

For some, camping is all about the destination. You pack the car, try to load up the kids with as many distractions as you can to last them the journey, and the fun doesn't really begin until the tent is pitched and the first coldie touches your lips.

Then you have motorcycling camping. It's all about the journey. You're closer to the ground. Out in the air. Bugs pepper your visor just to prove to you're part of it. If it's hot, you feel hot. If it rains, you get wet. Motorcycle touring is a fantastic way to immerse yourself in the journey. Setting up camp at the end of the day is about resting yourself for the next day of adventure.

Like with hiking and bicycle touring, motorcycle camping requires you to carefully plan and choose your gear. You don't have the luxury of hundreds of litres of space like you do when camping out of the back of your Prado or camper trailer.

Which brings me to a few common questions in the growing community of motorcycle campers: *should I sleep in a swag or tent?*

In this post, I am going to go over some of the pros and cons of both setups.

Pros and cons of swags for motorcycle camping

Swags hold a special place in the Australian camping tradition. Traditionally, a swag was essentially a canvas tarp you wrap yourself in to keep warm and dry by night, and then roll up and carry on your back for your next day of nomading. How things have changed. Modern swags now come with foam mattresses, waterproof synthetic floors, ventilation, and many now have a 'dome' shape and pitch like mini tents.



As you can see, swags are a little on the bulkier side. But that's nothing this beast of a bike can't handle! Image: Alan Ablett

The key benefits of swags for touring

1. All-in-one design

You get your shelter and your mattress – just add a sleeping bag and you're set.

2. Easy to set up

After a long day on the motorbike, the last thing you want to have to do is fight with tent poles for half an hour. Swags simply roll out – or require a few extra manoeuvres if you've got a fancy dome swag.

3. Durable

Cotton canvas is pretty rugged stuff. Swags are made to be stowed on the back of motorbikes and roof racks.



The Oztrail Biker Swag is purpose-designed for motorcycle touring. It packs relatively small, is light, and has good ventilation for sweaty Aussie conditions. Image: Rebecca Edwards



The downsides of using a swag for motorcycle touring

1. Size

Even the smaller, purpose-designed swag like the Oztrail Biker rolls down to 24cm and is 52cm long. That's pretty bulky.

2. The mattress is basic

There is only so much comfort a 5cm open cell foam mattress will provide. Sure, you can add a sleeping mat but that's more bulk, weight, and expense.

3. Claustrophobia

If you're not a fan of small spaces, you might find a swag to be a little tight. Plus, you won't have anywhere to put your gear.

A swag is a fine choice if you're after simplicity and don't mind carrying a bit of bulk on the back of your bike. For optimal comfort, choose a swag that's got good ventilation and invest in a quality sleeping mat to replace or use in conjunction with the included foam mattress.

3 Best swags for motorcycle touring:

1. [Oztrail Biker Swag](#)
2. [Roman Burke Biker Single Swag](#)
3. [Darche Urban Solo Biker Swag](#)

Pros and cons of tents for motorcycle camping

The humble tent mightn't be as 'of the earth' and nostalgic as a rugged, green canvas swag, but it does what it is meant to do very well. Tents come in all shapes and sizes. From feather-light hiking tents that you won't even know you're carrying, to touring tents that take up an entire roof rack. Despite the range, some tents are better suited to being carried on the back of a bike than others.

Most motorcycle tourists will opt for a [hiking style tent](#) for reasons of compactness. Some, who like to set up at their home away from home, will carry something on the bigger side to keep their gear safe and dry. I've heard stories of riders carrying one tent for their gear and another to sleep in. You can do that because tents are so compact.



A small dome tent like this will not only hold you but a lot of gear too! Image: Richard Harrowell

Main upsides of carrying a tent:

1. Versatility

If you have a small hiking tent, one day you can be touring North East Victoria on your Harley. The next, hiking along the Australian Alps Walking Track. Try doing that with a swag! Also, you can pick and choose what sort of sleeping mat you use in different situations – a single [Exped Synmat 7LW](#) if you're by yourself, maybe a double when you're with the better half.

2. Lightweight and compact

A quality one-person hiking tent might weigh less than 1.5kg. So, essentially nothing. Pack size: small enough to barely make a dent in your saddlebags. Even if you opted for a roomier, less 'technical' tent, when compared to a standard size swag a tent, sleeping mat, and sleeping bag combo takes up much less space.

3. Room

Like to be able to sit up and play a game of Solitaire before bed? Or cook out of the rain? Possible in a tent. What's more, you can keep your gear out of the weather too in an ample size tent.

4. Separate parts

A tent can be broken down into many separate parts – inner, fly, poles, pegs. This allows you to disperse the tent over many panniers and bags which allows you to better balance your load and to plug up those gaps.



Look at the sort of places touring takes you? Image: Scott Puehl

The less desirable aspects of carrying a tent:

1. They're harder to set up

While most modern tents are straightforward enough to pitch, there's no doubt that they're trickier than a simple swag. The bigger the tent, the more parts, and the more frustrating.

2. They're not as durable

This is especially true of lightweight, technical hiking tents as they lack in durability. You can't treat them like you would a swag and they need to be carried with respect on the bike.



3 Best tents for motorcycle touring:

1. [Companion Pro Hiker 2 Lightweight Tent](#)
 2. [Zempire Zeus Hiking Tent](#)
 3. [MSR Hubba Hubba NX Hiking Tent](#)
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The verdict

From a value-for-money perspective, and in terms of versatility, I think the tent/mat combo has the edge. You can keep your gear out of the weather. They pack light. And you can sleep another if necessary.

If you are looking for more information on sleeping solutions for your motorcycle touring adventures, you may be interested in this article - [Trail Bike Adventures - Swags, Tents & Bivvies](#)

Share your options in the comments below. Are you a swag or tent sort of biker?