinner on one side than the other), it's probably not level with the rim anymore and needs to be readjusted.

If you have your heart set on disc brakes, aim for cable models and not hydraulic disc brakes. Cable disc brakes are less likely to fail and easier for the average mechanic to fix when problems do arise. Take plenty of spare brake pads as well and line up a friend at home who will send spare parts for your disc brakes in an emergency.



*Mud and grit can wear away your rims so clean them after a muddy stretch.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)



#### 4. 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 justify it. Like disc brakes, adding suspension just means another set of moving parts that are potentially going to break down and be difficult to replace when you're on the road.

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. If you already have a bike with suspension forks, you may prefer to adapt it for touring rather than buying another bike.

In either case, there isn't too much to worry about. Other than making sure the suspension is in good shape before you set out, just think about how to carry your luggage. 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 a load when you're touring with a suspension bike (see more on p. 48).

#### 5. What do I need to know 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.



*If you're heading for hilly terrain, you'll want low gears to spin up the slopes.*

Photo © [Chris Leakey & Liz Wilton](#)

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. 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. For more about gear inches, check out [Sheldon Brown's gear inch calculator](#).

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.

# 3 Great Value Bikes

*"Things look different from the seat of a bike, carrying a sleeping bag with a cold beer tucked inside." - Jim Malusa*

**Still wondering which bike to get? Here are 3 reliable choices that won't empty your wallet.**

## Surly Long Haul Trucker

The Long Haul Trucker is incredibly popular with touring cyclists. The [Adventure Cycling Association](#) calls it "a tough bike that will get you from point A to point B with confidence".

Even better, it's excellent value. For just over \$1,000 you get a steel frame, good quality Shimano components and plenty of thoughtful touring extras. The Surly will handle wide tires as well as skinny ones. The wheels are solid, with 36 spokes and here's no shortage of attachment points for racks, bottles and pumps.



*Surly's Long Haul Trucker is a favourite among touring cyclists.*

The Surly comes with 26" wheels and taller riders have the option of a 700cc frame in the bigger sizes. You can also buy the frame only and build your own bike up, if you're feeling adventurous.

## Marin Muirwoods 29er

At about \$600, you could do a lot worse than pick up the [Marin Muirwoods 29er](#) as an entry-level touring bike. With its steel frame, mechanical disc brakes and eyelets for fenders and racks, it's no wonder this bike has caught the attention of many in the touring world.

It's a favourite of Stephen Lord, author of the [Adventure Cycle-Touring Handbook](#), and there are plenty of reports of cyclists travelling thousands of kilometres on this bike.

You will have to budget extra for racks and remember you're running 700cc wheels on this bike, so it may not be top choice for extended tours outside of Europe and North America.

## REI Novara Randonnee

From American outdoor retailer REI comes the Novara Randonnee – a bike often seen on the roads of North America.

This bike will run you about \$1,000 (though REI often have sales for their members and end-of-season deals). For that price you get a steel-framed bike with Mavic rims, simple and reliable cantilever brakes and even a rear rack so you can hit the road right away.



*The REI Novara Randonnee is another solid choice.*

Like the [Marin Muirwoods 29er](#), this bike runs on 700cc wheels so it's probably not the most ideal pick for international touring but it's still a good bike and from a company that's known for great customer service – always a valuable bonus when you're buying a bike!

# Essential Accessories

*"I've got a bike, You can ride it if you like  
It's got a basket, A bell that rings  
And things to make it look good."  
- Lyrics to "Bike", Pink Floyd*

**There's no end to the things you can upgrade your bike with. Bells, saddles, fenders, handlebar grips and lights are just a few of your many choices.**

As far as touring is concerned, some accessories are more critical than others. You probably don't need a basket hanging off your front handlebars (a waterproof bar bag is a far more useful choice) but you wouldn't want to hit the road without a decent saddle. Here are some of the better investments to consider adding to your basic touring bike.

## Handlebar Extensions

Most bikes come with standard handlebars that don't offer many hand positions. They're fine for day trips but on longer tours you'll want more flexibility. Being able to move your hands around while riding helps prevent injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome, tingling hands, numbness and pinched nerves.

[Ergon Grips](#) are one popular option, with a supportive rest area for your palms. Many cyclists who have suffered sore hands after long rides swear by these grips. You can also consider traditional, simple bar ends (the cheapest option and by no means a bad one) and butterfly bars – a large figure-8 shaped handlebar.

## 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 saddles evangelise about how comfortable they are, with the [Brooks B17](#) being the most popular model for touring. 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.

*[Brooks Saddles](#) will last a lifetime, if you don't mind breaking them in.*

## Bike Computers

Whether or not to carry a bike computer is up for debate. Most cyclists do and find it useful. A bike computer will tell you how far you've gone, helping you locate turnoffs and calculate how far it is to the next town. Seeing the kilometres clock up on your bike computer can also bring a sense of achievement and progress, especially when a headwind makes it feel like you're not getting anywhere.



When you buy a bike computer, you'll have to decide between wired and wireless versions. There's no longer much of a price difference between the two. We prefer wireless versions because there's no worry about loose connections or wires getting entangled with sticks, bushes or other debris. On the other hand, wireless computers mean more batteries to buy and replace.

For some people, a bike computer is more of a stress than a positive influence. If you find yourself always trying to beat your top speed or log a new record daily distance, consider taking it off your bike. You don't want to be pushing yourself so hard that you forget to stop and enjoy the sights along the way.

### Bell or Horn

Every cyclist needs a noisemaker. When you're pedalling along the bike paths of Europe, a bell will let others know you're coming, although a hearty shout of Oi! works too as long as you're not the timid type. Bells and horns really come in to their own when you're cycling off the beaten path as a way to say hello to locals and particularly kids. The sillier the sound the better.

Expect your bell to be the first thing people ring when you leave your bike outside an internet café, restaurant or attraction. When this happens don't be annoyed. Just consider it an extra security feature. While touring Angkor Wat in Cambodia, it was the sound of temple food sellers ringing our bike bells that told us the bikes were still there and hadn't been stolen!

### Get Something Nice

"Every bell you can buy goes *ding*, so you might as well get one that goes *ding* and looks good. Brass looks good, lime-green plastic doesn't. It's pretty simple, that one." - [Rivendell Bicycle Works](#)

### Mudguards

Unless you plan on touring exclusively in the desert, you'll want mudguards or fenders. A good set protects your own body and bike from the grit being kicked up off the road. Mudguards also keep the rider behind you happy.

