

A GUIDE TO RELAXED CYCLE TOURING

July 2018

About the Author

Tony Baker and his wife Margaret have completed several thousand miles of cycle touring in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the west coast of Canada. They cycled from [John O'Groats to Lands' End](#) (JOGLE) in 2017, and across Wales and the [west coast of Ireland](#) in 2018. Tony and Margaret live in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Introduction

This guide is for people who want to tour an area by bike, but who value creature comforts and opportunities to stop and smell the roses more highly than getting from A to B quickly. In other words, comfort always trumps speed for the relaxed tourer. You can still cover quite a bit of ground in a day, but always at a pace that allows stops for photos, pubs, chats with locals and other travelers, and of course, smelling the roses (literally so in Tralee, Ireland).

By this definition, this guide isn't for the keen lean-machine road biker who can cover 100 km before we, the relaxed tourers, are out of our comfy beds in the morning. Neither is this guide for the committed camping tourer, who can take a bike loaded with umpteen panniers up the Gospel Pass in driving snow with the happy expectation of spending the night soaking wet and freezing cold in a small bivvy at the top, fending off curious sheep at 2am when venturing out for a bio break. We celebrate and applaud both sets of intrepid cyclists (mostly from the comfort of the nearest pub), because they have the mettle and resolve we so clearly lack. No, this guide is for cyclists who journey from one B&B to the next by way of routes off the beaten track, but punctuated by a generous number of pubs; cyclists who can take whatever life and weather throws at them, safe in the knowledge that a warm shower and soft bed await.

The purpose of the guide is to pass along practical advice and observations from our various trips. We try to be comprehensive, covering everything for the aspiring relaxed cycle tourer. Much of what we say is common sense, but hopefully of use to people new to touring.

We talk about what works for us. That isn't to say that it's the only way to do things or that we necessarily endorse the products that we mention. It's just that they do the job.

Bikes

Touring Bikes - the Draught Horse of Bikes

The two most important ingredients for cycle touring is a bike and place to cycle. (In this section, we assume you're going to buy a bike, but depending on your touring plans you might decide to rent. We cover that decision later.)

The relaxed cyclist seeks a comfortable, solid and reliable bike that can happily go over all kinds of surfaces, including potholes, farm tracks and gravel. Touring bikes are generally steel frame, with a longer wheelbase, lots of gears, comfy seat, wider tyres, mudguards, and rear rack (and sometimes a front rack) for panniers. Steel is strong, but heavier and less stiff than aluminium or carbon fibre. However, it gives a more comfortable ride because it absorbs surface vibration. The long wheelbase gives better stability and also contributes to a smoother ride.

Touring bikes tend to have drop handlebars, rather than flats. This may seem strange because you don't often see a tourer riding down in the drops. However, you can hold drop handlebars in so many different ways that they can provide relief for your hands and arms on longer rides. You can hold at the brake hoods, or at the forward bend, or along the straight, or go down to the drops when braking hard.

Most touring bikes have either mechanical or hydraulic disc brakes. (Rim brakes are less and less common nowadays.) Mechanical discs offer the advantage that they're relatively easy to repair on the road, but the braking is not as positive as hydraulic discs. So some people may prefer hydraulics at the cost of running the low risk of a line leak.

Because they don't use exotic materials, touring bikes fortunately are not as expensive as road bikes. I ride a Trek 520 and Margaret rides a Specialized AWOL Elite. All the major brands make touring bikes with similar specifications to these, and it becomes a personal choice.

It's important to make sure the bike geometry fits your particular body dimensions. Your bike shop should be able to check the fit and frame size.

Bike Mods

Once you have your bike, it's a good idea to try it out for a couple of weeks and then decide on any modifications you might require.

Seat

You need a comfortable seat. You might be tempted to use a squidgy seat that has a gel layer. Our experience is that these don't work. We find more comfort and little or no chafing if you have positive contact with a firm seat. (For this reason, we also don't use padded bike shorts.) The broadness of the seat is more of a personal choice. Broader distributes the load more, but can impede leg motion. I ride with a classic Brooks B17 leather saddle. Margaret uses the seat that came with her bike. (Some men like a saddle that has a central depression that better accommodates male anatomy.)

