

axiomTM
PERFORMANCE GEAR

TOURING 101: A GUIDE TO GETTING OUT THERE





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How often do you come across a truly unique travelling experience? There's an adventure you may not have thought of that you should really consider. Maybe you have given it a thought but weren't sure how to make it happen. We thought we'd help by giving you a guide to planning this amazing experience for yourself. Combining the thrill of adventure with the fun of a vacation and the joy of riding your bicycle, once you tour you'll never go back.

Imagine re-experiencing entire regions, seeing landscapes like never before and challenging yourself in ways you've only imagined. These are just some of things that bicycle touring has to offer you. You can make your tours as easy or as difficult as you like, the decision is yours.

This guide will provide you with all of the necessary information to plan and organize your next trip as a bicycle traveler. Getting into bicycle touring is easier than you think and Axiom can help you reach your dream destination. You probably have some question before your first tour and this guide will help answer them.

1. Touring in a group or going solo, what's best?

In a Group: Like most things in life there are pros and cons in touring with a group. On the plus side:

1. You get to share your adventure with others.

2. You can split the load; usually resulting in lighter gear for everyone
3. If you run into a problem, like a mechanical failure, you've got support and assistance.
4. As you ride you can draft off of each other to conserve energy.
5. There is someone other than your bicycle or the creepy guy in the campsite next to you to talk to at night.
6. It's fun to ride with friends.
7. If something exciting happens you'll have people to back up your story; the fish really was that big!

On the down side:

1. You will be dependent on others; which means you may not get to do everything you want to.
2. Not everyone will want to do the same thing as you do
3. You will have to make compromises, yes like a relationship, to placate some group members
4. You may not get much alone time

Solo: If you go solo, your schedule is likely to be more flexible since you don't have to coordinate your activities with anyone else; you have only yourself to take care of. Even if you travel alone, you'll be meeting people constantly (other cyclists, locals, campers, etc). You will rarely be completely alone. Just remember that if you are going to be touring off-road you should always travel with someone else, you don't want to be the person others use as an example of why you never go into the backcountry alone.

2. Is it better to organize everything yourself and be self-sufficient or should you join a fully supported, organized tour?

There are numerous companies that offer bicycle touring packages all around the world. This is the easiest way to go; they provide everything you need so you can take the time to enjoy the scenery. However, you might be up for the adventure of setting out on your own or with a couple of friends and marching to the beat of your own drum; here are a couple of things to consider:

Supported: For your first cycling trip, try a supported bike tour. Numerous cycling clubs and bicycle touring companies plan expeditions in locations around the world. You will benefit from the advantages of being in a group without having to deal with the management: ride planning, accommodations, food, and transportation will all be taken care of for you. Moreover, while familiarizing yourself with bicycle touring, you will find out how much you like it!

Self-supported: Maybe you have a penchant for adventure. Well, a self-supported tour will offer it up in spades. A warning though; before you sell all your belongings and leave for a world tour, begin with a few shorter self-supported trips and work your way up.

When gauging what you might prefer, start easy:

Pack for a picnic, find a loop that will allow you to leave from home and come back by the end of the day. Making your home the departure and arrival point will make your first trip easier; since you are familiar with your region, you know what your resources are if something unexpected happens. And, it's easy access to your couch for a nap after your ride.

When you feel ready to undertake a bigger bicycle tour, aim for an excursion during the weekend (a long weekend is even better). Map out a route that offers alternative routes so you can cut short or ride more one day. Be flexible and have realistic goals. This trip should be an occasion to see how comfortable you are on your bike and test your equipment as well as yourself.

3. What should I aim for in terms of distance to cover (daily & overall)?

While bicycle touring, aim for distances you feel capable of covering and remain flexible; there are a lot of unexpected circumstances when you are touring.

