



Cycle touring is an incredible way to experience and explore the vast array of scenery that Europe has to offer. In this post, I'll take you through my top tips, recommendations, and what I learnt from my three-month experience pedalling across Europe.



Train station, Stockholm. Just off the plane and assembling the bike. Image by Chris Newman.

1. Buy a bike over there

The decision to take my bike over from Australia meant wrangling a 25kg bike box through Adelaide and Stockholm airports with a full hiking rucksack on my back – an Olympic test of endurance before the trip had even begun. And it was also tricky to find somewhere to ditch the enormous box at the other end!

Next time, I would hop on the plane and buy a bike in Europe where cycling is far more popular and bike touring equipment is cheap and abundant. It would also help to find somewhere to find accommodation on arrival for a week or so. This way you'll have time to sort everything out before setting off on the trip.

2. Slow and steady wins the cycle tour

Beginning full of energy from Stockholm, Sweden, I ate sparingly and pedalled hard, making 200km in two short days. Then I dropped dead in my tent and spent the next two days recovering! It soon became apparent that the best distances could be achieved by cycling long and slow each day, with frequent snacking and rest breaks. Making 80km over several hours, rather than “racing” to cover it in only three or four, was a comfortable pace for rest of the trip and allowed me time to absorb the scenery.

And a bonus tip – music is the cycling equivalent of ‘warp speed’. Put on a pumping dance track and you get there before you know it. This was especially useful for week-long sections through endless maize farmland in central Germany.



Easy riding along the Gota Canal in Sweden. Image by Chris Newman.

3. Cycling can easily be insanely budget-friendly

Of course, posh hotels and eating out at restaurants won't quite do it on a budget. Being young, intrepid, and fiscally challenged, I cooked meals on the Trangia – once producing a very gourmet 3-course meal of flatbread, curry, and pudding – and attempted to camp out most nights.

Transport on the bike was free except for a few repairs, which meant sometimes the only other expenditure was buying food from the supermarket. This made travelling very cheap in Germany and Spain, and worked out to be around only €5 a day!

4. The cheap cyclist buys twice

I prepared my trusty bike before I left Australia, replacing the entire drivetrain (chain, front and rear gears), cables, brake pads, plus a fresh set of Schwalbe Land Cruiser tyres. The



gears were a lower-end offering from Shimano, and had worn out completely by the time I reached Hanover in Germany, after only 1,000kms of cycling. Gears would usually be expected to last at least three times that distance!

The older parts, not replaced at home, broke anyway while on the road. The bottom bracket cracked after an intense hilly session with some local mountain bikers in Stockholm, the derailleur got bent beyond repair, and the rear freehub died in Germany and left me pedalling madly like a cartoon character while the bike went nowhere.

Slightly more forethought was needed on how this bicycle would carry thirty kilograms of equipment on its 3,000km journey. The renewal of components with high-quality replacements, before starting, would have saved the amusement (of me and others) of pushing my overweight steed through numerous villages to find a repair shop!



La Grande-Motte, France. Drying out gear after a night in the dunes. Image by Chris Newman.

5. Pack efficiently

Aside from essential cycle-touring items like tires and a bike, there were a few other pieces of equipment that were used very regularly.

Essentials worth carrying:

- Solar power bank for charging a mobile phone or GPS
- Small chopping board
- Emergency curry powder and salt sachets to add excitement to bland meals
- Head torch
- Balaklava/neck scarf (thin cotton) to stop lungs and ears freezing on cold mornings

Gear that wasn't worth hauling around included:

- a second pair of hiking shoes
- spare knife
- water bladder (soft drink bottles are more robust)
- extra clothes! 3 x T-shirts, 3 x shorts, 3 x jumpers and 5 x pairs of socks took up lots of space; two of each would have been fine with weekly washing.

6. Keep it real

Despite what comes through social media, the reality of travel (and certainly cycle touring) isn't a continuous stream of incredible vistas and stunning photos. Roads can be gun barrel straight, repetitive or with a 20% gradient. Panniers and gear cables break. Strange noises when camping in the night bring thoughts like, "was that a stampede of wild pigs, or someone creeping near the tent?".

There were times when having a companion would have been more comfortable, but doing it solo made it the trip of a lifetime. A French cyclist reminded me "this is Europe, not Africa. You won't have much trouble with people, guns or bribing border crossings. The only



challenges are environmental – weather or steep climbs.” Therefore, overcoming the boring, difficult, or scary parts often just needed patience and the will to not give up.



Kandersteg, Switzerland. It got a bit chilly camping here. Image by Chris Newman.

7. Stay flexible

There are sensible folk who plan journeys down to the minute, and free-spirits who just turn up in town each night and hope they can find a hostel. A rough itinerary a few weeks ahead worked well for me travelling solo, and balanced safety and spontaneity.

I found that flexibility seems to be one of the main advantages of being on a bike. My route changed almost fortnightly depending on the weather, conversations I had with locals, and receiving advice from other cyclists.

A chat with a mountain biker in Stockholm took my route along the coast, rather than inland. A friend in Germany advised that I give Lake Constance a miss, which cut out one week of unnecessary detours. And a Swiss mountain guide recommended walking my bike up over a high Alpine pass and camp the night, which was quite a challenge – but turned out to have the most spectacular views I’d ever seen.



Some of the locals I met across Europe on my cycling trip. Image by Chris Newman.

The most important lesson I learned from Cycling around Europe

Perhaps the most important lesson was from all the wonderful people I met along the way. Despite ideas and dangers portrayed to us by the media, I received a warm welcome almost everywhere I went and experienced kindness despite the fact that I was a stranger from the other side of the world.

For more tips on travelling to Europe, [head here](#). Or if you’re planning on touring locally, take a peek at our [article here](#).