



Bicycle touring is a great way to explore Australia. You're close to the ground, can feel the air in your face (sometimes it's hot!), and you're moving at a *human* pace so you can fully immerse yourself in your environment.

Better still, there is a type of bicycle touring to suit people of most fitness levels and tolerances to 'roughing it'. Each of these styles of touring will have different camping gear needs, so let's explore them in a little more detail first:

3 Main Types of Bicycle Touring

1. Bikepacking

This is a lightweight form of bike touring that aims to keep the load as compact and low to the ground as possible. It's a popular form of touring for those that like to head off-road, so mountain bikes are suited to this sort of touring. Bikepackers tend to use specialist bags that cling close to the frame of the bike and don't impede on the handling or add much weight. Sometimes they'll also carry a small backpack on their back for bulkier items like tents and sleeping bags.

This form of touring allows you to cover a lot of ground quickly. And, with the rise of ultralight camping gear, camp well off the beaten track if that's what tickles your fancy. Bikepacking is well suited to parts of Australia where the weather is mild, allowing you to carry lightweight gear, and where restock points are plentiful so you don't have to carry lots of food.



Refuelling at Yarck. Pie and orange juice, stat! (68km in 38°C heat that day!) Towns like this make credit card bike touring easy. Places to stop, refuel, and possible stay.

2. Credit Card Touring

Sometimes a comfy motel bed at the end of the day is just what the body needs. Credit card bicycle tourists prefer a comfy bed every night! These guys carry minimal gear on their bikes and stay in accommodation such as backpacker hostels, motels and caravan park cabins.

They may cook their meals in their accommodation or eat out at cafes, pubs, and restaurants, or a bit of both. They're nimble and cover a lot of ground.

This form of touring is only really suitable for regions that have sufficient facilities within a day's ride from each other. In Australia, credit card touring is popular in parts of Victoria such as the Great Ocean Road and Gippsland regions – really, anywhere where there are sufficient services and beautiful scenery.

3. Self-Supported Touring

When you think about what a bicycle tourist looks like, the image that conjures is probably of a self-supported cyclist. A specialist touring bike with panniers on the front and back, a handlebar bag containing all the essentials, a frame laden with water bottles, and a stringy cyclist who looks like they could couple as a marathon runner. Self-supported cyclists, as the name implies, carry everything they need to be self-sufficient on the ride. This includes many days' worth of food, camping equipment, spare parts, and plenty of water.



This form of touring allows you to camp where you want and explore those nooks that mightn't be possible if you had to rely on towns for accommodation and food. Ambitious self-supported tourers ride across entire continents, often going days without passing a town. Or far away tracks that take you into the middle of nowhere like South Australia's Mawson Trail which runs from Adelaide, 900km north to the depths of the Ikara-Flinders Ranges.

Choosing The Best Tent For Bicycle Touring:

Tent choice is important especially when you're on a long tour that may take you through different climates and environments. Also, it's going to be your home for a while! Generally, the best tents for bicycle touring in Australia sport the following qualities – they're:

- Lightweight
- Compact
- Easy to pitch
- Spacious enough
- Waterproof
- Well-ventilated

Size

When you're looking for a tent, look at the sorts of tents you'd take on a multi-day hike. Let's assume you're a couple that's touring together: aim for a 2 or 3 person tent. A 2 person version might be enough for you both to sleep comfortably, but mightn't have enough room to keep your gear secure or out of the weather.

Weight

Most quality 2-3 person tents will weigh in the 1.9-2.5kg range which, when split between two bikes, isn't much at all. Lightweight hiking tents like those produced by [MSR](#) and [Zempire](#) are ideal and will last many tours.



My old DMH Cygnet 1P tent at [Molesworth Recreation Reserve](#). A beautiful, quiet (well, outside of peak times) camping ground on the banks of the Goulburn River. Very cyclist-friendly too.

Ease of set-up

Having a tent that is easy to setup will be welcomed at the end of a long day on the saddle. You're on the South Coast of NSW, it's the middle of summer, and you have just clocked up 94km for the day. All you want to do is have something to eat and a swim so labouring over a complicated tent isn't your idea of a good time.

