



Taking on a cycle tour seems intimidating for beginners. As you prepare for such a journey, you will consume limitless information on routes, bicycle equipment, travel advice, what to see and what to miss, plus lots more.

Prior to starting our long cycle tour, we had many fantasies of what it would be like on the road. Now, with a year of riding under our belt, we have learnt a lot about what it is to be a cycle tourist. Here are just a few things we didn't expect about cycle touring.



We had many assumptions before we started our journey.

1. The lack of downtime

Prior to beginning our long-term cycle tour, we had fanciful dreams of using the endless spare hours in the day for personal development and relaxation. We expected to be able to read books, write, study languages and complete our online University courses.

However, reality set in quickly as we discovered the whole day was filled with riding for 6 to 8 hours, cooking or finding food, locating a camp spot, looking for fresh streams to wash in and setting up/dissembling our campsite. On top of that, we had our daily mapping of routes and visa applications.

There are only a few hours at the end of the day in which to crawl into your tent, take a long breath and do some stretching to help calm down, before crashing miraculously into a deep sleep.



Daytime nap after eating our fill.

2. Extraordinary hospitality

Along our journey, we've had many discussions with other travellers about cycle touring compared to other forms of travel. It was obvious that the main benefit is the intense interactions cycle tourists have with the local communities they encounter. Before departing for our trip, we had heard that some hospitality would be shown to us whilst travelling. However, what surprised us was the extent and excessiveness of peoples' hospitality.



Staying in a Yurt in western China.

We remember a particular day in Thailand where the sun was producing blistering heat and extreme humidity. Towards the mid-afternoon, we could feel a small increase in the wind and an eeriness crept up behind us as the weather began to change dramatically. Just before the clouds tumbled over us, we saw a small temple over the bridge to our right. We attempted to cycle there against a sudden raging headwind causing us to have to walk our bikes over the small bridge.

A one-eyed monk in his glorious orange robes saw us coming and without even having to say a word he gestured to us to stay the night. As soon as we entered the temple, a ferocious thunderstorm shook the buildings, terrifying all the local street dogs and a pounding rain filled the yard in half-a-metre of water in under 10 minutes!



A Kazak family took us into their home for 3 days.



3. How many of us are out there

Cycle touring is really a popular way of travelling, and there are many more cycle tourists than you would think! Within our first two months on the road, we met over 25 fellow cycle tourists. There are hundreds if not thousands of cycle tourists pedalling their little legs across the globe.

It's also a great community where you can talk to experienced cycle tourists through social media or international messaging services like WhatsApp which have many groups dedicated to cycle touring.



We met three cyclists on the road in the middle of nowhere in Kazakhstan.

4. How gear can make or break

Things like a tent, sleeping mat, sleeping bag and 100% waterproof panniers are essential for long tours. All equipment needs to be lightweight, durable and packable. Unfortunately, you don't always get it right, like us, when we purchased front panniers that are not suitable for monsoon rains of south-east Asia. Research is paramount and Snowys has a good range to begin the search. You should also check out this guide for further advice.



It's important to camp with the right gear.

5. You're going to be an endless pit of hunger

After a few days of cycling, I guarantee you'll be a black hole where food disappears into. You will be devoid of etiquette as you make it your personal challenge to disprove every "all you can eat" buffet sign you see. The advantages of your out of control appetite mean trying an array of local delicious foods and you'll never have to worry about gaining weight!



You will have a huge appetite when cycling every day.

6. Where you'll feel the safest

We originally thought that we would be most scared in the wilderness where ferocious animals or psychopaths might be waiting for the unfortunate lone cyclist to camp in their hunting ground. We now know that the most dangerous situations are in cities where cars and people are a serious risk to your safety.

After a while, you begin to gain confidence, forgetting the dangers of camping. Also, when you're wrecked from cycling, you tend to set up camp anywhere that is remotely suitable. Once, we were camping on a dry river bed on the border of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. We had set up camp late, close to Tajik and Afgan settlements, thinking that there was no chance of being caught this close to dusk. Unfortunately, at 8 pm we could hear and see the lights of people walking towards our tent. Luckily, they were friendly Tajik soldiers who mimed to us that we were too close to the Afghanistan border and we need to move our tents or risk being shot at in the middle of the night.



We aren't sure whether this was true, but we were quickly shuffled closer to the Tajik side of the river bed. For us, we love being completely in the wilderness. The silence is peaceful and knowing you won't be disturbed during the night is heaven for an exhausted cycle tourist.



Camping in the desert in Kazakhstan.

7. The vast world and small humanity

The world is massive in terms of distances. When looking at the kilometres you have travelled or still must travel, it can be daunting. However, the world is small in relation to cohesion between cultures and the basic needs and wants of people.

People in China were making the same jokes as the people in Iran. Not to say there aren't differences but there are many core principles that make us human, and we've experienced these everywhere we've visited. Additionally, we have noticed that western culture has impacted every country we have visited across the world whether it be movies, catchphrases, music or big brands.



It was incredible to see how western culture has impacted the world.

What else to expect

This is only the start of what you might encounter while cycle touring. There are personal realisations, surreal adventures and incredible people to meet which is only possible through this type of travel. There is much more to discover, so jump on your bike and start your cycle journey!

Is overseas cycle touring on your bucket list of adventures?