

Flies In Your Teeth
Motorcycling Guides

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GEAR AND PACKING FOR A MOTORCYCLE ROAD TRIP

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Introduction

Having ridden a 21,475 mile motorcycle road trip around America in four-and-a-half months, plus long touring rides in Cuba, Spain, Portugal and across Europe to Croatia, I have learned a little about what gear to take and how to pack on a motorcycle.

I was originally going to include these tips as a chapter in my book 'France In America' but decided to make it more widely available, and free, to anyone who wanted to read it.

Further motorcycling guides can be found on my website, along with details about my book.

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What to take and what to leave behind

Long before I embarked on my first long road trip, over 21,000 miles across America, I thought long and hard about what gear to take and how to pack it into just two saddlebags and one main piece of motorcycle luggage. I made lists of various items for consideration and piled those items on the floor of a spare bedroom, in a bid to rationalise what I would need. I even carried out a few trial packing sessions to see what would fit and what would have to stay behind.

I opted to pack small versions of as many items as possible, and considered all other methods of saving space. For example, in the US, I carried two mobile phones with me, but ruled out taking two normal-sized chargers, so instead I carried a USB cable with different adapters to charge the phones from my laptop. Anything to save space!

To help those considering a long road trip on a motorcycle, I have provided the final list of what I took with me, indicating just how useful each item turned out to be.

Paperwork

Passport – essential

Photocopy of main page of passport – I always carry this in case I lose the passport

Return flight details – essential

Motorcycle shipping paperwork – essential for import and export of my bike

Customs paperwork – needed at beginning and end of the trip

Driver's licence – essential to carry

Photocopy of driving licence – in case original was lost

V5 vehicle registration original – needed to import the bike and to prove ownership

Note: V5 is the United Kingdom vehicle registration document, being replaced by the EU-compatible vehicle registration certificate

V5 photocopy – in case original was lost

USA roadside assistance paperwork – essential, but never used

USA motorcycle insurance papers – essential to carry at all times

USA health insurance papers – essential and used during my trip

Reading glasses prescription details – in case I lost my glasses (which, regrettably, I did)

Trip route notes – used every day

Maps – used every day

Coloured marker to highlight the route I took on map – used each evening

Small notebook

Pen x 2

HOG book with details of all USA Harley-Davidson dealerships – used to find places to service the bike

HOG membership card – never used

HOG Assist card – never used

Bespoke 'In Case of Emergencies' card for wallet – I always carry one of these when riding

Tools

Harley-Davidson tool roll bag – I used a couple of spanners to tighten bolts

Multi tool – used a couple of times

Tyre pressure gauge – carried, but not needed as I used the ones at petrol stations

Small tyre compressed air machine – never used, but I would take it again for remote locations

Cable ties – I think I used one

Spare bike bulbs – not used

Circuit Tester – not used

Electrical Tape – not used

Wire – not used

Oil–Mobil Racing 4T, 4 stroke engine oil, 15W-50 – not needed, but I would carry it again

Small ball of string – used once

Many people carry tyre repair kits, but I didn't, as they don't work with inner tubes, which are necessary for my spoked wheels.

Motorcycle stuff

Sat nav – used every day

Sat nav case – used every day

Sat nav to laptop connection cable – used a few times to transfer pre-planned routes into sat nav unit

Main bike luggage bag – used every day

Large rubbish sacks – bought early during the trip, for covering the motorcycle luggage during downpours

Small rucksack – hardly used at all, so not really needed

Bungee net – used often

Saddlebag liners – used every day, as I carried them into hotels each night

Motorcycle cover – carried with me on the entire trip, but used just once

Bungee cords – used every day

Hand-held compass – used once, when lost

Disc lock & keys – used every day

Long cable padlock (for securing bike) x2 – never used, as I never felt it necessary

Long cable padlock (for securing leather jacket to motorcycle) – used just once, and wouldn't take again

Bike wash cloths – used a few times

Microfibre drying cloth – used a few times

Small bike wash liquid – used a few times

Bike keys x 2 – I lost both sets and had to find more!

Small padlocks & keys – used every day for securing helmet to the bike

Small first aid kit – not used, but essential to carry

Small torch – used a few times

Ziplock plastic bags – I kept important papers and sensitive equipment inside these, in case of rain

Drinking water bottle – used every day

Small petrol can – I carried this for the whole trip and never used it, so probably wouldn't take it again

Small funnel for petrol can – never used

Clothes

Kevlar jeans – worn nearly every day when riding

Jeans – just one pair, for evenings

Kevlar shirt – not used, so posted home

Belt – used every day

T-shirts and sports shirts x9 – enough for a change every day, plus a couple of spares

More T-shirts – bought during the trip as I got bored with wearing the same ones each day

Long-sleeved riding shirt x 2 – I should have taken more for riding in the sun

Underwear x 9 – enough for a change every day, plus a couple of spares

Socks x 9 pairs – enough for a change every day, plus a couple of spares

Lightweight shoes – one pair, for evenings

Shorts – used rarely, but needed

Swimming trunks – used a few times

Small towel – used after swimming in lakes / rivers

Fleece / sweatshirt – used for chilly evenings, but it took up a lot of room

Motorcycle clothing

Crash helmet – used every day, even when the law didn't require it

Leather motorcycle jacket – used often, but some days it was too hot, so was bungeed to the rear seat a lot

Dehydration vest – purchased during the trip, but rarely used. I would have used it more if purchased earlier

Lightweight gloves – used almost every day

Black winter bike gloves – rarely used

Motorcycle boots – used every day

Waterproof bike gear – used just twice!

