



Cycle Touring Gear List

If you are new to cycle touring and camping then it isn't always easy to know what gear to take, what works well, what is essential and what you can go without. Gear is very much a personal thing, what to one person is an essential may seem like to another a needless luxury. It's all down to your philosophy of touring and how much comfort you want. There are some who like to travel fast and light and take the bare minimum, some even go to the extremes of cutting labels out of their clothes to save weight!

We have listed below the gear that we usually take with us to give you an idea of what we carry. Our gear has evolved over the years as we have fine-tuned it and as new types of gear come on the market. Remember it is our personal choice and that there is no right or wrong way to cycle tour, do it your way and be happy.

The Bikes

The bikes we use are 2 Giant 'Expedition' 27 gear-touring bikes, which we have found to be excellent. Our original bikes were Claud Butler 'Odyssey' 18 gear hybrid bikes. They did us well, although their specifications weren't quite up to long tours as we had to replace various parts, like the back axles and bottom brackets!!

More information on our Giant Expedition bikes

Each of our 2 Giant 'Expedition' 27 gear-touring bikes are equipped with these extras for touring:

- 2 Ortlieb Bike Packer Plus rear panniers, with extra pockets.
- 2 Ortlieb Sports Packer Plus front panniers.
- 1 Ortlieb Ultimate 5 Plus bar bag.
- 1 Ortlieb Racpack (small size).
- 1 Cycle computer.
- 1 'Post Moderne' suspension seat post (very useful on East Germany's cobbled roads!)
- 1 'Bike Buddy' bottle cage.
- 1 Brooks 'Champion Flyer' saddle.

Personal Kit

- 2 prs cycling shorts.
- 2 Cycling tops.
- 2 prs Cycling socks.
- 1 pr Cycling shoes.
- 1 Cycle helmet
- 1 Gore-Tex helmet cover.
- 1 pr Ron Hill Bikesters.
- 1 Gore-Tex Paclite waterproof top.



1 pr Gore-Tex Paclite waterproof over trousers.

- 1pr Waterproof cycling overshoes.
- 1pr Gore-Tex socks (great for keeping the feet dry).
- 1 Pertex top (Callange).
- 1 pr Cycling gloves.
- 1 pr Waterproof cycling gloves.
- 1 pr Cycling sun glasses (Rudy Project - Wizard).
- 1 pr Zip off trousers.
- 1 Short sleeve shirt.
- 3 Handkerchiefs
- Underwear
- Swimming costume
- Wash kit (toothpaste, toothbrush, shampoo, deodorant, razor, soap etc.)
- 1 medium sized lightweight travel towel (we have tried several types but found the Lifeventure Trek Towels to be the best).
- 1 Fleece top.
- 1 lightweight insulated jacket - useful for cold evenings and doubles up as an extra pillow at night.
- Watch.

Most of our Cycle Touring takes place in the summer months, for colder climates or for touring at other times of the year you might wish to include warmer gear. We sometimes include a pair of thermal tops and long Johns, useful for cold nights.

Bike Repair & Maintenance Kit

The amount of repair kit that you take is dependent on your expertise at bike repair and to which countries you visit. For Holland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden although we had some mechanical problems (read our account Holland - Denmark98) we didn't seem to be too far away from a bike shop. Most of the repair shops realised we were touring and repaired our bikes while we waited or within a few hours and the prices were quite reasonable.

Basic repair kit

- Spare inner tube.
- Puncture repair kit with 8 patches and new glue + some 'leeches'.
- Homemade Multi tool kit (includes - spoke wrench, tire irons, chain tool, screw driver, 2-3-4-5-6mm Allen wrenches, 8-9-10mm spanners and a small Gerber Clutch Multi-tool which includes a small pair of pliers.)
- Lezyne Micro Floor Drive HVG Mini Floor Hand Pump With Gauge.
- Small plastic bottle of general lube.
- Selection of cable ties - useful for repairs.
- A 3m length of thin strong cord. (very useful for lashing broken racks back together!)



For more out of the way places we take:

- 1 spare folding tyre.
- 2 spare shifter cables.
- Magura service kit for the Hydraulic brakes.
- 1 spoke repair kit.
- A small selection of nuts and bolts.
- Other kit carried:
- 3 x 1 litre Stainless Steel drinks bottles.
- 1 Stainless Steel 0.5 litre vacuum flask (keeps drinks hot or cold and useful for carrying milk for brews).
- Maps & Ortlieb waterproof map case.
- Compact Digital Camera, memory cards and battery charger.
- Small pair of Binoculars.
- Small "hotel" type sewing kit.
- Notepad and pen.
- Passport, travel insurance documents, EHIC, ATM and credit cards.
- Waterproof stuff sacks or plastic bags for gear inside panniers. (We use some waterproof rucksack liners as we found that plastic bags tend to easily rip and tear with continuous stuffing).
- Earplugs (for sleeping at night on noisy campsites).
- 2 bike cables and locks.
- 2 Brooks saddle covers.
- 1 First aid kit (plasters, paracetamol, etc.).
- Sunbloc (Piz Buin Sport - we have found this to be the best as it's non greasy and survives a lot of sweating).
- Insect repellent.
- Some washing powder for laundry and a twisted elastic drying line.
- 1 Large lightweight nylon bike cover. (This has been a boon as it keeps the bikes dry overnight, no soggy seats and handlebars in the morning, it's also good for security as it keeps prying eyes off so that they are not noticed so much).
- 2 TTi PMR radios, as an intercom system (more information here).
- Smartphone, earphones & charger - We use it to make notes for this site and to write a diary of each tour, it also has our music collection on it, which is great.
- Amazon Kindle - Frank now carries one. It means that she has loads of books to read and the battery easily lasts a month as long as the Wi-Fi is turned off.