Metal mudguards are available but they're expensive. For something that's only going to get covered in grime anyway, plastic will do the job just fine. If you're feeling creative, search the web for nifty ways to make your own mudguards, including out of plastic bottles!

One small warning: if you're hauling your bike through a wet field (to get to a free camping spot, for example), mudguards are a hinderance rather than a help. They can quickly clog up with mud, stopping the wheels from turning. Take them off before you try to cross a muddy field.

### Lights

Lights aren't just for night riding. They're also good for navigating through dark tunnels and improving your visibility when fog and rain rolls in. Some may even be good when you need to search around your tent at night.

After testing several different types of lights, we've settled on the [Superflash light by Planet Bike](#). 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 also lasts a long time – up to 100 hours – on two commonly available AAA batteries.

Cateye is another reliable brand that is highly recommended by many other bike tourists.



The [Planet Bike Superflash](#) light is our favourite for night riding.

# Camping Gear



*Your bike can take you to some beautiful camping spots.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

# Choosing A Tent

*"Greg, our favourite Hungarian, was going low-tech from Beijing to Budapest with a Tesco's £7.99 tent. 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, [Sloths On The Move](#)*

**A tent is perhaps the most crucial piece of equipment that the independent bicycle tourist will carry.**

It will be your home away from home, a haven from wind, rain and cold temperatures, key to travelling on a budget and one of the few constants that appears every night as you go from place to place. Choose well and your tent will be your best friend. Pick poorly and it may be the cause of more than a few unprintable words!

There are many types of tents to select from – an overwhelming number in fact – but look for a few crucial features:

- **Lightweight** – Tents made for car camping can be downright heavy! Aim for one that's between 2-4kg, towards the lighter end if you're going solo and a bit more if you're travelling with a partner.
- **Packed Size** – Make sure it packs down small enough to fit in your panniers, trailer or across the back rack of your bike.
- **Muted Colours** – A bright orange tent looks pretty in the shop but it's hardly ideal when you're trying to camp undetected in the woods. Get something that will blend in with your surroundings. Even if you don't intend to free camp, you never know when an unexpected rain storm or some other event will change those plans. Being as invisible as possible will help ensure you don't attract attention.
- **Easy Set-Up** – If you intend to do any amount of camping, you can be sure there will be at least one day where you're trying to set your tent up in the dark, in the middle of a gale-force wind or with hordes of mosquitoes attacking every inch of bare flesh. This is not the time to be fiddling with 20 poles and an incomprehensible series of hoops, loops and straps. Get the simplest set-up system possible.



*A tent will be your home away from home on a bike tour so choose wisely.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

Everything else when it comes to tents is really a matter of personal preference and your plans.

For camping across the seasons, look seriously at a double-walled tent that will insulate against the cold. For warmer climes, something single-walled and well ventilated will keep you safe from bugs, while still allowing a nice breeze to flow through. Shorter trips probably mean you don't need as much space, while on extended journeys you're likely to value the extra room that buying a slightly larger tent brings.

A freestanding tent will let you set the tent up first and stake it out later. It makes things easier on



hard ground but we have found you can set up any tent without pegs by attaching the straps and strings that come with most tents to the rocks, trees and even picnic tables – whatever is in the area.

If you do go with a freestanding tent, don't be tempted to leave the pegs at home. It might save weight but you never know when a storm will blow through and you need to fully secure your tent. Pegs also tend to bend or break at the most unfortunate times and it's always good to have a few in reserve.

## Tents To Consider

Which tent should you pick? A few stand out in the 'tried and tested' category.

### Hilleberg Nallo GT

Our tent of choice comes from Swedish tent maker Hilleberg. At 2.8kg for the 3-person model, it's light in weight but heavy on your wallet. Expect to fork out about \$600 for a 3-person model. Price brings quality, however, and this tent, with its roomy vestibule and separated sleeping area, has never failed us. In 15+ hours of a downpour in New Zealand, we were perfectly dry. In strong winds, our tent gracefully flexed with the gusts, without ever breaking a pole.

We slept over 400 nights in our first Nallo GT and it was still functioning perfectly, if a little thin from UV damage when we replaced it.

The customer service from Hilleberg is also top-notch. If you can afford it, you won't regret this tent for serious expeditions. For solo tourers, Hilleberg also make the 1.5kg Akto.

### 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](#) (about \$300) has a frame that is based around the inner layer, which means you can leave the fly-sheet off for great ventilation and star gazing. At a mere 2kg, it won't weigh you down either.

If you have to use the fly-sheet, the bright yellow colour of this tent works against you for wild camping and it might not be the best in heavy rains but for the price it's a great buy. [Peter Gostelow](#) is using this tent for his bike ride through Africa.

### Tarptent Contrail

This tent took top place for solo travellers in Backpacker Magazine's 2009 buyer's guide. It weighs just 700g, costs a modest \$199 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. It may also feel cramped if you have to stay in it for a long time in bad weather. You may want to splurge on a hotel rather than stay for days in this tent.

## Read More

→ [Lightweight Tarp Tents](#) - A video that looks at two popular models, including a Tarptent.



*Hilleberg tents are expensive but will last a long time.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)



*The MSR Hubba Hubba tent - take the fly-sheet off for great star gazing.*



*The Tarptent Contrail - light and cheap but not great in prolonged bad weather.*

# Sleeping Bags

*"Bicycling is the nearest approximation I know to the flight of birds. The airplane simply carries a man on its back like an obedient Pegasus; it gives him no wings of his own." - Louis J. Helle Jr.*

**Crawling into a cozy sleeping bag after a long day on the bike, knowing that you're settling down for a well-earned rest, is one of the wonderful pleasures of touring.**

Equally memorable, for all the wrong reasons, is a sleepless, freezing night because your sleeping bag just wasn't up to the job. Here's what to consider when picking out a sleeping bag for a bike tour.

## Think Of The Seasons

Every sleeping bag comes with a temperature rating and you should get one to match your touring destination and the season.

If you only plan to tour during the summer, you can go with something relatively light. Don't skimp too much though. Cold weather can roll in without warning and summer is also the ideal time to explore cooler mountain areas. Get a bag that's rated for temperatures a few degrees below what you expect to encounter.

