

Guided Tours

Ride exotic vacation destinations on a motorcycle, without sweating the details.

> By **Alisa Clickenger**

Guided motorcycle trips can be a perfect way to spend a vacation or go on that bucket-list adventure. Some two-wheeled tours last a few days, some a couple of weeks. Epic trips span months and may go all the way around the globe. Whichever tour you choose, with an open mind and the heart of an explorer, you're guaranteed to have an unforgettable adventure.

PLANNING

One of the best things about a guided tour is that you do not need to spend time, energy and resources planning and organizing every detail. Most of the time, all that you must organize are flights. The tour organizer takes care of planning everything else. This is a great relief when a busy life and tight schedule don't allow for the luxury of planning an entire trip yourself.

Accommodations, motorcycle maintenance, route, itinerary, attractions, meals and activities are carefully preplanned. Simply fly in, join the group and ride, without worry. A guided trip focuses on enjoying the ride, taking in the sights and the scenery, and thoroughly unplugging. Everything else is taken care of.

"The research one would have to put in to have the same experience as a first-timer to a particular place is extensive," said Rob Beach, owner of Beach's Motorcycle Adventures Ltd. "That doesn't mean that someone going for the first time is not going to have a good time, because it's all so new and



A guided tour will take you to places you didn't even know exist. Planning, organizing and routing are taken care of. Simply fly in, gear up and ride out.

different. But a good tour guide is going to evaluate your situation and take you to places that are of specific interest to you, not just TripAdvisor highlights."

With a guided tour the motorcycle will be in top condition, properly serviced and insured. On the road, the tour company will help manage breakdowns

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A great bonus of the guided group tour is making lots of new friends. They have all signed up for the same reasons you did and become your daily riding partners.

or accidents. Many motorcycle touring companies bring a spare motorcycle for this exact purpose. It's the difference between a bike breakdown being a mere blip in the day or ending a trip altogether.

GUIDES

When riding somewhere remote, like the Himalayas or Southern Africa, being in a group with a professional guide adds ease and security in navigating different cultures, especially if you don't speak the local language. Even domestically, an expert local guide can offer a better tourism experience.

Although it may sound more adventurous or romantic to set out solo, and many riders do, tour guides offer extensive knowledge about the area traveled. They know the best roads to ride and can easily reroute around delays and obstacles. Intimate knowledge of the routes and areas can add significantly more depth and layers of experience into the trip.

A great tour guide will know all the interesting local curiosities that most riders would miss on their own. Best coffee or burgers, an artisan guitar maker in a small village en route, a curious landmark, a hidden valley or canyon with a completely different view. These things take years of exploration to discover. A guide has mined these gems for you to experience.

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GROUPS

Unless signing up with friends, you will be riding with a group of strangers, which can be intimidating. How will everyone match their speed? What about rest stops and activities? People are different, and it's normal to feel a little anxious about other riders.

Motorcycle tours are usually designed to cater to different needs of different customers, and are tweaked, the longer they are in operation. Whichever guided trip you have chosen, remember that the other riders are there for the same reasons and with the same goal in mind. Smile a lot, be friendly, and you'll make great new riding friends and have a great time together.

Although logistics are carefully planned, a good tour always has room for flexibility. An experienced guide will always adjust according to the needs of the group. If the group feels longer rest stops are needed, a tour guide will do their best to accommodate this. If riders wish to do shorter distances, or change rest day activities, most guides will offer options.

To maximize enjoyment, you should be flexible, too. Other riders may take a little longer to gear up, or they may want to take more photos. Accept that not everyone has the same idea of the perfect vacation or the same riding style.

It is impossible to accommodate every individual need or request on a guided tour. A great vacation means being ready to adapt and contribute to the good vibes of the whole group.

"We consider our customers friends, and the tour group a team," said Mike Thomsen, Owner of Motolombia Tours and Rentals S.A.S. "The guide is there to smooth everything out and make sure the tour goes as planned. It's not a butler service, but a mutually respectful relationship between competent professionals and a group of curious travelers.

"A lot goes on behind the scenes that the customer never sees. Discussions with hotels and restaurants, changes to reservations, maintenance of bikes, mechanical fixes, rerouting when conditions call for it and time management, for example. Making sure every person in the group is comfortable. In worst-case scenarios, the guide will take control of the situation, perform first aid or arrange for the correct authorities to take over."

ADVENTURE

A guided trip offers new experiences, not just travel. Some tour companies offer tours combined with training, where the instructor leads a tour after the coaching session. Even if it isn't a training tour, there is still a lot to learn.

There is a good chance that tour leaders and some other riders in a group will be experienced. Ask them to share their tips and techniques.

Some riders feel that a guided tour is less of an adventure, but adventures can happen anywhere. However meticulous the tour operator, it is impossible to plan for every eventuality. On the road, anything can happen, even if everything is preplanned. The specific group and location involved will never be replicated, so whatever happens, it is guaranteed to be a unique experience.

An expertly planned motorcycle trip can truly be an adventure of a lifetime. It is a great way to mix the love of motorcycles and travel, and explore new places in the company of like-minded riders. Do a little research, pick a tour destination that appeals to your riding style, and hit the road. Adventure awaits! **MCN**