Gears

Get the gears and arrangement that suits you. My Trek 520 came standard with variable gear shift levers on the end of the handlebars. I didn't like this because you have to move your hands to change gear. I had my bike shop convert to standard integrated brake/gear shifters. Margaret wanted a lower gear ratio, so had her rear cassette replaced with a larger gear set, and her forward 2-ring chain set replaced with a 3-ring set.

Tyres

We both use puncture resistant tyres. I use Schwalbe Marathon Plus and have never had a puncture. Margaret switched to Specialized Hemisphere Armadillo Reflect after suffering three flats on our JOGLE trip, and hasn't had one since. The modest cost and slightly higher rolling resistance are well worth the peace of mind of being able to run over bits of glass and just about anything else. My tyre width is 32 and Margaret's is 38. I might go with a slightly narrower tyre in future, though it is nice to have the extra width on wet or uneven roads.

Pedals and Shoes

We both use clip-in shoes and dual-purpose pedals. This allows you to clip in or not, depending on what you're doing, so you get the best of both worlds. For those who haven't tried them, clip-ins are not scary or difficult to use. Clipping in or out is a simple move of the foot, and quickly becomes second nature. Neither of us has ever fallen off because of using clip-in shoes. They are good because you can pull up on the pedals, as well as push down, and so allow you to use a different set of leg muscles. The result is that you can pedal harder going up hill, plus they give you more endurance on a long ride. They also provide the benefit of positive connection to the pedals when you're going through driving rain and your feet would otherwise slip and slide. This all said, we use a more forgiving cleat system than those used by the keener road racers.

Bells and Whistles - Things to Attach to the Bikes

Lights, Camera, Action

You'll be cycling a long way and during those thousands of miles, you'll have thousands of vehicles pass you. In our experience, almost all drivers are very respectful of bikes, and leave a wide berth. Some of the best are the commercial drivers. Sometimes tourists are not so good, perhaps because they're not used to the roads, or are driving on the side they're not used to. But you, the cyclist, cannot afford for even one vehicle to screw up and hit you.

We believe that safety on the road depends primarily on being seen. That means passive equipment like reflectors and high-vis jackets. But it also means **lights**. We use high-intensity daytime flashing rear lights. Mine is 150 lumens and can be seen in full sunlight at a distance of at least 500m. It has a lithium-ion battery that I charge from a USB port every night, though it can run for several days on one charge. Whenever the bike is moving, the light is on. I set it to a regular flash. Human eyes tend to notice movement, so the eyes are drawn to a flashing light far more readily than to a constant light. The main idea is make sure that every driver has seen you way before they get close enough to potentially hit you. If they've seen you, you can be reasonably confident that they will leave you adequate space.

Front lights are not as critical, though there are times, such as bad weather or poor visibility, when you want to signal your presence to oncoming drivers. And, of course, if you're cycling at night you need to see where you're going. Again, we use high-intensity lithium-ion USB-rechargeable front lights. If we want to be seen, then we set them to flashing mode. If we need to see where we're going, we set to constant on.

A good rear-view **mirror** is another vital piece of equipment. We use Mirrycyle mirrors that mount on the end of the handlebar. They're rock solid and have a good-sized glass mirror. Seems a bit risky (and from experience I know that if the mirror is whacked it will break). But glass is way better for rendering a good image, which you need when you're steaming down a hill in the pouring rain and see a pothole ahead and have to decide, do I dodge it or not. (No, you don't dodge it if your trusty mirror reveals a truck bearing down on you with no room to manoeuvre.) Also, because we generally space ourselves 100m or so apart on busier roads, a good mirror allows the person in front to see to the rear and not get too far ahead.