When it comes to 3-season touring, this means a bag rated down to -5°C or even -10°C. This might seem a bit warm for summer days but if you're too hot, you can always doze with the bag loosely spread open on top of your body, or leave your tent door open to let in a breeze. It's much easier to find ways to deal with weather that's too warm than nights that are too cold.

Remember that sleeping bag ratings normally assume a number of things. They expect that you've eaten properly before going to bed, that you're in some form of shelter (not camping under the stars), that you have a sleeping mat for added insulation and that you're not a 'cold sleeper' by nature. If one of these things doesn't apply, then you'll have to compensate in another way, by putting on an extra layer of clothes, for example.

## Down Versus Synthetic

Sleeping bags are filled either with synthetic fibres or with down feathers from ducks and geese. There's a lively debate as to which is best. In a poll on the [TravellingTwo Facebook Group](#), over 60% of people preferred down.

A down sleeping bag packs smaller, weighs less and lasts longer – all reasons why feather-filled bags are our choice for bike touring. The disadvantage of a down bag is that if it gets wet, it can take a long time to dry out.

However, we don't think a soaked sleeping bag is very likely. As long as you store it in a waterproof bag (good practice anyway) and don't have a leaky tent, your bag shouldn't get wet in the first place. In 50,000km of bike touring, we have never been kept awake at night because of a wet



*A good sleeping bag and liner will keep you warm on the coldest of nights.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

sleeping bag. Sometimes a down bag can be slightly damp on the surface from morning dew but this has always dried quickly for us.

That said, synthetic bags are good if you have allergies or don't want to spend too much on a sleeping bag. Synthetic bags are also easy to clean at any laundromat, while down bags should be hand washed with mild soap or taken to a specialist cleaner. Finally, synthetic fillings have come a long way in recent years and sometimes you may have a hard time telling the difference between the two!

Don't labour too much over down versus synthetic. Neither will be a disaster on your tour. You may just find a preference for one or the other after a few nights on the road.

### **Zips Or Zipless**

It used to be that all sleeping bags came with zips but now you can get bags without zips. How do you get in? Just slide yourself in through the top hole.

With zipless sleeping bags, there's no draft coming in from one side of the bag and no rolling onto an uncomfortable zipper in the middle of the night. The missing zipper also means you shave a few grams off the overall weight of the bag and you've removed just about the only thing that can break on a bag. Our sleeping bag of choice is a zipless one, from the [PHD Designs Minim range](#).

Of course, a zipless bag also means you can't open it up if you're too hot and it's harder to get into if too much cycling or age has brought on stiff joints. For couples, it also rules out the possibility to zip the bags together. If you do get a sleeping bag with a zipper, make sure the zipper is a good quality. Unfortunately, it's hard to find a cheap bag with a decent zip.

### **Don't Forget A Liner**

Along with your new sleeping bag, you'll want a sleep sack or liner. This adds warmth and also keeps the sweat and dirt on your body from penetrating into the bag. It's much easier to wash your sleeping bag liner than the bag itself! You can make your own out of a cotton sheet (heavy but cheap) or buy a commercially made liner. The two most popular choices are fleece (warm but bulky) and silk (light and tiny but expensive). Some people find they get tangled up during the night in silk liners. You can find silk pyjamas instead for a truly luxurious and tangle-free sleeping experience.

### **Make Sure It Fits**

Some bags are rectangular, others are a 'mummy' shape that tapers at the feet. We like the coziness of the 'mummy' style bags but some people find them too constrictive. Bags also come in different widths and lengths, including a few double-width bags for couples. It can be hard to judge which size you need from the internet so visit your local camping shop before you buy to figure out what feels good to you.

### **Consider The Packed Size**

Last, but not least, make sure you have room to pack away your new sleeping bag. All but the cheapest bags should be compact enough. Ideally, your bag will fit easily inside a small front pannier, with space leftover. What you don't want is some long and bulky thing from your boy scout days that takes up almost as much room as the tent!



# Sleeping Mats

*"What it all comes down to in the end is your legs, determination and the ability to improvise." - [Janne Corax](#)*

**A good sleeping mat is the last piece in the puzzle - along with your tent and sleeping bag - that will ensure you get a good night's sleep on the road.**

It's critical for insulating your body against the cold ground. The best sleeping bag in the world is no good without a decent mat to put it on. A mat can also be used as something to lounge on when you stop for a lunch break or turned into a chair with the help of special lightweight kits.

Make sure you get something designed for the job. A pool mattress won't cut it. Neither will the wafer thin camping mats you find in department stores for just a few dollars, unless you're young and exceptionally hardy. You also don't want the very heavy inflatable beds that you might use on a car camping trip.

Happily, there are many camping mats designed for backpacking and bike touring that are lightweight, compact and comfortable.

The kinds of mats you'll be looking at can broadly be broken into two categories: inflatable ones and those made of solid foam.

Inflatable mats are generally more cushy and roll up into a smaller package than their solid foam counterparts but don't score so well when it comes to durability. They're prone to punctures and tend to start falling apart after a few months of continuous use.

By all means, get an inflatable mat if you're planning several shorter trips and can sort out any problems with your sleeping mat between tours.

If you're dreaming of a world expedition, however, solid foam mats are practically indestructible and will save you the hassle of arranging a replacement from overseas.

Whichever option you go for, remember that sleeping mats are rated - like sleeping bags - for their insulating abilities. It's worth spending a little extra money for a 3 season model.

As for which mat to buy, we're big fans of the Thermarest brand. The company backs its product with a lifetime guarantee and, having tested that guarantee on the road, we can vouch for the great customer service behind the warranty.

In the inflatable line, the [Thermarest Prolite](#) series is a favourite of cyclists, while the egg-carton surface of the [Z-lite](#) is among the most comfortable solid foam mats we've slept on.

Other brands often used by bike tourists, but which we can't offer any first-hand experience with, include the [Exped Down Mat](#) (reviews say: expensive and heavy but the ultimate in comfort and very warm) and the [Big Agnes Insulated Pad](#) (reviews say: reasonably priced, light and warm but punctures easily and takes time to inflate).