Most good hiking tents can be set up in a few minutes and feature clear instructions and



clever ‘hub’ pole designs.

Waterproofness and ventilation

In terms of waterproofness and ventilation choose a tent that’s going to meet your worse case scenario. For most cycling in Australia that will mean a quality 3-season tent that has a mesh inner and a fly with a 3000mm+ Waterhead rating. Cycling in Australia is not going to take you to many places where a 4-season alpine-style tent is needed.

Our Picks For The Best Bicycle Touring Tent

- [MSR Freelite 1](#) for one person
- [MSR Hubba Hubba](#) is a great choice for two people

Creating a Comfortable Sleeping System

Like with any physical activity, getting a good night’s sleep is so important. Your bed at home or a nice comfy hotel or motel bed is going to give you the best night sleep, but comfort can still be achieved when camping.

Your sleeping system will comprise three main parts:

- Sleeping bag or quilt
- Sleeping mat
- Pillow

When choosing a sleeping bag consider what temperatures you’re going to be sleeping in. If you’re touring, say, Tasmania in winter, expect it to get into the minuses. This will require a sleeping bag that is rated to below zero. Alternatively, a cooler sleeping bag can be made warm by wearing more clothes when you sleep, especially thermals, or adding a silk or fleece liner. Anything to trap in that warmth.



The Sea to Summit Ultralight is a great choice of sleeping mat for the ultralight bikepacker.

Choosing a sleeping bag

Personally, I carry a sleeping bag rated to 0°C on most of my hiking or touring trips. If it’s cold I wear thermals, gloves, socks, and a beanie; if it’s hot I use it as a quilt. While it’s true that there is no ‘one size fits all’ sleeping bag, one bag can be made to be pretty flexible in most conditions.

One of the most important considerations for a sleeping bag, especially for bikepackers, is packed size. Weight is one thing, on a bike a few hundred extra grams isn’t the end of the world – but bulk will mean the difference between whether it will fit in your rack bag or pannier, or not. My 0°C bag is synthetic, thus doesn’t compress down very small. It takes up too much room in my pannier to practically arrange gear around it, so I end up



storing it in a 20L dry bag, along with dry clothes, that straps to the top of my rack. Quality down bags compress down a lot smaller than synthetic bags.

How to decide on your sleeping mat

The next most important part of your sleeping system is your sleeping mat. There's nothing worse than waking up the morning, following a big day on the bike, with a crook back. Lightness and packed size should be considerations when it comes to your sleeping mat, but comfort should be the priority. The Exped UL range is well-known for its comfort-to-weight ratio, some say they're the most comfortable sleeping mats on the market.

And recently Sea to Summit released a range of mats that give the Expeds a run for their money. I used an uninsulated Sea to Summit Ultralight on a recent trip along the Great Victorian Rail Trail, in North East Victoria, and found it to be plenty comfortable with the added bonus of it rolling up ridiculously small and weighing next to nothing.

Why a comfy pillow matters

The humble pillow often gets neglected when camping. I spent years using my sleeping bag stuff sack stuffed with clothes as a makeshift pillow. Oh, the sore necks in the morning! Eventually, I had enough and invested in a Sea to Summit Aeros Ultralight inflatable pillow and I have never looked back.

I still tend to pack my raincoat (if it's dry) and whatever other clothing I have on hand under the pillow to raise the height as I normally sleep with two pillows at home. But invest in one if you want a good night's sleep.

Our Picks For The Best Sleeping Setup For Bicycle Touring

- Sleeping Bag – Sea to Summit Trek II -1°
- Sleeping Mat – Sea to Summit Ultralight Insulated
- Pillow – Sea to Summit Aeros Ultralight

Ideal Cooking Setup For Bicycle Touring

When on a long tour, even if you're trying to be self-supported, stopping in at that country bakery for a chunky steak pie, and having the odd pub meal is a must. Food has an uncanny knack for improving morale even after the most strenuous day. However, in the interest of having the full 'camping experience' and saving money, many bicycle tourists will choose to cook their own food or to carry food that doesn't require cooking or heating.