1. On short bike tours, monitor how many kilometres you travel in one hour, depending on the type of terrain you are riding on. Gradually you will learn how to pace yourself and how to set achievable goals.
2. The first day(s) of your tour should be shorter than your planned daily average.
3. Do not be afraid of long distances. The scenery will always be more enjoyable on your bicycle than in a car (and much more rewarding)!
4. Mentally breakdown longer days into stages: Pedal stroke by pedal stroke your destination grows ever closer.
5. Whenever planning a route from a map, bear in mind there will be elevation changes. The road will never be as flat as your map.
6. Throughout your trip, plan shorter days. They will allow you to explore more of your environment.
7. Do not forget to include rest days and free time in your planning. Those will keep your body and your mind refreshed!
8. If the weather is too bad (or dangerous) for you to hit the road one day, modify your plans and take a day off.
9. Remember to do it your way, there will days where all the elements are against you. Sometimes you will have

to take a different road: these days often make the best memories...

10. A final piece of advice: remember touring is not only about the destination, it's about the journey!

4. How long do I want to tour for?

Depending on how much time you have and how much time you would like to spend riding, your bicycle touring destination will vary.

Are you going for two weeks in Europe or a month in South America? Do you want to go camping for a weekend or you are biking across Asia for half a year? It sounds obvious, but the longer and the farther the tour is, the more comprehensive your preparation will be.

In the end, it all comes down to you. Perhaps your first two-week trip makes you want to go bicycle touring for a month and bring your family along, maybe you decide that you're a weekend warrior or that a year on the road is just what you need. There is only one way you will know and that is by getting out there and finding out.

5. What kind of roads do I prefer to ride on?

If you are riding off-road your trip will be, to a great extent, different than if you would be riding on the road.

Bicycle touring off-road: Safety first

1. Never go bicycle touring off-road alone. As with all backcountry expeditions, it is imperative that you travel with a partner.
2. Always leave details of your route, timing and check points to ensure others are aware if a problem arises.
3. Carry a communication device such as a satellite phone to remain in touch with “civilization”
4. You will probably need to be more self-sufficient off-road since occasions to stop for food or assistance will be fewer. You may need to carry more gear (more food and a water filter for instance).
5. On your map, locate water supply points.
6. Make sure you have quality maps of the trails you will be riding.
7. If you are traveling in a government run park, be sure you obtain all necessary access permits before starting your trip.

Bicycle touring on the road:

1. Plan a route that avoids major highways (many freeways are closed to bicycle traffic or simply dangerous).

2. Local bike shops may be able to offer route advice or interesting hot spots.
3. Look for designated bicycle routes available from state or provincial departments.
4. Look for scenic roads.
5. Mind the prevailing winds: from West to East in North America and North to South on the Pacific Coast.
6. Identify tourist information centers, main attractions, places to make pit stop and bike shops along the way. Such locations offer a great rest stop and contain valuable local information!

6. What kind of accommodations would I be the most comfortable with?

This really depends on what your comfort levels are. Depending what kind of accommodation you prefer, you will have to carry different equipment.

Obviously, if you are camping you will carry a tent but if you stop at hostels you may simply carry a sleeping bag.

Moreover, the type of lodging you choose will lead you to different routes. Suppose that you decide to stay at a hotel, you may have to ride along major roads as opposed to a B & B which could be farther out of town.

1. If you are bicycle touring during the high season, book in advance.
2. Check for local events and festivals along your route. They offer an interesting detour but also affect accommodation availability.
3. When placing your reservation, ask if there are facilities for you to store your bike!
4. Ask family, friends and relatives to provide shelter along the way.
5. Subscribe to a “couch surfing” organization to have a place to stay at -almost everywhere in the world!
6. Look for state and provincial campgrounds that offer discounted campsites for hikers/bikers.
7. Every kind of accommodation has something different to offer, one advice remains: be flexible. Mixing different types of lodging could be the best option.

4. Always carry snacks, including sweet treats. They make good rewards at the top of hills and provide the boost you may need when exhausted.
5. Keeping packed food away from hungry critters camping can be a challenge.
6. Hydration: Identify water supply points along the road and ensure you will be carrying enough water while riding. You could take 2 or 3 bottles with you or opt for a hydration pack.

Once again, flexibility remains key. Eating at restaurants, experiencing local food or cooking will all be enjoyable at some point of your bike tour.