*Will you get a solid foam mat like the [Z-Lite](#) (left) or an inflatable one like the [Prolite](#) (right)? They both have their advantages.*

# Loading Up The Bike



*The one-wheeled Extrawheel trailer in action. You can use a trailer or panniers to carry your gear on tour - maybe even both.*

Photo © [Tom Allen](#)

# Panniers

*"Excellence can be attained if you care more than others think is wise, risk more than others think is safe, dream more than others think is practical and expect more than others think is possible." - [Peter Gostelow](#)*

**Panniers are bags that attach to racks 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, with the possibility of also strapping a tent and sleeping mat across the top of the back panniers.

This configuration is used by the vast majority of cyclists. Why are panniers such a favourite?

Versatility while touring is one reason. 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. You can also quickly grab the pannier with your laptop and other valuables in it to take along as you go supermarket shopping. In a city, you can empty a pannier and use it as a day bag while sightseeing. When you have to fly somewhere, you can check your panniers as normal luggage.

Panniers help you stay organised as well. You can sort your equipment into different bags. One bag might be for food and cooking gear, another 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.

In addition to panniers, you might also want to add a:

- **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.
- **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.



*A typical touring bike, loaded down with panniers, a handlebar bag and a dry sack.*

Photo © [Stephen Lord](#)



## 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 short, occasional touring. Don't expect the 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 German-designed [Ortlieb panniers](#).

If panniers are the choice of almost all cyclists, then Ortlieb panniers are by far the most popular brand. They are also some of the more expensive bike bags you can buy 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.

Despite using our Ortliebs for over 50,000km they're still in perfect working order (if a bit sunfaded).

There is one downside to Ortlieb panniers: most models don't come with pockets or compartments. That makes organisation a bit more challenging. Ziplock bags or stuff sacks can be used instead to organise the different types of equipment.

If you turn out to be one of the people who don't care for Ortliebs, they're popular enough that you will always be able to sell them to another cyclist and get most of your money back.

Other brands to check out include Vaude, Carradice, Jandd, Lone Peak and – at the luxury end of the scale – the exceptionally well designed but also extremely expensive Arkel bags.



*Ortlieb panniers will easily last you more than one time around the world.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

## The Good And Bad Of Panniers

### Pros

- Easily carried into your tent or hotel room and over obstacles like fences and streams
- Can be taken on a plane, without any special preparation
- Equipment is more easily organised by bag, making things easier to find
- Simple design means little or no maintenance
- Accessible while riding (you can reach things without getting off your bike)

### Cons

- Put strain on a bike, particularly the back wheel, possibly causing broken spokes
- Increased tire wear and wind resistance
- Make the bike wider and harder to navigate through tight spaces
- Need to be reasonably well balanced between the left and right sides
- Must be taken off when you stop to fix a flat

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 and some cyclists prefer this option because it allows a bit more air to flow through the panniers.
- **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 the repeated opening and closing makes zippers prone to failure. Roll tops are great because you can roll them a little or a lot, making room for extra food when you need it. 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 you buy 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. That means you don't want it to be a long and tedious process. The best panniers unhook automatically when you lift the bag up by its handle.



*How much do you need to carry? The bigger the bag, the more you'll be tempted to take with you.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)



# Pannier Packing Tips

*"He who would travel happily, must travel light." - Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

## **Packing your bike panniers can be confusing, especially when you do it for the first time.**

Once you have a few days of bike touring under your pedals, you'll discover exactly what works for you. Until then, here are some tips to put you on the right track.

### **Organise And Categorise**

Panniers have a natural tendency to act like black holes. The most important things always seem to get sucked down to the very bottom of the bag. That is the last thing you want during a storm, when you're trying to find the rain gear. A little organisation goes a long way towards avoiding pannier frustration and confusion.

Start by sorting things into categories. Put all the food and cooking gear in one bag. Then bring your clothes together in one pile. Do the same for any bike tools and spare parts you are carrying, things you'll need in the tent at night and so on. Doing this helps you remember where everything is and ensures that you don't have to unpack 4 bags to get the job done. Fixing a tire takes far less time if the spare tubes, puncture repair kit and tire levers are all in one place and not spread across your panniers.

You can organise further by getting multi-coloured bags or zip-lock bags and putting things into sub-categories. We have one bag for socks, one for underwear and so on. Finally, consider printing labels and putting them on the back of your panniers, so you remember exactly what goes in each one.

### **Balance The Weight**

Your bicycle should be reasonably well balanced, both from side to side and from front to back. We have traditionally gone for about 40% of the weight in front and 60% in back but other cyclists prefer the reverse. Putting more weight in front takes some pressure off your back wheel, lowering the risk of things like broken spokes. This probably isn't important for most people but could be an issue if you are exceptionally tall or big boned.

There is no 'correct' answer. Just experiment and see what works for you, remembering the general rule that your bike should not be greatly unbalanced in any one direction. A lopsided bike will be difficult to steer and dangerous to



*How will you pack your bags?*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

"Try to keep heavier items down low. Of course, this was much more critical on our bikes (recumbents), but even on regular bikes, the lower the weight the easier it is to balance." - [Rebecca Hogue](#)



ride. Uneven weight also puts unnecessary pressure on the racks and frame of the bike.

You don't need to carry a scale and weigh everything to the last gram. Instead, pack your bags and then pick them up. How do they feel? Are the front ones lighter than the back ones? Do the right panniers weigh roughly the same as the left panniers? A difference of a couple pounds is unlikely to make a big difference but if you feel that one is significantly heavier than the other, try to reorder a bit until the distribution is better.

### Important Things On Top

Think about what you are likely to need during the day and then put these things near the top of a pannier, where they're easily reached. Rain gear, snacks and your tool kit all fall into this category. You might also include your journal or a warmer layer of clothes.

### Bulky Items Outside The Panniers

Not everything has to go inside your panniers. Some particularly bulky things can be strapped on the outside of the bike. The standard place to strap things is on the back rack, resting on top of your rear bags. A tent is the obvious thing to put here. We also carry our sleeping mats and extra food outside of our panniers.

To hold everything together, we used a cheap \$2 bag, made from thick, woven plastic and available in any dollar store. We attached it using bungee cords and it worked out to be surprisingly water resistant. Garbage bags are another popular choice to weather-proof things carried outside of panniers. These homemade options are never 100% waterproof though, so if you plan to store your sleeping bag on top of your racks, invest in a dry bag (see more on p. 42) to ensure you don't suffer a night in a soggy blanket.