When we did JOGLE, I didn't have a **bell**, so I'd have to rely on bellowing at walkers who were in front of us on canal towpaths and the like. A bell is a far more dignified way to announce your presence. I have a cheap dinger mounted on my handlebars. Margaret has a fancy Knog Oi bell and it really sounds lovely when dinged, and doesn't scare the daylighters out of unsuspecting walkers. Some people carry air horns that make very loud noises, but we've never found the need.

As I explain later, we depend on our phones for navigation. We both have handlebar mounts for our phones. There are many types on the market. The main thing is to have a system that will keep hold of your phone through any conditions (the thrill of flying down a bumpy hill is lessened by the sight of your expensive phone being jettisoned from its mount), won't itself damage the phone, allows you to fiddle with the screen while in motion and, if needed, provides protection from the rain. (My phone is fairly waterproof, so it doesn't need a cover.)

The last accessory that I carry is a readily-accessible small frame-mount zip-top pouch big enough for my camera, energy bars, and so on.

Panniers

We each carry two 20-litre rear panniers, which provide more space than we need. We do this for two reasons. First, it's way easier to pack a pannier when there's excess room - just toss everything in. Second, despite best intentions we inevitably end up buying souvenirs on our trips. They may be small - a T-shirt here, a bottle opener there - but they add up.

We use Arkel panniers, which are made in Quebec. They're the Rolls Royce of panniers and a bit expensive, but they're guaranteed for life, they get well used, and they have a great cam locking system for attaching to the bike. It takes seconds to attach a pannier, and they will never accidentally come off. So again, when you hit that pothole at the bottom of the long hill going 50 kph, you're not going to see your worldly goods being ejected on either side of you. (Incidentally, one of the things I like about the Bontrager rear rack on my bike is that it has an additional pair of side rails attached slightly lower than the main rack frame. This means your panniers sit lower down, and keep your centre of gravity lower and thus more stable.)

OK, So Where Are We Going?

Choosing a Destination

You have your bikes, and they're all fitted out, so where to ride? We've ridden extensively in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the west coast of Canada.

Visitors to the UK often have the misguided impression that it's predominantly a dense urban sprawl with very little countryside. That's completely wrong (as becomes immediately clear if you fly over the UK - you mostly see fields). Only about 2% of the UK's land use is urban, and only 5% semi-urban. In fact, the UK is a great country to cycle in for several reasons: the scenery is beautiful and varies widely; there are lots of places to stay and lots of pubs; and there are hundreds of excellent cycling routes that are off the main roads. Underlining that last point, the UK has the [National Cycle Network](#), arguably the most comprehensive cycle network in the world. For example, you can do JOGLE numerous ways using just NCN routes. It really is a joy to cycle in the UK. The NCN routes are well-signposted and only very rarely will you find yourself on a busy road. If an NCN route does have to use a high-traffic road, almost always there will be a bike lane or a shared-use pavement. Many NCN routes will take you along old railway lines that have been paved. These are ideal cycling because they slope gently and have no vehicular traffic. Many routes also take you alongside canals. You can pass through large cities, particularly in the Midlands, and under big motorway interchanges, by simply following a canal, barely aware of the intense hubbub above you.

Ireland is similar to the UK, though they don't have a national cycle network. Nevertheless, they have many smaller roads that are well-suited for cycling. They also have the [Wild Atlantic Way](#) (WAW), which is 2,500 km of coastal roads that follow the many ins and outs of the west coast of Ireland. We found Irish drivers to be as courteous as UK drivers and, contrary to what we'd been told, roads were in no worse condition than in the UK. One caution though for people thinking about cycling WAW is that the coast roads are narrow, winding and, in the summer, very busy with tourists, buses, trucks and local traffic. While the views are stunning, the cycling experience can be a bit fraught in the summer season.

Canada is a big country, with a road network that connects major population centres, but otherwise doesn't have a lot of back roads, particularly in the west. Thus, it's almost inevitable that if you want to do a longer point-to-point trip, you'll be cycling along a major road and competing with heavy traffic. (Unfortunately, every year cyclists are killed on the TransCanada Highway.) Also, distances are large and if you do go off the beaten track (and even on many stretches of the beaten track) there may be very few facilities. That said, Canada has unique stunning scenery, and there are some fine local cycle routes. (Vancouver Island, for instance, has a 70 km cycle way that follows an old railway line from the centre of Victoria.)

