



The Florida Gator Tale

Newsletter of the Florida Chapter of the
Motorcycle Sport Touring Association

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Feature Article

Off-Road Touring in ... Medellin, Colombia?

By Doug Westly

[Editor's Request: If you have ridden somewhere interesting at any time and would like to share your experiences and some photos from your journey with other riders, please contact editor@flmsta.org to publish an article. Thanks!]

Yes, that's right. Colombia. This is not the country of 10-15 years ago. Tourism is exploding, not bombs. There are busloads of European and American tourists everywhere. Colombia is one of the new international tourist hotspots! So why go off-roading around Medellin?...

First of all, it's easy to get there from the U.S. Flying time from Miami is 2 1/2 hours. You can hop daily American, Jet Blue



Just jumped off the daily Miami-Medellin flight

and Spirit scheduled flights. And, the flying is cheap. When a friend and I did it a couple of months ago, total roundtrip airline cost from Tampa, FL to Medellin was just \$750. We left Tampa at 8 AM, had a short layover and connection in Miami and landed in Medellin just after lunch.



The vistas were amazing and everywhere!

Eco-tourism and off-roading adventure tours are now one of the top new industries in Medellin. Many of them are run by foreigners that have moved to the Colombian city, taking advantage of the pristine wilderness outside the urban areas. All you have to do is hook-up with a tour operator, and they will set you up with everything you need.

My friend had arranged the tour with Alex Klimek of HydroXpeditions outside of Medellin. He's a young and enthusiastic ex-pat Belgian, who runs 2-wheel and 4-wheel tours of the area and will customize the off-road motorcycle tours to any required level of experience of

capability. He's also a genuinely nice guy and works hard at making sure his customers have a great adventure.

After flying into Medellin, we had a driver that Alex had arranged to pick us up. Safety first, and he texted us in advance, with his picture, to make sure we met the right guy after going through customs and immigration. The formalities were easy, but be prepared for a long immigration line as there are LOTS of tourists as well as returning citizens coming in every day.

Our driver took us straight to the motorcycle rental company that works with Alex. We were pleasantly surprised to see almost brand-new Honda XRE300s waiting for us (basically the South American version of a 300L, and mine had about 300 miles on it). Nicely kitted out with driving lights, protection bars, windscreen and a large top case on the back. Good 50/50 tires mounted up (could have done with a little more aggressive tread, but they worked), and they even had a phone holder with USB plug-in for our phones. We setup our bikes before heading to our hotel for the evening, literally a 10-minute walk away.



My rental Honda XRE300. Easy to ride, plenty of power, lightweight and fuel efficient. Perfect for a (mostly) casual off-road tour of Colombia



The tour gang, somewhere in the Colombian outback. Nope, no clue where we were...

Early the next morning, we mounted up, and our bike rental company owner led us down to a little breakfast spot in Medellin where we met Alex and two other riders joining the tour - one American and a Lebanese gentleman. That was it, only 4 riders and Alex, our guide. A quick bite of breakfast and we were off.

Serious warning here: Medellin traffic is NOT for the faint of heart. The city is about 3 million people, and it seems EVERYONE is on two wheels. Traffic rules simply don't exist, and there is NO enforcement. The lane markers are a waste of paint and lane splitting in town at highway speed is literally the norm. Next to surviving the ride in

and out of Medellin on two wheels, the hundreds of kilometers of off-road in the Colombian jungle and mountains seemed like a piece of cake!

Once you break free of Medellin traffic, everything changes. The countryside is pristine, the paved roads leading out into the jungle are in excellent condition, and traffic off the main roads is very light. We rode out for about an hour, then hit our first 60 km section of off-road. What we discovered then was that our tour was going to take us from village to village through the countryside, down through jungle valleys and then up over mountain range tops. Most of the off-road was not difficult for anyone with a moderate amount of dirt-riding experience. You didn't need to be a Dakar rider...at least for the most part.

Day 1 was about 125 km of total off-road distance, interspersed with the villages for a late morning coffee stop, then another for lunch. That doesn't sound like much distance, only 78 miles or so, but we were probably averaging about 20-25 miles an hour in between stops. The off-road was a combination of dirt roads, cutting across open fields, riding down by and across rivers in the valleys, and an occasional single-track short-cut here and there. By the afternoon we were coming out of one jungle dirt road section when our first real challenge hit us, the afternoon Colombian jungle rainstorm - I'm talking 40-day flood, can't see the rider in front of you, rivers of mud moving faster than you're riding type of rain. We finally admitted defeat, and Alex led us into the front courtyard of a little local farm. He hopped off and ran in, speaking to the family, who graciously allowed us to shelter in their farmhouse for about an hour, until the rain subsided. Amazing people!



Parked in the family's courtyard, waiting to see the jungle animals going by two-by-two, headed for the Ark...



Crossing a reservoir on a motorcycle-only suspension bridge, coming out of the jungle and into one of the many villages on the trip

However, that put us an hour behind and meant that when we finally got going again, we had to run the last 20 kilometers to our night's accommodation in the dark, on the roughest single-lane, dirt and rock road we had yet encountered. Rocks ranging from pebbles to bowling ball size. Ever see the movie "Dust to Glory", with the racers running through the night, driving lights only illuminating the ground a few feet in front of them? Yeah, that was what it felt like, trying to make our scheduled stop for the evening. Fortunately, we had some good riders and were moving cautiously, about 35-40 kph, as a fall then would have been a real problem. We were at least an hour from any type of rescue if anything serious had happened. Fortunately, we came through unscathed and arrived at a little Colombian-style B&B, run by a family up in the mountains, and just a little late for an amazing dinner by truly

gracious hosts. As we were eating, they took all our soaked riding gear, boots and helmets and dried everything over warm kitchen air. Hot showers and a comfy bed made for a great end to an amazing first day of riding. I can't say enough about how wonderful and amazingly friendly the Colombian people are, especially out in the countryside.