### Leave Extra Space

There is always something you'll want to add to your bags en route, whether it's a souvenir you pick up along the way or extra food for a particularly remote stretch. If your bags are bursting before you leave, they're too full. Unpack and re-evaluate until you have at least half a pannier free.

### Protect Sensitive Things

Some things don't do well with the bumpy nature of bike travel. Anything liquid like cooking oils, honey or shampoo should go in the strongest container you can find and be placed so it stands upright in the bottom of a pannier. Electronics also need special care. A soft padded case will protect your mp3 player, laptop and other gadgets from dust and vibrations. Add further protection by packing electronics between layers of clothes, to minimize their exposure to bumps and shocks.

"Make a small pack with the clothes that you normally use after cycling and put it inside, at the top of one pannier. When you stop, then you do not need to look for your change of clothes." - [Alvaro Neil, Biciclown](#)



*A typical fully loaded touring bike, with plenty of things piled on top of the back panniers.*

Photo © [Nicolai Bangsgaard](#)

# Luggage Racks

*"If we wait for the moment when everything, absolutely everything is ready, we shall never begin." - Ivan Turgenev*

## Once you've got your panniers, you'll need racks to hang them on.

Like panniers, you get what you pay for when it comes to racks. Spend a bit of extra money for a decent set that will withstand the bumps and jostles of riding. A higher upfront cost will be quickly offset by peace of mind and a long lifespan.

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 zip ties because they're more likely to break under the strain of a heavy load.

### Good features to look for include:

- **Steel** – Steel racks have proven themselves to be strong and reliable, time and time again. There are some good aluminium racks on the market but in general steel is the best choice. Steel racks can also be easily welded back together, if necessary.
- **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.
- **A Guarantee** – The best racks come with a substantial warranty.



*Tubus racks are some of the best you can buy for fully loaded touring.*

Remember too that you'll need different racks for 700cc wheels than 26" models and special designs for bikes with suspension.

If Ortlieb are the top choice for panniers, then Tubus are the gold standard in racks and a favourite of expedition cyclists. They're renowned for being exceptionally strong and Tubus racks are made of steel, so if you're unfortunate enough to have one break, any welder should be able to do a repair job. Even better, they come with a 30-year guarantee, including shipping of free replacements anywhere in the world for 3 years.

Other good brands to check out include the Nice rack, made by Surly, the same company that makes the Long Haul Trucker bicycle. It's heavy (double the weight of a Tubus rack) but robust and comes with a top platform so you can mount something lightweight like your sleeping bag and mat to the front of the bike, saving room on the back for the heavy stuff.

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 them.

### Read More

→ [Choosing Racks](#) - What we used and other good choices.



*Choose good racks to get all your luggage safely over miles of rough roads.*

Photo © [Heidi Hvarregaard](#) and [Martin Thorsoe](#)



# Trailers

*“Without new experiences, something inside of us sleeps.  
The sleeper must awaken.” – Frank Herbert*

## Trailers are an alternative choice to panniers for carrying luggage.

They cost and weigh about the same as the standard combination of panniers and racks. Trailers have definite advantages if you're going off-road, down narrow tracks, want to carry a lot of gear or take young kids along. Trailers can also come in handy if your bike doesn't have attachment points for racks.

We don't have any first-hand experience with trailers but models to consider include the single-wheeled [BOB Yak Plus](#) and the [Extrawheel](#). Double-wheeled options include [Burley's Nomad Cargo](#), the [Y-Frame](#) from [Carry Freedom](#) and the [Wandertec Bongo](#).

For more insight on one wheel versus two, we turned to the [Bike Trailer Blog](#) and an informative article, written by David Herbold.

### 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 100lbs, this can be quite 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.”

#### Reasons To Choose A Trailer

- All your things are in one place, making packing easy
- Great for bulky, heavy items (large quantities of water, a backpack for hiking trips)
- More uses than just touring (carrying groceries, firewood).
- Can minimise strain on your bike
- Wider profile encourages cars to give you more passing room
- You can easily unhook the trailer and ride a 'naked' bike, without racks
- Some trailers can be flipped over and used as a table.
- Still fairly unusual. Makes a good conversation starter.
- Aggressive dogs tend to chase the trailer, keeping them away from your legs.

## Doug's Experience With A Trailer

"I bought a BOB trailer and a Yak Sak many years ago, and I used it on my ride across Canada and then again when I went to Ethiopia.

I'll start with the advantages of a trailer.

The trailer takes a lot of weight off the bicycle itself, so you don't have to worry as much about broken spokes and flat tires.

There is a lot of room in the trailer and the size of the trailer means that it is easy to carry long and bulky items like tents, tent poles, sleeping bags, and sleeping bags. You never even have to think about it. Everything just fits in.

The BOB was great as a utility trailer after I'd set up camp. I'd ride to the nearest town or farm and fill up on something like 10 gallons of water.

One doesn't need that much water necessarily, but it's a nice luxury.

The trailer also worked well for gathering up and carrying firewood back to camp.

Finally, I found that the flat bottom of the BOB was handy as a table. I'd flip the trailer over, jam a log under one end or the other to level it out, and voila, a nice, big tabletop.

Some of the disadvantages of a BOB and Yak Sak combination are also pretty obvious.

Having the one big compartment is convenient, but it also means you can't organize things as easily and you are putting things like your camp stove, camp fuel, tools, and grease into the same bag as your clothes, food, and books. A leaking fuel bottle could cause quite a mess.

It's also more difficult to get at things. With the trailer, you have to get off the bike and walk around to the back. That soon becomes a major irritation.

When I wanted to leave the BOB behind at the campsite, I wanted a pannier bag. It's overkill to bring the whole trailer just to ride down to the lake and snap pictures or to ride into town and pick up some spaghetti sauce. Even if you did, now the Yak Sak is empty, and your few items and purchases will be bouncing around like crazy inside that big empty bag.

Overall, for me, pannier bags are the way to go. There are advantages to a trailer, but they are outweighed by all the disadvantages.

Where my trailer really shined was when I used it in Canada in my day-to-day life to make trips to the grocery store and things like that. You probably wouldn't put four pannier bags on the bike to go to the grocery store and get a weeks' worth of groceries but the trailer is ideal for that.

