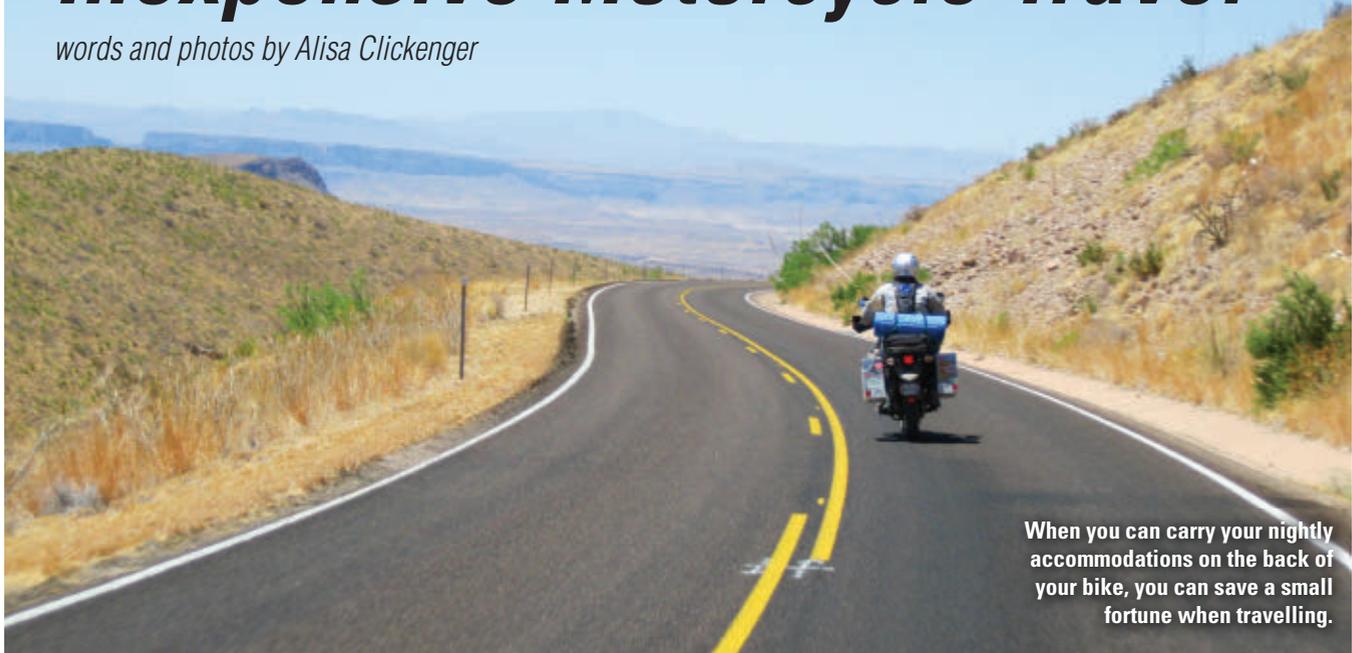


# Zen and the Art of Inexpensive Motorcycle Travel

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When you can carry your nightly accommodations on the back of your bike, you can save a small fortune when travelling.

IT'S A COMMON theme among riders to fantasize about taking a long motorcycle trip. The allure of the open road combined with an endless array of cool things to see and do is a powerful draw. Unfortunately, where most riders get stopped short is on the budget. They assume taking a big trip is enormously expensive and therefore they stop before they even get started. Motorcycle trips can be made surprisingly affordable, however, with some clever pre-planning and with some minor adjustments to your travel style.

A few years back, my partner and I spent the entire summer riding around the United States. When we got home and tallied everything up, the number shocked us: we spent over three months traveling and it cost each of us less than \$30 per day including maintenance and repairs. Did we stay in fancy hotels and

eat prime rib every night? No. Did we travel over 15,000 miles, see a goodly part of America on two wheels and meet some pretty awesome people along the way? You betcha. Here are some travel tips we used in order to be able to afford several months of travel, as well as some more ideas that we've learned from other travelers.

What are the biggest budget busters on an extended trip? Lodging, food and fuel. These costs are ones you can't avoid, so it's best to learn to minimize their impact on your budget. In order to travel on the cheap, most likely you'll need to spend some time doing pre-trip research. A little pre-organization goes a long way, and identifying the cheapest options ahead of time helps you conserve your financial resources once you are on the road. Plus, planning is always half the fun of any motorcycle journey.

of most of the camping off the beaten path in National Forests and on BLM land. East of the Mississippi it's decidedly harder to find free camping, but it is possible. If you are forced to pay for camping, try seeking out state parks or recreational areas. Hint: "undeveloped" sites often cost less than the ones with picnic tables and flush toilets.

To save money we avoided developed campsites and camping chains unless we needed a dose of WiFi and some clean laundry. KOA campgrounds always cost more, yet you usually get more in the deal. These are ideal for camping-newbies because you get built-in neighbors and chances are if you've forgotten something there will be a kind-hearted soul nearby to lend it to you. One thing I always do when moto traveling is to "cruise" any campground before registering and setting up my tent. If there are other motorcyclists present I stop and ask them if they are willing to share their site and, of course, the cost. I've met some great folks using this method, and have saved money at the same time.