There are many other cycle-friendly places to consider. While we haven't done them, we're keen to try both western and eastern Europe, Scandinavia, the Balkans (we hear very good things about Croatia), New Zealand and parts of Australia (though the thought of doing any of their [inland bike rides](#) gives me the collywobblers).

Type of Bike Trip

There are basically two types of trip: A to B (e.g., JOGLE), or a round trip of A back to A. You'll have set aside a certain amount of time for your trip. If doing a round trip, it's easy because you can generally adjust the route to suit the time. However, if going A to B, you must make sure you can comfortably complete the distance in the allotted time.

TIP: Know your pace. Our pace is about 60 km per day, though we're generally fine doing up to 80 km if need be. Our average **elevation gain** is 700m per day, but we have done 1000m. Knowing your pace is very important. If you base your trip on an overestimate, you'll find yourself departing from the relaxed cycling model and embracing a heads-down endurance ride. Do a few full-day test rides to find out what pace works best for you.

Once you have your general trip route and duration, you can plan intermediate waypoints and roughly where you hope to be as your trip progresses. More about this later.

Getting There and Back

You need a travel plan that gets you, your bikes and your stuff to your trip start point, and gets you home again. Here are some thoughts about modes of travel.

Planes (and Bike Boxes)

Most airlines are happy to transport bikes, for a price. (Currently on Air Canada it costs \$150 per bike per leg, so that's \$300 per bike there and back.) It's important to check the carrier's website for their policies and prices.

If you're doing a loop, so you end where you start, you might consider buying a hard bike case. However, these can be expensive and you need a place to store them while you're touring. You can buy bike bags, but we've heard that the airlines don't like them and they don't really protect the bikes.

We use cardboard bike boxes (and lots of duct tape), and have never had any damage to the bikes. Your local bike shop will be only too happy to give you a bike box for free. They receive their bikes in these boxes and otherwise have to toss them in the recycling.

Bike boxes can be deceptive. If you've never packed up a bike, it's difficult to believe that you can shove a bike-shaped object into a small-looking rectangular box. But it can be done, and there are lots of videos on Youtube showing you how. (The main trick is to take off the front wheel and zip tie it alongside the frame interleaved with the crank arm, take off the handlebars and zip tie to the frame, and rotate the front forks by 180 degrees.) Bike boxes come in a variety of sizes, so you do need to choose one suited to holding a touring bike. Your bike shop should be able to advise.

What you'll need to get your bike into a bike box:

- instructions or video to show you how,
- a bike tool to partially disassemble the bike,
- lots of zip ties,
- some polystyrene foam padding, a plastic front fork spacer and a hub protector (usually comes free in bike box)
- duct tape to reinforce and seal the box
- lots of time and patience

Working with your partner to put your bikes in bike boxes is an excellent test of your compatibility and whether you're going to be able to travel together for several weeks (let alone the rest of your lives).

TIP: Leave enough time to pack your bike box. If you've never prepped your bike to plunk in a bike box, don't do it the day before you travel. Do a trial run at least a week before and allow 3 hours for the first run. Something always goes awry. You don't want to be rushed (and you need to allow time to go and get another bike box because this one is too narrow or short, or now inexplicably has a boot-shaped hole in the side of it).

Don't forget to put your contact details on the box, as well as taped to your bike. You can seal the box, but it's worth taking some duct tape to the airport in case security want to open the box.

Trains

Trains in the UK and Ireland will take bikes for free, but you have to reserve a space for the bikes by phone and, in the UK, print the reservation with your ticket. Spaces are limited and many routes will fill up quickly, so as soon as you've settled your itinerary, it's best to reserve space for your bikes.

Buses

We've only ever travelled on National Express in the UK with our bikes in their boxes. This has never been a problem, and you don't have to pay extra, but sometimes it's a squeeze for the driver to get the boxes stowed. It's worth letting them know ahead of time that you have a bike box.