For a bike tour, I'd say that pannier bags have the upper hand." - [Doug Nienhuis](#)



*A trailer can make a good table for a BBQ after a long day on the road.*

Photo © Sue Gardiner

# On The Road



*Are you ready to hit the road? There's plenty out there to explore by bike.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)



# Finding Your Style

*"Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and celebrate the journey." – Fitzhugh Mullan*

## Once on the road, it's time to discover what style of bike touring suits you best.

There's no one easy answer. Ways to bike tour are as varied as the people who tour and each variety of bike travel has its benefits and downsides.

How much money you have will be one of the biggest influences on your style of touring.

Some folks set out with bank accounts brimming from a few years in a good career. They tend to travel on lightly loaded bikes, stop at restaurants for lunch and dinner instead of carrying heavy cooking sets and spend most nights in a hotel.

They don't hesitate to spend money on good gear either, preferring high quality equipment that's unlikely to fail over the challenge of impromptu roadside repairs. These high-end cyclists may go it alone but they're also often tempted by guided tours, where someone else takes care of the planning and carries the luggage.

On the other end of the scale are the cyclists who travel on pennies a day. They live on a diet of pasta and onions (or whatever food happens to be cheapest), make their gear last until it's literally falling apart and never pay to see a tourist attraction.

The reward for their dedication to a frugal lifestyle is the ability to travel for years on what seems like an impossibly small budget. They also tend to carry more stuff because the weight penalty isn't as bad as the cost of buying something new. At night they rely on their wits to find good stealth camping spots, only using campgrounds as a last resort.

Distance can be as much a dividing point as budget. Some people seem to have wings on their bikes and easily cover 100km a day, without feeling stressed or overly tired. Others rarely go more than 60km because they'd rather stop to take pictures, savour long lunch breaks and talk with people along the way.

Most of us fall somewhere between the extremes.

When Andrew and I tour, we aim for a distance of about 80km a day. We certainly don't travel lightly, though we do sometimes mail things ahead if we know we won't need them for a while. We cook most of our own food and head for out-of-the-way spots instead of tourist favourites. We do some stealth camping too but you're just as likely to find us in a campground or a hotel if the weather is really bad. We treat ourselves to a cold beer or an ice cream on most days and very occasionally we'll splurge on a meal out.

It doesn't really matter where you fit in this picture because everyone is different. What is fun for one person will be sheer unhappiness for someone else and it may take you a few days or even weeks to figure out exactly what works for you. How you bike tour isn't really the issue. The key is just to start slowly and find the rhythm that works for you by trying as many different ways of touring as possible until you discover one that just feels right.



Andrew at work cooking supper.

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

# Managing Money

*"Wandering re-establishes the original harmony which once existed between man and the universe." -Anatole France*

## Managing your money on tour is easy, thanks to the internet and cash machines

Even in places as remote as the edges of the Sahara desert and the ancient Silk Road cities of Samargand, you'll be able to access both, making it a breeze to keep an eye on your bank account from far away and withdraw cash as you go. Just make sure you set up an online banking account before you leave home and get a spare bank card, in case you lose your main one. Having a credit card for unexpected expenses is also a good idea.

Because bank machines are so widespread, chances are you'll be able to withdraw funds at least once a week, if not everyday. This almost universal convenience means we rarely carry more than \$100 in cash at any one time and we don't worry about theft because we don't have much to lose. You can cut the risk of theft even further by not keeping all your money in one place. Put enough for the day in your handlebar bag and then spread the rest between your other panniers.

You may even want to put a few bills inside your handlebars or down your seat post, as a hidden emergency fund. If your handlebar bag has a detachable liner, you can also put money between the liner and the shell of the bag.

Occasionally you'll get so far off the beaten track that bank machines will disappear for days or weeks. In particular, this applies to the countries of Iran, Turkmenistan and Burma, where there are no international ATMs or credit card systems. In this case, stocking up on cash before you enter the country is the only option. The good news is that in places like these, where there aren't many bank machines, prices also tend to be low so you may need far less money than you might think.

Finally, on any trip outside of the developed world you'll likely have to use money changers at least once. You won't have to look hard for them, they'll be waiting as soon as you cross the border and these frontier businessmen are always eager for your business. Be wary though. The ones at the border rarely offer the best deals. Don't be afraid to negotiate if the exchange rate seems excessively unfavourable.

It's better to wait until you're further inside the country to change your money, where rates are almost always better. Don't be fooled into thinking the man on the street is your only option. Jewellery sellers often act as money changers and we've even managed to swap old cash for new in a hardware shop!

Watch out for anyone who starts spinning a line about how you can only change money with him because the banks are closed or no one will take your money on the other side of the border. In these situations we walk away because stories designed to make you fearful usually end up in a rip off.



*Jewellery sellers are also money changers in many parts of the world, like these women in Turkmenistan.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

# Where To Sleep

*"Away, away, from men and towns,  
To the wild wood and the downs."  
- Percy Bysshe Shelley*

**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 most frequently rely on:

## 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, far from the ringing of a mobile phone or blaring televisions. 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, out of sight of people and roads and, preferably, free of any garbage or graffiti that might indicate a local hangout or party spot.

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. Avoid dirty roadside rest stops at all costs.



*Wild camping spots can be beautiful and peaceful.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)

## Wild Camping Dos and Don'ts

**DO** find a spot away from houses and hidden from roads. You want to be unseen by anyone passing by.

**DO** develop an eye for good spots. Areas marked as woodland on your map offer good camping potential. Small hills by the side of the road can provide cover if you can haul your bike up and over the crest.

**DO** be prepared for inquisitive visitors, especially in the Middle East and Asia. In Morocco, dozens of people would gather to watch us pack our tent in the morning. In India, cyclists report curious farmers unzipping the tent door to find out who is inside!

**DO** leave early the next morning and take all your garbage with you.

**DON'T** deliberately trespass. That means no jumping fences or crossing onto marked private property.

**DON'T** camp in dry riverbeds. A little rain can bring them to life. Even if the rain is far away, a stream can still end up flooding through your tent!

**DON'T** start a fire or do anything else that might attract attention, like playing loud music.



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 of staying as hidden as possible (don't get a yellow tent!) and respecting 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.

## 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 America, watch out for the swankier privately-run campsites. They may be sparkling clean but they 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.

Things are better in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, where prices are generally lower and there tends to be a dedicated and decent spot for tents. Sometimes use of a kitchen or lounge area is even included. In less touristy areas, like the Middle East, you'll still find campgrounds but expect a rustic experience and go prepared to bargain down the price.