Bluffs x 4 – rarely used due to great weather, but helpful to wrap things in

Motorcycle sunglasses x 2 – used every day

Night-riding glasses – used a few times

Sunglasses cases / cloth bags – used every day

Camera gear

Nikon D200 Camera – used most days

Soft case for Nikon camera – used every day

Lead to connect Nikon to laptop – used most days

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Nikon fisheye lens – used a few times

Nikon long lens – rarely used, so sent home

Nikon camera battery charger – used most days

Nikon spare battery – never needed

Nikon spare memory card – never needed

Midi tripod – used just a few times

Large tripod – used just twice; why did I carry this right around America?

Nikon remote shutter trigger – used a few times and would take again

Small digital camera – used most days for shots from the bike and when I didn't want to carry my big camera

Small digital camera charger – used most days

Lead to connect small camera to laptop – didn't use, as I realised I could transfer files using memory card

GoPro video camera x 2 – used often for onboard filming

Cardellini clamps for mounting video cameras to the bike x 2 – used often

Spare Go-Pro memory card – used a few times

Go-Pro camera cases – used often

Spare Go-Pro plastic lens covers – used once when I scratched the original

Spare Go-Pro battery – used a few times

Electrical gear

UK mobile phone – not used much for outgoing calls, but needed for incoming

UK mobile phone USB charger – used every day

USA mobile phone – used daily to avoid high bills on my UK phone account

USA mobile phone USB charger – used every day

iPod and earphones – initially used a lot, then hardly at all

iPod USB charger lead – initially used a lot, then hardly at all

iPod speaker – hardly used at all; wouldn't take again

Moulded wired ear plugs (for sound) – I purchased these for the trip, but hated them

UK to US power adapters x 3 – used every day

Laptop – used every day for my blog and photos

Laptop charger – used every day

Memory stick – used a few times

External hard drive for backing up laptop x 2 – used every day (as laptops don't travel well on motorcycles)

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External CD drive – used once (and it was essential I had it)

Mini USB hub – rarely used

USB / various laptop cables – used every day

Garmin sat nav map discs for North America – used once, but absolutely essential when I broke my original sat nav

Personal stuff

Watch – essential

Reading glasses–essential

Glasses spray cleaner & cleaning cloths – used often

Travel alarm clock – I never travel without one

Wallet – essential

Money – of course

Credit cards – essential

UK house keys – why did I take these and carry them all the way around America?

Magnifying glass (for reading maps with small print) – sadly, essential for me

Suitcases to transport stuff to New York (then throw away) – you have to consider this

Toiletries

Lip Balm – used every day

Sun protection lip balm – used often

Razor + brush + soap

Comb

Toothbrush and toothpaste

Deodorant

Small aftershave

Small shampoo

Non-prescription medicines – I carried quite a lot with me, just in case, but rarely used

Prescription medicines

Suntan lotion – essential and used nearly every day

Toiletries bag

Packet Kleenex

Mosquito spray – used a few times

There are a few other tips regarding gear and packing that I have picked up during this and other trips:

- Some airlines do not allow you to take helmets as hand luggage (carry-on luggage). You often won't find this out until you're already at the airport, so I now always put mine in my main checked luggage.
- If flying abroad for a motorcycle trip, you will probably want to carry all your gear in a suitcase or other large bag – but take a moment to consider where you will leave that empty suitcase when riding. If you plan to start and finish in the same place, you can probably leave it at a hotel for the duration of your trip; if, however, you have different start and finish points, you'll probably need to use a cheap bag and throw it away at the start of the trip, then buy a replacement at the end for flying home.
- Carrying enough clothes for two changes a day is unrealistic. Each afternoon, when I arrived at my hotel for the night, I showered and changed, so I had fresh clothes for that evening. I then wore the same clothes for riding the next day.
- On a long trip, you will need to wash your clothes at some stage, so seek hotels with guest laundries.
- Saddlebag liners, preferably waterproof ones, are really useful, as you can just lift these out of the bike when you arrive at your accommodation for the night.
- It's a personal choice as to what riding gear you want to use, but remember that thick motorcycle jackets and trousers take up a huge amount of space. This can prove to be particularly annoying if you rarely wear them and, for this reason, I left my thick bike trousers at home.
- In intense sun, make sure you protect exposed skin, especially your neck. I always carry sunscreen lotion.
- I generally always carry a few tools. Even though I rarely use them, it's good to know they're at hand.
- When riding in the USA, and indeed anywhere that requires driving on the right, I always put any items I might need during the day in my right-hand saddlebag. That way, if I ever need to access them, I won't be standing next to the moving traffic beside the road.

If you have any specific comments or suggestions that would improve this guide, then let me know and if included in a future revision, I will credit your comments to you.

You can read more about my motorcycling adventures at www.GarySFrance.com