

Enjoying your Adventure for the Long Haul

• Story and Photos by Alisa Clickenger

In 2009 I had planned to take six months and ride to and through South America. When my Connecticut house rented earlier than expected, I headed west to Port Orford, Oregon on the 3,500 mile Trans-America Trail, a largely dirt and off-road route originally mapped out by Sam Correro. Not yet satisfied, I headed north and rode the 2,500 mile Continental Divide Trail to the Mexican border. By then a new bike was needed, so I headed back to New England where motorcycle outfitter Twisted Throttle fixed me up with a "Twisted" DR650. I left New England November 1, 2009 and rode to Argentina. From there, my ride through Latin America lasted almost seven more months.

Last year I spent almost a full year living off the saddle of a Suzuki DR650, a trip which was part personal challenge, part needing to venture into the unknown. It was the adventure of a lifetime. I was a fairly skilled road rider, but had only about six months' dual-sport experience under my belt. My prior travels had ranged in length from two days to two months. My dream could have become a nightmare had my approach not changed partway through the trip. I hope to help you learn from my mistakes and perhaps have an easier time on your own adventure.

I made some friends in the jungles of Central America!

Twisted Throttle outfitted me with a "Twisted" DR650 for my journey to Argentina

Part 1: Do Your Research

The internet is rife with helpful forums. Be prepared by familiarizing yourself with those relating to your trip and machine. Does your brand have a reputation for burning oil? Fuel pump issues? Eating rear tires? This seems mundane, yet you'll need to measure this information against where you will be traveling. How accessible are parts for your bike in that particular country? Was your model sold there, or will you have to order parts from home?

Knowing your machine and its common issues can save you a lot of headaches on down the road, even if your knowledge is only theoretical. A little prior research would have been helpful when I broke a chain in the Peruvian Jungle. My bike came equipped with a 525 chain which was not common in Peru. I didn't know much about chains and sprockets before I left on my big trip, since my previous bike had a shaft drive. You oil and adjust them once in a while, that's it, right? Wrong. I spent a good many days looking for a 525 chain for my 2003 Suzuki DR650 SE motorcycle in Mexico, where big bikes are the exception rather than the rule. We don't even consider that a big bike in the United States, do we? Had I done proper research, I might have learned that I could have changed the entire drive-train and run a more common 520 chain, thus eliminating the problems I had finding parts while traveling.

Trip Planning for Type "A" Personalities

Planning and preparing for your trip are half the fun. Sure, you can't wait to get started, yet isn't it delicious dreaming about all the fun you will have and all you will see? Take time to learn your route, resources and the sights along the way. Perhaps if you alter your course by a few miles, or adjust your itinerary by a few days, you might be able to take advantage of an event few others see because it is off the beaten path. Maybe if you take an extra week to see the Chaco in Paraguay, you will get to Ushuaia just in time for the New Year's Celebration. You won't know unless you research your options in advance.

Do As I Say and Not as I Did:
I hate to admit it, but I didn't realize that Angel Falls was in Venezuela. Sounds silly, yet when I was doing my pre-trip planning I figured I would plan South America when I got there. As a result, I missed Angel Falls because I didn't learn its location until I had already passed it.