Your best option though, where it exists, is a publicly run campground. Operated by municipalities and national governments, they tend to 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. They also often offer a special price for bike tourists and are less likely to be overbooked in peak summer season.

## 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](#) – only for bike tourists – and [Couchsurfing](#), with its worldwide network of members.



*Through groups like WarmShowers and Couchsurfing, you can mean locals who often turn into good friends.*

Photo © [Yves & Ingrid](#)

## 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, just 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.

## Hostels

Sometimes you just need a break from the tent and the cheapest way to do this is with a bed in a hostel. Prices start around \$10 U.S. for a space in a dorm (bring earplugs to drone out the sound of snoring roommates) to around \$50 U.S. for a private double room – near the cost of a budget hotel. For your money, you get not only a bed but also a shared common area to lounge in and usually kitchen access. Like campgrounds, quality varies widely. The furnishings can be tatty and you may need to supply your own bedding. Hostels can also fill up quickly during the summer so call ahead if you want to be sure of securing a place for the night.

## Hotels

Nothing will blow your budget more quickly than a few nights in a hotel but they'll be worth every penny if you're sick or have been riding all day through terrible weather. Hotels become much more affordable if you can split the cost with friends. In cheaper parts of the world like Thailand or India, even bike tourists on a modest budget will be able to regularly splurge on hotels because rooms can always be found for just a few dollars. Whenever you take a hotel, make sure there's a safe place to keep your bike – either in a locked storage area or directly in your room. Never leave your bike on the street outside overnight.



*Try asking at a local cafe if you can pitch your tent nearby. Often they're only too happy to oblige, especially if you eat dinner and breakfast inside.*

Photo © [TravellingTwo](#)



# Bike & Gear Security

*"All bicycles weigh fifty pounds. A thirty-pound bicycle needs a twenty-pound lock. A forty-pound bicycle needs a ten-pound lock. A fifty-pound bicycle doesn't need a lock." - author unknown*

**Now that you've got a beautiful touring bike, of course you don't want it to go missing. Here's the good news: it's quite rare to have your bike stolen and a few simple steps can almost guarantee that you'll come home with your bike safe and sound.**

Most bikes are stolen in cities. On a bike tour, you tend to avoid cities because rural areas are much more tranquil and enjoyable to cycle through. There aren't many 'model offenders' out in the countryside as a general rule.

You may also worry about your bike being taken in areas where poverty is common. On the surface, this seems like a reasonable fear. After all, your bike is a highly useful item that many people could not afford.

In our experience, however, some of the world's poorest countries offer the greatest security. The traveller is often seen as an honoured guest and stealing a bike would be unthinkable. Also, a foreigner's bike is so different from local models that it would be easy to spot if anyone did buy it and ride it around town. Finally, in small communities any thieves are usually well known and the police or local leaders can quickly track down the likely suspects.

All that said, it never hurts to take a few precautions and there are several ways to minimise your risk of theft.



*In rural areas, this thin cable lock will probably provide enough security. A thicker one would be better for cities.*

Photo © [Richard Masoner \(Flickr\)](#)

- **Get a decent lock** – If you go for a cable lock, get a thick one and something long enough to weave around at least one tire and frame, plus a couple panniers. A D-lock brings more peace of mind but it's also very heavy so unless you're going to be leaving your bike unattended in cities, it's probably unnecessary.
- **Appoint a bike security guard** – If you're cycling as a couple or in a group, get one person to watch the bikes for short excursions like grocery shopping. Solo cyclists can ask a local shopkeeper to watch their bike or even pay guards outside of hotels, bars and tourist attractions \$1-2 for a little extra security.
- **Budget for hotels in cities** – Campgrounds in cities tend to be outside the central area. This means you're tempted to take your bike into the centre but then you have to leave it unattended while you visit local attractions. And what will you do with the rest of your luggage? It's much better to park your bike and bags in a room and go sightseeing on foot.



- **Practice good locking techniques** – Attach your bike to something secure and make sure you secure the wheels as well as the frame. Put your bike in a highly visible place. In front of a business is better than down a dark alley. Don't get lazy when camping. Attach the bike to a picnic table, tree or any other solid object in sight. If nothing else, attach it to your tent so that you'll be jostled awake in case of trouble.
- **Make your bike look undesirable** – Cover brand names with tape. Remove attractive items like bike computers and lights. Pack the top of your panniers with dirty underwear. String your laundry across the back of the bike to dry.
- **Take extra care on public transport** – Be responsible for loading your bike into the luggage vans of trains. Lock it inside the carriage if possible or take off the seatpost and turn the handlebars so it can't be easily driven away.

### What We Do

We have a cable lock and a D-Lock (also known as a U-Lock).

In most scenarios we just use the cable lock to stop the passing criminal from taking our bikes but in busier places, if we must leave our bikes, we use both locks for peace of mind. We also tried a motion detector alarm for our bike but it stopped working after a few rainy days.

Mostly we leave our baggage on the bikes. It looks dishevelled and faded enough now that we think it's pretty unattractive. But we always take our handlebar bag with us, which contains our money, passports and camera, and we often take the bag with our computer and other electronic gadgets along as well. That way, even if the bikes are stolen, we haven't lost the things that are most expensive or hardest to replace.

If carrying all those things is too much of a burden (at an archaeological site, for example), we arrange the bikes so that Andrew's back bag with the computer in it is against a wall or in a corner or other hard to reach spot. Then we put Friedel's bike against Andrew's bike so the most valuable things are the hardest to reach. We do this next to the ticket booth or security office, where people are the least likely to cause trouble and we specifically ask the guards to watch our bikes.

When wild camping, we try to find somewhere discreet to hide away. The idea is that no one should know we are there, which leaves no possibility for anyone to attack us during the night or steal our things. However, people show up in the most unlikely places sometimes so we always lock our bikes to each other and tie a few tent strings to the bikes, just in case.

One effective technique for security while sleeping involves attaching several small bells to a length of fishing line. Once your tent is set up, run the line around your tent using nearby trees and bushes, at about knee-height. The idea is that if anyone comes during the night and tries to approach your tent, they will trip over the wire and fall, causing lots of commotion and ringing bells and alerting you to the problem.