Other Travel Options

You might consider a **courier** service for your bikes as an alternative to plane or train. When we did JOGLE, we used an excellent company called [John O'Groats Bike Transport](#), who will arrange to have your bike transported from anywhere in the UK to Inverness, where they're based. They will then reassemble your bike. You get yourselves to Inverness, and then they provide transport by van up to John O'Groats, about a 3-hour ride.

Though we've never done it, another travel option is to **rent a large car**, one big enough to take your bikes in the back.

Buy Versus Rent Bikes

If you're planning a foreign trip, you might consider renting bikes instead of taking your own. We've tried this, with mixed results. The problem with renting is that you don't really know what you're getting until you see the bike, sit on it and ride it. If you're doing a short trip, this is fine, but a critical factor in your enjoyment of a bike adventure is the comfort of your bike. You'll be sitting on it for hours each day, and it's your means of propulsion. If the bike doesn't fit, or doesn't work properly, you won't have fun. A further factor is the rental cost. For a long trip, it can easily exceed cost of transport by plane, though you can usually get deals on longer term rental.

You might consider buying a used bike at the start of your trip, and then sell it at the end. This is potentially the cheapest option. The downside is the hassle of finding a suitable bike at the start, and selling it at the end.

Because we like our own bikes and have set them up how we like to ride, we've preferred to transport them to where we're riding and take them home again at the end of the trip. It's just part of the cost of doing our kind of touring.

Other Prep

Take a first aid course. If you're going to be cycling in the wilds somewhere, then take a wilderness first aid course.

Make sure you know how to repair flat tyres for both front and back wheels. (Remember that you need to remove whatever sharp object caused the flat from the tyre before inserting the new or patched inner tube.)

Know how to adjust and replace brake pads. Know how to adjust front and rear gears.

What to Bring

As we've noted, we are relaxed tourers who bring along sufficient gear to be comfortable and cover most eventualities. That said, we actually do limit ourselves because we don't want to carry more weight than needed or over-stuff our panniers.

Clothes

We basically bring three types of clothing:

1. Inner bike wear (all synthetics): 1 pair socks and underwear, non-padded bike shorts, T shirt
2. Outer bike wear: Bike jacket, nylon reflective shell, bike shoes, waterproof booties, bike gloves
3. Apres cycling wear (all cotton): 2 pair socks and underwear, light PJs, 2 T-shirts, long-sleeved sweatshirt or down vest, small sunhat

You don't need many clothes. This is because you wash your inner bike wear every night so it's ready to wear again the next day. Synthetics are light and will easily dry overnight. We go with cotton for day wear because it's more comfortable.

If you're going somewhere where it will be cold and rainy, then perhaps you need something a bit warmer to take along. But we cycled through Scotland, where it was cold and rained for 11 days straight, and we were wet but mostly warm enough. Waterproof booties really help keep your feet dry, which keeps the rest of you warm. And if you really get cold cycling, then cycling faster up the next hill will warm you up.

Personal Stuff

This is what we take:

1. First aid kit comprising painkillers, antihistamines, antiseptic cream, triangular bandages, gauze pads, scissors, Band-aids, safety pins and steri strips for wound closure
2. Sponge bag each with toothbrush, toothpaste, personal medications, etc
3. Small amount of soap and shampoo, which we also use for washing clothes
4. Camera
5. Phone each
6. Passport each
7. Wallet and credit cards each
8. 4-port universal USB charger and cables
9. Tablet (for writing blog)
10. Sunscreen
11. Sunglasses each
12. Contact lenses and/or spare glasses each
13. A dozen clothes pegs and 20 ft of nylon cord to use as a clothes line
14. Hand sanitizer
15. Compact knife, fork, spoon
16. Leatherman multi-tool
17. Plastic bag each to put dirty or wet clothes in

Bike Stuff

Apart from the stuff that we attach to the bike (discussed earlier), these are the bike-related items we bring:

1. 2 water bottles each
2. Pannier covers
3. Bungee
4. Bike tool
5. Spare batteries for lights
6. Spare brake pads for each bike
7. Chain lubricant - dry type if cycling in mostly dry conditions
8. 2 inner tubes
9. Puncture repair kit
10. 4 pairs latex gloves to wear when having to change tyre
11. Tyre gauge
12. High pressure hand pump
13. Spare chain links
14. 3 tyre levers
15. Good bike lock for each bike and optionally a cable (a combination lock is best because there are no keys to lose)
16. Small amount of duct tape
17. Variety of zip ties - very handy for making repairs

On the Road

You've got your bikes, you've decided where and how long you want to tour, and you've got yourselves to the start of your trip. What happens next? Probably the easiest way to explain what we do is to walk (ride) through a typical day. Again, it's worth making the point that this is what

works for us, but I'm sure other people will have their own variations and preferences. The basic model for the relaxed cycle tourist though is to start at one B&B and spend the day cycling to the next B&B, and that's the process we describe here.

Tactical Route Planning

We first review our overall route plan and think about where we'll be staying over the next three nights or so (see below). Almost always we'll know where we'll be staying tomorrow night. So we just need to choose the route.

TIP: Choosing a bike-friendly route. We use a route planner website designed for touring cyclists. There are many apps and websites out there that do this, but the one we like is cycle.travel. (We don't use Google Maps because their cycle routes seem more designed for road cyclists.) Cycle.travel is free to use (generously developed and maintained by Richard Fairhurst), and uses open source tools (particularly OpenStreetMap and the OSRM routing optimizer). This is all good, but the main reason we use it is that it chooses very good cycle-friendly routes. It really is excellent. So we plug in where we are and where we want to be tomorrow and let cycle.travel generate a route. We may then insert waypoints by hand if there are intermediate places we want to pass through. We then save the route and also download it as a GPX file to our phones for use on the day of travel.

Booking Accommodation

The amount of advance booking of accommodation depends on the flexibility of your route. For JOGLE, we booked our John O'Groats B&B about 8 months in advance. For parts of Ireland we booked the night before. Generally, if you know you have to be somewhere (e.g., to catch a ferry the next day), then it's best to book early.

(Some people just turn up in a town in the afternoon and find somewhere to stay. That's too stressful for us. We like to know where we're going to stay, that it will be reasonably comfortable, and that there's a safe place to store our bikes.)

TIP: Finding a place to stay. We use online sites like booking.com and tripadvisor to find B&Bs, but with caveats. We find these websites unpleasant to use because they intentionally create a sense of urgency to book by suggesting available spaces are very limited. Usually this isn't the case, but they bombard the user with pop-ups and warning messages. Also, speaking to B&B hosts, it's clear that these sites take a significant cut of the revenue and impose sometimes burdensome restrictions on the hosts. Therefore, our approach is to browse through these websites to find a place that we like, then find their individual website and phone number. We then call the B&B directly to book. It's usually cheaper, and you get to talk to a real person. (Also, a B&B may appear full on a service like booking.com, but if you call they will often have room. This is because only a portion of rooms may be allocated to booking.com.)

The Daily Commute

Our day starts with breakfast. Over the years we've found that, while the thought of shovelling down a full English (or Scottish or Irish) breakfast seems like a good idea when you first leap out of

bed and contemplate a day of cycling, in fact it's usually too much. So we tend to have a decent breakfast (after all, we've paid for it), but not go overboard.

After breakfast, we take down our bike clothes that have been drying overnight, slip them on, slap on sunscreen, fill up water bottles, pack bags and head out to the bikes, not forgetting to return the keys to our room. If it's not too hot a day, we'll only fill one water bottle, and then refill at lunch time.

TIP: Navigating. We navigate using our phones, which attach to a holder on the handlebars. We import the GPX file for the day into [Locus Map Pro](#), though there are many other good apps available. We like this one though because it works. It has umpteen different features, functions and settings and it does take a little while to get to know the app. We highlight the route on the map, but we don't use turn-by-turn navigation - it becomes pretty obvious if we miss a turning. But having the route always available and visible is invaluable, especially when traveling through urban areas with cars zooming in all directions.