7. Will I be preparing my own meals or not?

If you decide to bring cooking necessities you may gain on flexibility (eat wherever you want, whenever you want) but you will equally lose room for other equipment and increase the weight you have to carry.

1. Most of the time, you will stop to get food as you go.
2. Just in case, always pack enough food for one day
3. Consider eating at restaurants if you want to travel light.

8. Do I have the right equipment?

Make sure you know how to properly use all of your equipment; your local bike shop can help you with this. And make sure you test your equipment before you leave for your trip.

Bike:

A simple answer is that most comfortable bikes will do. However, like most things some bicycles will be better suited than other. Go and talk to your local bike shop and they will be able to recommend the right bicycle and gear for your needs.

Before you go:

1. Be sure to ride frequently in advance and mimic your trip condition. Being fit will make sure you have a more enjoyable journey.
2. There's no better way to familiarize yourself with your bike than using it.
3. Visit your preferred bicycle retailer for a tune-up. Be sure to check wheel tension, brake pads and tire wear. Under load, these factors will greatly affect the quality of your ride.
4. Ensure that your riding position suits you. While at your local shop have them check for positioning. Consider replacing parts such as seat, stem and handlebars to increase comfort and efficiency.
5. The look of the bike does not matter as you may not want to attract too much attention to it (plus you will put rack & bags on it).

Racks:

1. Having the proper racks and bags will help you get the most out of your trip.
2. Axiom has a rack for every ride.
3. Whether you have disc brakes, a butterfly handlebar, a full suspension bike or a road bike, Axiom has what you need. Our racks can carry from 15 up to 70 kg but only weight between 380 and 1020 grams. Our Streamliner racks are expressly designed to move weight inboard for more stability when loaded.

Bags:

Once you have the right racks, you need bags to carry your belongings. When selecting you bags bear in mind:

1. The load you will carry (volume and weight)
2. The type of weather you will be riding in: lightweight fabric bags for dry conditions or heavier but waterproof bags for wet conditions.
3. Handle bar bags offer convenient storage for small items needed throughout the day. A Map window allows for on the go navigation while keeping your maps clean and dry.
4. If you plan for frequent stops on your trip, consider a motion detector lock so you can leave your bags unattended.

Packing:

Make sure you distribute the weight you carry evenly on both sides of your bike.

1. Pack the heaviest items as low as possible to keep center of gravity low.
2. Remember to keep heavy items to the rear of the bike as a weighted front wheel can interfere with steering.
3. When packing keep the gear you will need to access more often towards the top of your bags.

Helmet:

Before you start thinking about what to pack for your bike trip, purchase a good helmet. A helmet can save your life in the case of a fall or collision.

A good helmet offers ventilation and, most importantly, fits your head. It has to be tight enough to stay in place without being buckled yet still comfortable. The buckle should attach so that two fingers can be slid between the strap and your neck. On both sides of your head, the straps should meet just below the lobe of your ear. Your local shop can help you find a properly fitting helmet.

Gloves:

Gloves will not only protect your hands if you fall but they will also provide you additional comfort. Moreover, when riding in the cold, they will keep your hands warm. When riding in the sun, they will prevent your hands from getting sunburned.

Clothing:

1. Choose light clothes that dry fast.
2. Dress in layers to adapt with changing weather conditions.
3. Make sure your clothes are adapted to the type of weather you will be riding in.
4. Have clothes with reflective material for night or low light riding.
5. Have apparel that will keep you comfortable if it rains.
6. Remember that you can always do laundry. At the end of every day, wash what you have been wearing and let it dry throughout the night.

Cycle computer or a GPS system: Both will ensure you keep track of your mileage, but a GPS will make sure you know where you are going.

Lights and Reflectors: For safety, in case you get caught after dusk, have reflectors and lights on your bicycle. It is dangerous to ride if not well prepared.

Lock: Your bike is key to your journey, securing it with a lock will keep your mind free of concerns when you are away from it. Bring a light but secure lock with you.

Tools: Strictly carry what you can handle: Before your trip, learn how to use what you are taking with you.

Take care of your bicycle, your equipment and yourself.