Camping Equipment

- 1 Helleberg Nallo GT, plus groundsheet protector footprint.
- 2 Mountain Equipment 'lightline' sleeping bags and sleeping bag inners. (We haven't used these for a while and now tend to use our duvet alternative see below).
- 2 sleepmats - We prefer the Exped down mats.



- 2 Exped seat kits (invaluable addition after a long day, saves a lot of back ache).
- 2 Blow-up pillows (Ajungilak Komfort Pute).
- 1 Optimus Polaris multifuel stove.
- 1 Camping cook set - includes 2 billies and a frying pan(Optimus).
- 1 Folding spatula (MSR).
- 2 Plastic plates.
- 2 Plastic mugs.
- 2 Titanium Sporks.
- 1 Small sharp knife.
- Washing up liquid and sponge.
- 5 litre folding water carrier (Ortlieb)
- 2 small LED torches.
- Swiss Army Knife.
- Matches and gas lighter.

See our page on 'How we pack our gear'. It might give you an idea of how we fit it all in!

Summer alternative

In summer my wife and I prefer to take a duvet instead of 2 sleeping bags. We take a goose down king size duvet bought from John Lewis complete with light weight pertex duvet cover (which we made ourselves) and a single fitted sheet which fits nicely over our 2 sleeping mats when they are coupled together. This may seem a bit 'wossy' for camping but it has a lot of advantages over 'maggot' bags. Firstly it is a lot more cozy!, secondly it's a lot more comfortable, you don't wake up in the middle of the night trussed up like chicken unable to move like you do with a sheet liner in a sleeping bag!, thirdly it's a lot easier to regulate your temperature than in a sleeping bag. We pack the duvet in a waterproof Ortlieb dry bag and we reckon it takes up the same amount of room as 2 sleeping bags as well as being about the same weight. We also take 2 lightweight cotton pillowcases, which we fill with the insulated jackets, and the 2 Ajungilak Komfort Pute pillows, which makes for a really good pillow, an essential for a good nights kip. As we tend to be away for up to 5 weeks at a time the duvet cover, pillowcases and sheet can be easily washed and tumbled at the campsite on a rest day.

Food

We normally buy all our food on route, however we do carry our own supply of tea bags, a couple of dehydrated emergency meals and some milk powder just in case. Shops being shut due to National Holidays and Religious Festivals have caught us out on occasions, therefore look them up in the guidebooks and plan accordingly. Try and keep space available in your panniers for the food that you buy at the shops, we have one racpac which is normally fairly empty when we set off, ready to put food in when we go shopping just before finding the campsite. See our 'Food on Tour' page for details of food and cooking tips and to find some of our favourite camp recipes.



Tips & hints on Gear

These tips & hints might seem obvious, but if you are new to cycle touring or camping they might be useful:

- If you are new to cycle touring, go for what the navy call a 'shake down' before you embark on a long tour. Try a short trip with an overnight camp close to home, it will help sort out any gear problems or needs. If we buy some new gear we always go on a weekend shakedown tour prior to our main tour just to test it out. You don't want to be saddled with (pardon the pun) a bit of gear on a 4-week tour that that doesn't do what you had hoped it would.
- When packing gear, consider the packing of each pannier with equal weights of gear on both sides to increase stability. We are greatly in favour of using both front & rear panniers, try to distribute the weight 40/60(rear) or at the most 30/70(rear). If you load everything on just a rear rack the stability and steering is compromised, an over loaded rear rack can cause you to pull 'wheelies'. This over loading can be dangerous on sharp inclines and can cause a 'wallowing' effect on taking sharp corners at speed (very unnerving believe me!!).
- Don't consider riding with a rucksack on your back, it is after a while profoundly uncomfortable and can hinder your stability. If you find yourself needing to carry a rucksack then probably you are carrying too much gear, review what you need to take.
- Although weight isn't as critical as it is in back packing, an over laden bike is hard work up hills. Therefore consider what you take, look for light weight kit and consider things to have a dual role e.g. Ron Hill bikesters could be used over your cycling shorts if it is too cold and can act as pajamas bottoms on cold nights. When deciding on what to take it is quite interesting to use a pair of kitchen scales to compare the weight of things, you may have two fleeces that are as warm as each other but one may weigh heavier than the other.
- Pack your gear with thought as to what needs to be easily accessible on route i.e. waterproofs near the top or in a pannier pocket and consider what might be needed first when arriving at the campsite i.e. your tent near the top.
- Pack everything in waterproof bags, as most panniers are not at all waterproof (unless you can afford a waterproof type, like the superb Ortlieb panniers) All our gear is packed in either Ortlieb dry bags or in waterproof pack liners from Field & Trek.
- Carry plenty of drink (particularly when it is hot). In some countries there can be quite a distance between shops or places to obtain potable water. We usually carry three 1litre bottles plus our 0.5 litre flask.
- If you carry things that use batteries - lights, radios etc. try and take ones that all use AA batteries, as they are the ones that are the easiest to get hold of in most countries.



