



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, there's 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 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.

As 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 common question in the growing community of motorcycle campers: 'should I sleep in a swag, or a tent?'

In this blog, I will address some of the pros and cons of both setups.

Swags for Motorcycle Camping

Swags hold a special place in the Australian camping tradition. Traditionally, a swag was essentially a canvas tarp to wrap yourself in to keep warm and dry by night, 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, and ventilation. Many now also 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



Pros

1. All-In-One Design

You've got 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 only a few extra manoeuvres, if you own a dome swag).

3. Durable

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



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

Cons

1. Size

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

2. Basic Mattress

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 keep 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. [OZtrail Mitchell Expedition Swag](#)
3. [Darche Ranger Solo + Swag](#)

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'll forget 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 compactness. Some, who like to set up 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. This is possible, given tents are so compact.



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

Pros:

1. Versatility

If you have a small hiking tent – one day you can be touring North East Victoria on your Harley, the next day you can be 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. For example, a single Exped SIM 3.8 M sleeping mat if you're by yourself, or 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, a tent, sleeping mat, and sleeping bag combo takes up much less space compared to a standard-size swag.

3. Room

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

4. Separate Components

A tent can be broken down into many separate parts: inner, fly, poles, and 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

Cons:

1. 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 therefore the more frustrating!

2. 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.

Best Tents for Motorcycle Touring:

1. [Companion Pro Hiker 2 Lightweight Tent](#)
2. [Zempire Zeus Hiking Tent](#)
3. [MSR Hubba Hubba 2 Hiking Tent](#)
4. [Sea to Summit Telos TR2 Bikepack 2P Ultralight Tent](#)



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?