Hopefully this will be disruptive enough to scare the intruder into run away! The downside is that the bells can also shake in the wind or if an animal passes by, which might unnecessarily startle you.

Finally, if the worst happens we have recorded our bike serial numbers and we have good photos of them to help the police.

# Equipment List

## Ask 100 cyclists and you'll get 100 different lists of things to take with you on tour.

Much depends on the style of tour you have planned. Will you be staying in hotels or camping? In hot climates or cooler weather? Here's a basic list for fully loaded touring that will give you some ideas of what to consider.

In most cases, you won't need everything listed here.

Things we think are essential for any trip - even just for a weekend jaunt - are in *italics*. The rest depends on the length of your trip, where you're going, the expected weather and what kind of access you'll have to bike shops along the way. Links go to more information on [TravellingTwo.com](http://TravellingTwo.com) and other relevant websites.

### Accessories

- ☐ *Bottle cages and bottles* (3 bottles ideally)
- ☐ Bicycle computer
- ☐ *Bicycle pump*  
→ [Topeak Mountain Morph](#)
- ☐ *Bell or Horn*
- ☐ *Bungee cords or compression straps*
- ☐ *Helmet*
- ☐ *Locks*
- ☐ *Lights*  
→ [Planet Bike Superflash](#)
- ☐ *Mirror*  
→ [Take-A-Look Mirror](#)

### Camping Gear

- ☐ *Tent*  
→ [Hilleberg Nallo 3GT](#)  
→ [MSR Hubba Hubba](#)
- ☐ *Groundsheet*
- ☐ *Tarp*
- ☐ *Headlamps*  
→ [Petzl Tikka](#)
- ☐ *Flip flops for grotty showers*
- ☐ *Sleeping bag*
- ☐ *Sleeping bag liners*
- ☐ *Sleeping mat*  
→ [Prolite Plus](#)  
→ [Z-Lite](#)
- ☐ *String, 6-10 meters* (for a clothesline, putting food in trees, etc)
- ☐ *Travel chairs*  
→ [Thermarest Camping Chairs](#)
- ☐ *Water bladders*  
→ [Camelbak Unbottle 70](#)
- ☐ *Water filter*  
→ [MSR Miniworks](#)  
→ [More about water filters](#)

### Tools & Spare Parts

- ☐ *Allen keys*
- ☐ *Bike grease*
- ☐ *Brake & gear cables*
- ☐ *Brake pads*
- ☐ *Mini cassette remover*  
→ [NBT2](#)  
→ [JA Stein Tool](#)
- ☐ *Chain lubricant*
- ☐ *Cone spanners for taking hubs apart*
- ☐ *Duct tape & zipties*
- ☐ *Multitool with a chain breaker*
- ☐ *Spare nuts and bolts*
- ☐ *Proofide* (for leather saddles)
- ☐ *Puncture repair kit*
- ☐ *Rag for cleaning*
- ☐ *Replacement spokes*
- ☐ *Touch-up paint*
- ☐ *Tire levers*

## The Kitchen

- ☐ Cookware (1-2 pots, non-stick frying pan, sharp knife for chopping)
- ☐ Stove
  - [MSR Whisperlite](#)
  - [Trangia](#)
- ☐ Thermos (great for cold weather camping)
- ☐ Utensils and cutlery (plate, cup, fork, spoon, lighter, stirring spoon or spatula)
- ☐ Cleaning Up (Dish soap, dish towel, pot scrubber)
- ☐ Spices (in film canisters for easy storage)
- ☐ Kitchen Sink
  - [Ortlieb foldable bowl](#)
- ☐ Swiss Army knife (corkscrew, bottle opener)
- ☐ Screw-top bottles (for liquids like oil, vinegar, honey)

## Everyday Clothes

- ☐ Cycling Shorts (x2)
- ☐ Padded Cycling Gloves
- ☐ T-shirts (x2-3)
- ☐ Long-sleeved shirt or fleece for warmth\*
- ☐ Cargo pants (for off the bike)
- ☐ Underwear (x3-5)
- ☐ Socks\* (x3-5)
- ☐ Sunglasses
  - [Why you need them and what we use](#)
- ☐ Cycling Shoes
  - [Shoes for touring](#)

\*Merino wool is our favourite material: warm, light and long-lasting

## Cold & Wet Weather

- ☐ Rain jacket & pants
- ☐ Shoe covers
- ☐ Cycling tights
- ☐ Waterproof gloves
- ☐ Waterproof socks
- ☐ Headband (protects your ears in strong winds and cold weather)
- ☐ Long Johns (to sleep in)

## Hot Weather

- ☐ Bandana (can be soaked in water to keep your head and neck cool)
- ☐ Hat with a wide brim to keep the sun off
- ☐ Lightweight-long sleeved shirt (keeping the sun off your skin is better than sunscreen)
- ☐ Swimsuit

## Toiletries

- ☐ Basic kit (shampoo, toothbrush, razor, soap etc...)
- ☐ Baby Wipes
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Roll of toilet paper
- ☐ Laundry powder
- ☐ Travel Towel

## For Women

- ☐ Menstruation Cup
  - [Mooncup](#)
- ☐ Urinary Device
  - [pStyle](#)

## First Aid Kit

- ☐ Band-aids
- ☐ Antiseptic cream
- ☐ Emergency blanket
- ☐ Rehydration crystals
- ☐ Tweezers
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Gauze
- ☐ Headache tablets
- ☐ Diarrhea treatment
- ☐ Anti-inflammatories
- ☐ Cold medicines
- ☐ Tiger balm (great for sore muscles)
- ☐ Laytex gloves



## Technology

- ☐ *Digital Camera*
- ☐ Kindle (if you don't want to carry books)
- ☐ mp3 player
- ☐ Netbook laptop (Asus EEE is good)
- ☐ Padded bags for laptop and gadgets
- ☐ Spare AA and AAA batteries
- ☐ Mini tripod
- ☐ Cables and electric plug converters (for foreign trips)
- ☐ USB stick

## Random Things

- ☐ Books
- ☐ Playing cards
- ☐ Shortwave radio
- ☐ Spare keys
- ☐ Paper notebook
- ☐ Lens cleaner for glasses, camera lenses

## **Bike Touring Basics**

A free eBook from [TravellingTwo.com](http://TravellingTwo.com) -  
the website for news, tips and bike touring inspiration.