Gear Notes

Cycling Tops

We used to use cotton T-shirts to cycle in, but found that they didn't dry very quickly and really needed ironing to look anything. We then used cycling tops made from 'Coolmax' material which are easy to wash, dry quickly and need no ironing, however they had a downside and that was they did need washing each day otherwise they started to hum a bit. We now use Berghaus shirts, which are made from ARGENTIUM® fabric which wick sweat away well, are easy to wash, dry quickly and need no ironing. They have a Polygiene® coating which certainly works to mitigate the odour problem if you can't wash them for a couple of days.

Cycling Glasses

We would highly recommend that you get yourself a good quality pair of cycling sunglasses. They are invaluable at protecting your eyes from the glare from the sun and any airborne objects such as dust and flying insects. A friend of mine narrowly missed losing an eye when a Bumble Bee at high speed hit him!

Look for the ones that are the wrap around style to give the best protection and those which have 3 interchangeable lenses, one blue smoked for low light, one yellow for dull days and one dark for sunny days. They are easily scratched so make a habit of putting them back in their protective case when they are not being worn.

Saddles

The original saddles that came with the Giants were a low spec. gel saddle and we replaced these with a Serfas RX model. These worked fairly well, however we have found that gel saddles lose their effectiveness after a while, are sweaty and you still end up with a 'numus bumus' after a while! In an attempt to find 'Saddle Nirvana' we have now moved to trying the [Brooks](#) leather saddles. We both started with the B67, my wife has found hers to be quite comfortable from the start and has continued to use it. As far as I was concerned I couldn't quite get on with my B67 it didn't suit my behind and my less upright riding position. I found that it was too short for me and I have since changed it to the Champion Flyer which it is longer in the body and slightly narrower. It also has a slightly thicker and harder leather and has taken slightly longer to break in than the B67, however it is now much more comfortable.

Cycling Gloves

We usually take only one pair of cycling gloves, however if we are going somewhere which we think could be colder than the UK summers we take an additional pair of warmer gloves. We have found the [Terra Nova](#) Extremities 'Velo' gloves made out of windstopper fabric to be very good.



Tyres

Our Giant expedition touring bikes came fitted with Vredestein Spider tyres. These did nearly 4000 miles with heavy loads on very mixed riding conditions from tarmac to the gravel roads in Finland, they also performed reasonably well off road in Norway. They were superb, they rolled well on normal roads and the nobly side bits helped in the gravel. Their puncture resistance was brilliant, my wife had no punctures in her 4000 miles and I had only one and that was because I rode along a verge to get some respite from the jolts of a cobbled road in Poland and picked up a thorn in the top side wall.

Due to their success we purchased a second set of Spider Max tyres prior to our trip in 2005. Unfortunately we didn't find these so good and after 600 miles they have started to show signs of the sidewalls splitting slightly. On our tour to Norway in 2006 my rear tyre started to bulge slightly in one place and to be on the safe side I replaced it on Lofoten with a Spectra Ruby.

Whether the tyres were a duff batch I don't know, but we were slightly disappointed after their previous performance. We replaced them with Schwalbe Marathons XR's for our tour in Iceland in 2007 and they were excellent. We have continued to use Schwalbe Marathons as their puncture resistance and durability has been excellent.

Trousers

As we like to like to play tourist on our tours and visit places of interest it is quite nice to have some trousers to wear rather than just cycling shorts. Since we have been using our Brooks saddles we really have found that we don't really need to wear padded cycling shorts. We therefore now used zip off trousers to cycle in.

Due to them being zip-off they can very quickly be changed to shorts when it is warm. We are currently using a version made by Vaude, which have a shaped seat so that there are less seams on the seat area to cause any problems, and they have velcro tabs on the legs so that you can narrow the legs to stop them from getting caught in the chain. They are easy to wash and dry quickly.

Unfortunately Vaude seemed to have stopped making these zip-off trousers but I notice that Endura make a similar product the 'Hummvee Zip-off Trouser'.

Bike Buddy

We have found these to be great a way to carry the large 1 litre MSR fuel bottles, which are normally too large to fit into a standard bottle cage. We have fitted ours under the down tube, so if there is any leakage it drips onto the road. We have the MK3 version, which has a quick release system that makes it easy to release from the bike but still gives a very secure fit onto the bike, even on really bumpy roads. More information can be obtained from the Bike Buddy web site.