If you're social and not terribly shy, motorcycle home stay networks like Moto Stays and Motorcycle Travel Network (MTN) can be great choices. Both are international networks of riders that offer up their homes B&B style to other riders. Each has a membership cost. The MotoStays.com (\$49.95/year) deal is a free place to stay with other network members. MTN (\$40/year) does it

Peace and quiet are assured when you are the only campers in the area.



## Enjoy the Great Outdoors

Camping is the obvious solution in order to avoid pricey hotel rooms. Camping phobic? You're in similar company. Now that I own quality outdoor gear, however, I find that I am comfortable sleeping outdoors and really enjoy sleeping outside. Plus, you can't beat free, and that's precisely the cost

slightly differently. Their deal is to pay your hosts \$15 for one person and \$20 per couple per night for bed and breakfast. Both require advance notice to set things up with your host or hostess.

I've met several camping-adverse riders that have worked out an entire itinerary around these networks. If you're up for staying with non-motorcyclists, there's always CouchSurfing.com. While these folks may not "get" the specific needs of motorcyclists, there's a vast network of people offering space on their couch (and sometimes even a bed). The BMW MOA, Women on Wheels, HOG, ADVrider.com, and HorizonsUnlimited.com all have lists of people willing to help in an emergency or open up their yards/homes to other moto-travelers in the club or network, so consider joining if you're not already a member.

What happens if you are forced to buy a hotel night due to unforeseen circumstances? For one thing, ask for a discount. Very often if you ask for their lowest price, it is 15-20% cheaper than the price you were quoted when you first walked in the door. Veterans and AAA members get nice discounts, too, so by all means wave those cards. Off-the-main-drag establishments generally charge less, too—especially when you offer to pay cash. Ask! I personally head to places that offer the triple gems of free breakfast, Wi-Fi, and laundry—if I have to pay for a hotel room, I want to get the most bang for my buck.

The HotelTonight.com app works well for getting discounted hotel rooms in bigger cities. Sites like Priceline.com, Hotels.com and Travelocity.com sometimes offer killer deals because of bulk contracts or last-minute availability, but are mostly selling chain hotels, not the Mom & Pop establishments. Seek out the coupon books at most rest areas, and sometimes local information booths have

No motel on this road?  
No problem.



Out-of-the-way eating establishments can be half the fun of adventure traveling.

the low-down on what hotels are comfy and inexpensive. Sharing hotel rooms and camp sites will halve your lodging expenses, so if you can find someone to travel with it will help stretch your travel funds even further.

### Food

Buying your own food and cooking it is always your least expensive option. Breakfast and lunch tend to be the cheapest meals at restaurants, so depending on our hunger quotient we usually picked one of those to be our daily restaurant meal and then cooked in the camp site at night. Just be sure to watch those extra beverage charges, or the meal can get pricey in a hurry. Water is nearly always free, and it hydrates your body much better than those sugary drinks. If you just have to have something other than water, be sure to ask if the refills are free.

### Fuel

Unfortunately, there's not a whole lot of economizing you can do in this area. If I like a certain location, I'll stay an extra day. Simply stated, less mileage = less fuel used. Non-riding and sightseeing days eliminate fuel from your daily spending and help your overall bottom line. Other small things can help reduce costs like using a brand-specific fuel card that gives you a rebate, or paying cash at the places where there's a discount for not using a credit card.

### The Zen of It All

In the USA our National Parks are our National Treasure, and an \$80 "America the Beautiful" annual pass (\$10 for seniors) gets you into all National Parks and Federal Recreation Sites for a calendar year. Veterans and their families get in for free. Typically the pass gets two people into a site, although it seems some parks differ in their rules when it comes to motorcyclists traveling on separate

bikes. Note that this pass does not give free entry to State Parks or independent recreation areas.

Both Mad Maps and Butler Motorcycle Maps are waterproof and tear resistant, and each company is run by avid motorcyclists so you can count on them pointing out the best roads. (Mad Maps also has a mobile app.) If you are a member of a travel club, be sure to take advantage of all their free or discounted services like maps and such. Traveling in the "off" season will save you money, as will getting off the beaten path.

Pre-planning where you stay is the single most effective way to cut your travel costs. Riding until you are exhausted and then looking for a place to stay will nearly always net you a more expensive lodging option. Setting up a tent in the dark in an unknown place is not a fun experience, either. Plan ahead and have a couple of alternatives in mind and you will probably avoid the budget hiccups. After that the only thing left to do is to load up the bike and start on your adventure. 🚗

## RESOURCES:

### Accommodations

[www.MotoStays.com](http://www.MotoStays.com)  
[www.Motorcycle-Travel.net](http://www.Motorcycle-Travel.net)  
[www.Hlhostels.com](http://www.Hlhostels.com)  
[www.CouchSurfing.com](http://www.CouchSurfing.com)  
[www.Boondocking.org](http://www.Boondocking.org)

### Web Resources: Trip Planning

[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)  
[www.EastSleepRide.com](http://www.EastSleepRide.com)

### Trip Planning

[www.atlasobscura.com](http://www.atlasobscura.com)  
[www.TravelingBikers.com](http://www.TravelingBikers.com)  
[www.Viator.com](http://www.Viator.com)

### Maps:

[www.MadMaps.com](http://www.MadMaps.com)  
[www.ButlerMaps.com](http://www.ButlerMaps.com)  
CampingRoadTrip.com's  
USFS and BLM Campgrounds App