1. **For your Bicycle:** Tubes, tire levers, mini-pump, patch kit, multi-tool, chain pins, brake & gear cables are some items you want to have on hand.
 2. **For your Equipment:** A flashlight and some duck tape are two key items to take with you. Also carry things such as fabric patches: if something breaks down you will enjoy being able to fix it on the go!
 3. **For Yourself:** A basic First aid kit containing various bandages, disinfectant, tweezers, gloves, and painkillers.
 4. Have communication devices such as a cell phone or walkie-talkies when in group.
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9. What kind of training will prepare me the best for my tour?

Organizing your tour includes a minimum of physical, mental and technical preparation.

Physical preparation:

Your physical preparation is an excellent way of knowing your limits in order to plan a trip that will suits your capacities.

Riding:

1. To get your body ready for touring you firstly want to familiarize yourself with your bicycle: ride it and make sure you are comfortable on it.
2. Progressively increase the lengths of your rides.
3. Gradually, add touring gear to your bike.
4. Think about commuting to work for a regular work out on the bike.

Improve your flexibility:

Make a habit of stretching after your bike rides.

Improve your strength:

Go to the gym or simply add core strengthening exercises to your stretching routine. Fitness balls offer an inexpensive and effective way to gain core strength and improve balance.

Take care of yourself:

1. Visit your doctor for a complete examination.
2. Get all inoculations recommended for your destination.

3. Eat well.
4. Rest well.

Mental preparation:

Some days will be as much a mental challenge as a physical one; make sure you are prepared mentally as well as physically.

Diminish anxiety before leaving:

1. Learn about your destination and touring in general. That will reduce the level of stress while answering questions you may have.
2. Accept that you cannot know and control everything.
3. Find a good bicycle retailer that will give you tips and help you assess your needs.
4. Ask people experienced in bike touring for advice. Online forums can be a great resource.
5. Do not only rely on the Internet as your only resource.
6. Think about strategies for the tougher days so you know how to turn them into great memories: bring music, keep a journal, have a book to read, tie a funny mascot onto your bike, etc. When the elements are against you, you will know what to do in order to keep going. Bear in mind that, sometimes, the worst case scenarios make the best stories to tell!

Technical preparation:

1. Learn how to repair your bike. Ask around or take lessons.
2. Consider taking a First Aid course.
3. Know your equipment: know what you have and what it can be used for.

4. Test everything you bring before you leave.

8. Satellite and topographic maps are available online. These resources can be of great benefit in deciding a route.

10. Do I have all the travelling documents/articles necessary?

Emergency contact: Leave a photocopy of ALL your travel documents with someone who will be your emergency contact. Keep in regular contact with this person so they can track your progress in case of emergency.

Geographic Maps:

1. Get topographic maps: the most direct road on the map may not be the fastest on the bike.
2. If you need many maps, ask relatives or friends to send them to postal addresses for you to pick as you go.
3. In some regions, finding a map can be difficult. Visit the local libraries, information centers and even ask locals to obtain them.
4. If you cannot get a map in English, acquire one in the local language and ask the inhabitants to decipher it for you.
5. When selecting a route on the map, always identify alternatives.
6. Look for scenic roads.
7. Guidebooks are not necessary. Photocopy the pages containing potentially helpful information (about great cities for instance).

Passport: Make sure your passport is valid for at least 6 months or for the entire length of your trip giving you a bit of cushion at the end in case something in your trip changes. Make sure you know the contact information of your embassy.

Visas: Know what is required to visit a certain region, how and where to obtain those documents.

Credit Card: Verify that your credit card will not expire during your trip. Inform your credit card company of your destination and ask them if there will be any fees for foreign use and cash withdrawals. You may want to add a PIN number to your credit card for improved safety and cash withdrawals. Finally, know how to contact your credit card company. This may vary depending on an international location.

Debit Card: Verify if you will be able to use your debit card where you are going and ask if you will be charged additional fees. Ensure your card will not expire during your trip.

Travel cheques: Ensure that they will be accepted wherever you are going as they are being outdated by credit cards.

