

Traveling the world on a motorcycle can be the thrill of a lifetime. Packing everything you need—and nothing you don't—is vital.



The Art of Packing

There's a fine line between loading and overloading one's motorcycle to spend a few weeks or months on the road.

► By **Alisa Clickenger**

I recently returned from leading a motorcycle tour in Southern Africa. Checking in at the airline, my bag was a surprising 54 pounds, including my riding gear. The gate agent wanted to charge me an extra fee. I made a lame joke about motorcycle travel not really being all that lightweight. Humored, the agent let me pass without paying the surcharge. This got me thinking about motorcycle packing for extended trips, and how even after two decades of practice, I am still dialing it in.

Whether packing for a week, month or more extended motorcycle adventure, needs are remarkably similar, because the basics for your bike and your person are relatively the same. What primarily determines what you pack is what type of trip you're taking.

When hotel-bound, you won't likely pack cooking and

camping equipment, and very little clothing is needed, because laundry facilities are readily available. However, packing for an off-road adventure most likely requires camping equipment and many tools and spare parts.

"Most people overpack and bring more than they will ever use. If you are paired up, share the tent, food and cook kit. It saves weight and space," said Eric Hougen (Wolfman), Owner and Creative Designer at Wolfman Motorcycle Luggage. "Many people believe if they have the space, they need to fill it, but that's not true. Simon and Lisa Thomas are a great example, they have lived off their bikes for over 10 years, completely self-contained. Chris and Erin Ratay traveled the world for four years while self-contained, and got into the Guinness Book of World Records for it. Practice makes perfect."

JOSH PRUES & LOUISE POWERS



There are few convenience stores in a Central American jungle, where motorcycles begin to resemble pack mules. Basics like mealware and tools must be carefully assembled.



I've taken cues from lightweight backpacking. The motorcycle carries the weight for you, but each pound added changes the way the motorcycle handles, which can add up to a whole lot of shimmy and sway when improperly packed.

Consider the difference in weight between lightweight travel pants and a pair of blue jeans, or between a pair of hiking boots and joggers. You don't have to swap out all your kit right away, but always consider size and weight when making new purchases.

Louise Powers and her husband, Josh Prues, left their home in Colorado and traveled south through Mexico, Central America, and South America for 10 of the last 12 months. It had been a couple of years since they had done a big trip together, so they took two separate travel kits and condensed them down to one. Their tool kits were consolidated into one that worked for both a BMW and a Suzuki.

"We tried to find things to take along that were more than single use," Powers said. "Josh's dry bag was a stuff-sack for his sleeping bag, sleeping pad and pillow, but doubled as a clothes-washing bag."

Whether to use hard luggage or soft luggage is an ongoing debate. The

rule of thumb is, if you are planning off-road travel, it's better to go with soft luggage, but if you are mainly staying on the street, then choose hard luggage. That said, many factors play into this decision, including the security of your contents, durability and price. Powers and Prues found a happy medium with a combination of both for their big trip.

"We had plenty of room to pack everything we needed using our Mosko Moto 35L panniers, plus the Mosko duffel on my bike and a top box on Josh's bike," Powers said. "We had to be careful not to take more things than we really needed, simply because we had room. We also needed room for buying food for several days at a time, plus room for carrying water when needed."

To determine if it will all fit and ride well, practice makes perfect.

"In my experience of making luggage for over 26 years, I always tell riders to do a dry run, pack the bags and bike for a weekend to see what works and what doesn't," Wolfman said. "Take time to load and unload, and get comfortable with your kit."

Even when you've got everything pared down to the essentials, sometimes it boils down to time on the road to get everything dialed in correctly.

"On four different occasions, food or drink exploded in Josh's hard top case," Powers said. "Sometimes a lid would come off. Once, a banana was pulverized to liquid, and on one occasion we wound up with a hole being rubbed in a syrup bottle."

"But the worst was a container of instant coffee and a package of drink mix powder. Though not in the same part of the box, they exploded at the same time. It coated everything in sticky coffee powder. We were thankful that the rest of our bags were soft. Cinching those soft bags tightly made all the difference in keeping our stuff from being destroyed on the very difficult roads we were often riding."

Flying somewhere and renting a motorcycle is a slightly different ballgame than packing your own bike, but the same ground rules apply. Pack on the light side; you can always buy things along the way, if necessary. Find out as much as you can about the luggage that comes with the bike.

I usually pack my personal items in a dry bag, and bring along extra tie-downs, just in case. Invaluable are mini dry bags of different sizes, which keep my kit dry in case the borrowed luggage isn't 100-percent waterproof, or I don't screw a lid on tightly. Different colors also help organize electronics, toiletries and clean underwear. Don't forget something to isolate the dirty laundry, if you're reusing items.

"Proper luggage, packed properly, can make or break a trip," Wolfman said. "Sub-par luggage can cause much stress when riders have their whole world on their bikes. The contents need to be safe, secure, away from the elements, etc. When traveling in an off-road setting, contents properly packed, and luggage attached to the bike per the manufacturer's instructions, will make the bike handle well."

"I see so much improperly attached luggage and overpacked bikes that all I hear is complaints from the riders. I'll refit, tighten and repack, to make the bags and contents work on the bike. Once properly adjusted and loaded it makes a world of difference." **MCN**