Some days we stop at a pub for lunch, though eating pub food every day isn't particularly healthy. So much of the time we will pick up a sandwich and drink from a grocery store, and find a nice place to stop for a picnic. In the evenings, it's again easy to get into the habit of finding a pub. While that's nice for a drink, we will often prefer to go to a grocery store again to find a healthier variety of food. It's a personal thing, but we're happy sitting in a park or back in our room surrounded by crackers, salad and fruit fixings, making weird and wonderful dinners.

TIP: Eating. You burn a few calories cycle touring (though not perhaps as many as you might think.) But if you're on the road for six hours or so, you need to keep a regular supply of calories coming in. The best way to do this is to stop every hour or so for a five minute rest and snack break. If you only stop for lunch, it's easy to get tired (and irritable - says Margaret), which takes the fun out of climbing a 5km hill in the pouring rain. Your snack doesn't need to be a high-tech protein and macro bar. It just needs to have a few calories. (It's the one time I find I can eat Mars Bars without feeling guilty.)

We usually get to our destination in late afternoon or early evening. While we may be traveling for six to eight hours, we might only be actually cycling for half that time. We will stop for photo ops, to check out interesting places, and chat to locals. We find that it's these pauses that make for a memorable trip.

Once we're at our destination, it's into the shower, wash bike clothes, pause for a cup of tea, and then off to explore the locale, and perhaps find a new kind of beer at a local pub. When we're back at our B&B, we plan the next day and usually crash into bed in good time.

TIP: Washing and drying clothes. We wash and dry our bike clothes every day. We use synthetics because they dry quickly. You can wash them in the sink, or in the shower while you're showering, and you just need hand soap or shampoo - you don't need special washing soap. Wash and rinse, then squeeze them out and place on a dry towel. Roll up the towel and then twist it tightly to transfer water from the clothes to the towel. Hang to dry. If they're still damp in the

morning, put the clothes on. It feels clammy initially, but the warmth of your body will dry the clothes in no time.

TIP: Hanging a washing line. We hang a washing line in our B&B room using our 20 ft of nylon cord. We are always careful not to attach the line to something that will break - we'd have to pay for the repair and it's not fair on the B&B hosts. This usually means using a hook or the top hinge of an open door, or part of the window frame. You can always find somewhere for the line.

Maintenance

We do a bit of maintenance along the way, but really, bikes don't need much attention while you're touring.

Tyres and Flats

Tyres deflate over time. We estimate that our tyres drop about 15 psi per 500 km. So every 300-500 km, we like to find a friendly bike shop who will lend us a foot pump to inflate the tyres. The high-pressure pump we carry is fine for fixing a flat but despite its label, inflating much over 70 psi requires enormous effort and isn't worth it.

Tyres occasionally get flats, though not often with puncture resistant ones. Our philosophy is to plunk in a new inner tube rather than trying to patch the old one. Patching is fine, but takes a while and leaves the worry of a slow leak.

There are emergency fixes if you're out of inner tubes and patches, and these vary from tying a knot in the inner tube to filling the tyre interior with grass. Some people carry CO2 cartridges to inflate the tube. This is fine, but CO2 leaks through the inner tube wall.

Chains

I squirt some dry lubrication on the chain every now and then, or after a rain shower. Dry seems better than wet because road dirt doesn't adhere to the chain. But it does need to be replenished fairly often.

Brakes

We have mechanical disk brakes. A pair of pads will usually do you for up to 2,000 km, depending on how much you like to use your brakes. As the pads wear down, you will need to adjust the piston travel and, for mechanical brakes, the brake cable connection to the caliper.

We carry spare pads and it's pretty easy to replace them either by removing the wheel or the brake caliper. (If you have hydraulic brakes, make sure the pistons don't come out of the caliper.)

Closing Remarks

We hope you've found this brief guide useful, and we wish you happy and relaxed touring.