What cooking gear you need is going to depend on where you're travelling and what sort of food you're going to be cooking. Australia seems to have about 1 public BBQ for every 10 people (a slight exaggeration, but still...) so there's one way you can cook up a bit of nosh on



the road.

If you're camping in a caravan park, there will usually be a camp kitchen which will have a BBQ and/or stove and oven. Some supply cookware, others don't. So don't get caught out – carry what you need.



Boiling water for a meal of Back Country Cuisine Thai Chicken Curry on the Trangia Mini (perfect for the solo camper) at Yea Holiday Park.

What you need to bring for cooking

At a minimum, if you're self-supported, even only to an extent, carry a cooker and at least one pot. Hiking cookers and stoves come in all shapes and sizes. The three most popular are:

- Compact burner (e.g. [MSR PocketRocket](#))
- [Trangia](#)
- [Jetboil](#)

Compact burners are ridiculously light and simply screw onto the top of a propane canister which is readily available. You will also need a pot or pan of some description. The sort you choose will be determined by the kind of food you want to prepare. Freeze-dried meals for instance only require boiled water, but if you're an outdoor gourmet – [Trangias](#) comes with everything you need – pots, pans, burner, all you need to add is the liquid fuel which is readily available from supermarkets and petrol stations.

The Jetboil is an all-in-one cooking setup but is best left for simple cooking, such as boiling water for freeze-dried meals. That said, you can buy heaps of accessories to help you explore your culinary wizardry.

Our Pick For The Best Stove / Cooking Setup For Bicycle Touring

- Budget – [360 Degrees Furno Pot Set & Stove](#)
- Quality / Speed – [Jetboil Flash](#)

What Sort of Food Should You Eat On A Bicycle Tour

I'm going to talk from personal experience on this one, and base it on my recent 6-day ride along the Great Victorian Rail Trail. Like with any endurance exercise, keep your body fuelled up. There are many takes on what the best way is. Some from qualified professionals and others from people that adhere to a particular diet. My approach when on long rides or hikes is all about carbohydrates and calories.

If you're self-supported and a long way from civilisation you need to be conscious of choosing foods that have a good weight-to-calorie ratio. As many long-distance hikers will know, it can be challenging to carry enough calories for a 7-8-day trek. Crunch your numbers.

The menu for my recent Victorian bike tour looked something like this: each day my trip took



me through towns and villages, and every night was spent in a town of varying sizes:

- **Breakfast**

The highest calorie muesli I could find at Woolworths with milk powder, and an instant coffee

- **Lunch**

Usually had on the road: a baked item from a bakery or a sandwich; or fruit

- **Dinner**

Back Country Cuisine freeze-dried meals (Thai Chicken Curry is my favourite) with a serve of Deb mash potato. A couple of pub meals were thrown in for good measure. (And a few beers of course.)

- **Dessert**

Dark chocolate!

- **Snacks**

Clif Bars, orange juice, lollies, and cashews

I didn't calorie count on this trip but I did listen to my body. I felt well enough fuelled with the above menu for the entire trip. My menu on multi-day hikes (4-7 days) looks quite similar too. My tip for food on a bike touring trip in Australia is to think calories but also think enjoyment. Carry things that you're going to enjoy as they can lift the mood after peddling 20km into that northerly headwind. Oh, and tasty treats will quickly be peddled away!

Other Camping Bits And Pieces

There is plenty of camping gear I haven't covered in this post but the above categories. Shelter, sleeping, cooking are where you should spend your time researching and your hard-earned cash. Things like microfiber towels, headlamps – those small items are secondary and there is plenty of information on the internet and the Snowys Blog about these. Buying quality is always a good idea, especially if you want it to last or you're hard on your gear. And, a general rule-of-thumb to follow for bike camping is *if it's suitable for hiking, it's probably suitable for touring*.

Into bicycle touring? What tent and sleeping bag do you use?