Cash: If you will not be able to use other forms of payment, make sure you carry enough cash with you. If banks and ATMs are not easily available where you are travelling, get the currency before you arrive or verify where and how you can get money.

Insurance: Purchase travel insurance and ensure that you are insured for the complete length of your trip. Know the procedure to follow in case you need to utilize your insurance coverage. Know the contact details of your insurance company.

11. How will I get there?

Taking the plane:

Be ready to spend a little extra to get your bicycle on the plane. Some companies will charge you \$50, others \$150 each way. Airlines have various policies when it comes to bicycles so make sure you know what it will cost beforehand.

Packing options:

In a cardboard bicycle box:

1. Ask your local bike shop for one that fits your bike.
2. In case your box rips open in the transport, attach everything you put into the box with zip ties.
3. Once at destination, you can dispose of the box only if you know you can get another when you come back. Otherwise, find a place to store it while touring.
4. If your start and end points are not the same, a cardboard box will be the best packing option. They are cheap and easy to find and disposed of.

In a wheeled rigid plastic box.

1. Purchase or rent one (note that all the necessary padding is included).
2. Plan a place to store your box while touring.

In a bike specific travel bag:

1. Purchase or rent one.
2. Plan a place to store your bag while touring.

Packing your bike:

1. Before you go take pictures of your equipment. These will serve as proof if anything happens in the transport.
2. If you do not know how to pack your bike, ask for assistance from someone who has done it before or visit your local bike shop for help.
3. To dismantle your bike, take the pedals off, then the front wheel. Remove the quick-releases and dismantle either the stem or the handlebar.
4. Remove your seatpost and mark the height with a piece of tape.
5. Put all parts together and, ideally, attach them to the bike frame with zip ties.
6. Ensure that your derailleurs are protected. It could be a good idea to remove your rear derailleur.
7. It is recommended that you deflate your tires and suspension –making sure there is some air still left in case of any shocks. Ensure that you have the right pumps to inflate them when you arrive.
8. Depending what type of packaging you choose, you are likely to need foam, (or any protective material), zip-ties and tape.

9. Put your biking shoes, helmet and other cycling gear in the box.
10. If there is enough room in your box, place your panniers in it. If not, put them into a plastic bag and check them in at the airport.
11. Use bubble wrap, foam or other packaging material to protect your bicycle.
12. Once you get to your final destination, unpack everything and verify that your equipment hasn't been damaged.
13. Test ride your bicycle before you start riding.

Taking the bus: Most bus companies will let you take your bicycle on the bus, sometimes for a minimal fee.

Contact the charter to find out if your bike needs to be packed; bike specific racks are available; bicycles allowed onboard are limited to certain number (you may have to reserve a place for yours or get to the bus station earlier to ensure it gets on).

Taking the train: When booking, mention you are traveling with a bike; you could then be assigned a bike specific location on the train. Extra fees may apply.

Taking the ferry: Most ferries welcome bicycles on board; check ahead of time to make sure yours will be welcomed too.

By reading this guide, you are getting a little closer to your touring goals. Now, it is up to you to choose a destination and get ready to roll! The last word: Remember that every person is unique, so is every tour. In the end, it's your trip. Make it exceptional, do it your way. For more information, tips and

advice, consult friends, your local bicycle shop and our touring links section.

Thanks for having us riding with you!

Axiom; *Making each ride even better.*

Resources

[Bicycle Touring 101](#)

Covers bike touring in depth.

[Ken Kifer's Bike Pages](#)

In-depth touring information.

[Gonecycling.com](#)

Cycling Safety & Education, Commuting & Touring.

[Travel with a bicycle](#)

Experiences of cyclists taking their bikes on the plane, the train, the bus, or the ferry. Non-commercial website.

[Couch Surfing](#)

Worldwide network for making connections between travelers and the local communities they visit.

[Bike Tour Reviews](#)

Reviews of European bike touring companies.

[Adventure Cycling](#)

American association for bicycle travellers.

[CTC - the UK's national cyclists' organization](#)

The oldest cycling association. UK based.

[Wheretocycle.com](#)

A user community for sharing bicycle touring information.