That was how it went for the next couple of days. Up early, breakfast, hit the roads and trails. Morning coffee stops in beautiful little villages surrounding courtyards with old missionary churches as a centerpiece. More off-road until lunch, an afternoon coffee stop, and on to our evening's destination. We had one brutal single track to climb, only wide enough for our handlebars and with 180-degree switchbacks, to gain a ridge and field that led to gorgeous waterfalls. That was the only place we ever got stuck, the rain making the field nothing but mud, and the 50/50 tires just couldn't go any further. We ended up hiking the last 200 yards! Fortunately, the first day of rain was the only time we encountered a deluge. Our last night on the road was in an eco-hotel just outside a village, accessible only by a rickety suspension bridge with questionable loose boards for a riding surface!



One of the many beautiful village churches along the way

There is too much to talk about Colombian off-road touring in a short article. The landscape was spectacular, the riding exceptional and the overall experience one you savor for your entire riding life. Would I do it again? In a heartbeat. Only the next time I would throw in a day of kayaking and another day of horseback trekking.

Oh, did I mention the total cost of the trip? About \$750 for the airfare. \$300 for the tour (including the nightly stays and meals) and another \$300 to rent the bike, including insurance (highly recommended!). About \$250 bucks for first and last hotel stays in Medellin, I spent maybe another \$50 during the coffee stops and paid to fill up the bike twice. Total for the 5-day trip? A little over \$400/day. But hurry, prices are only going to go up!

—Doug

Safety Talk

IMPORTANT NOTICES: *Ultimately, the safety of motorcycle riders and their passengers is their own responsibility. Nothing presented in the column supersedes, negates or relieves a motorcyclist and/or passenger from assumption of personal responsibility for their actions and safety. [Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the April 2017 edition of the FLMSTA Gator Tale.]*

Safety and the Road Less Traveled By Doug Westly

Just yesterday Becky and I were in the truck. So you want to go do a little ADV riding? Nothing serious, you just wonder what is down those dirt roads that you always speed by. Here are some thoughts on safety if you ever decide to take that left or right turn onto the dirt/sand/gravel road.

First rule of thumb: Traction, traction, traction. Street tires aren't made for off-pavement adventures. They aren't made to grip the soft surface and if your off-road path is anything more than hard pack gravel or dirt, you're asking gravity to take over.

Heavy bikes don't work well off-road in Florida. All of Florida is a beach; it just depends on how far you are from the ocean. That means unless you are up in the Panhandle, you're riding on sand. Heavy bikes sink in this stuff, so unless the road or trail under you is hard pack, be extremely careful. For our off-road riding conditions, simple, lightweight ADV bikes work far better than the latest heavy-weight, monster-powered ADV wonders. You don't need power, you need traction and maneuverability. Besides that, it means you can pick it back up by yourself, when you discover just how soft our sand can be.

If you're going to ride off-pavement, and especially if you are by yourself, repair (both you and the bike) and safety equipment are critical. As a minimum, basic tools, a tire repair kit with inflator, a good first aid kit, and a way to call for help should be your minimum standards. Particularly if you are by yourself, consider carrying a SPOT transmitter. This should be on your person, NOT mounted to the bike.

Be aware of changing surface conditions if you venture off the pavement. A gravel road can change to hard pack or soft sand almost instantly.

A few quick riding techniques to help out...

- Watch for changing surface conditions by changes in the surface colors, undulations in the path, puddles, and even the tracks made by other vehicles.
- If you get into soft sand, push your weight back on the bike, allowing the front end to lighten and ride up or float on top of the sand. Be very careful about your front brake in reduced traction conditions. Getting your front tire turned in soft sand will almost guarantee a front-end tuck and gravity taking over.
- Even on hard pack and gravel, your front end will want to wander. Let it and stay loose on the handlebars, guiding the front end in a straight line, but don't fight the little front-end wandering.
- In deep sand, find the passable rut and use it, as long as it isn't too deep. Sometimes riding all the way on the path's shoulder will find you some harder ground.
- If you don't know how deep the puddle is, don't try it! There is a big difference between a 6-in hole and a 2-ft hole.
- As the path gets worse and if you're not sure about your skills or your bike's capabilities, TURN AROUND. Bruising your ego is a lot less painful than bruising or breaking your body or bike!
- IMPORTANT (for all riding): Let somebody know where you're going, and establish check-in times and procedures.



You don't need the latest high-HP ADV wonder bike and/or spend a lot of bucks to do a little off-road wandering. The author's choice of lightweight ADV bike, a Honda CB500X with ABS, simply equipped with a rugged top case, crash bars, a good skid plate, secure mounting for a cell phone and Dunlop Trailmax tires for on and off-road use. Find what works for the kind of riding you want to do.

Finally, once you do venture off-road, you're going to find a whole new world for two wheels. If you get the bug, find an off-road riding course. You'll be surprised how fast you can adapt, and how much fun the off-road world really is out there!

Ride safe! – Doug Westly

Florida News



South Director's Report

Okay... I packed a bunch into my September, and need to be to the point for this Gator Tale!!

First, if you can, donate to the charity(ies) of your choice to help our neighbors struggling to get back on their feet both locally and in the Smoky Mountains region we all know and love...

October is a **BIG** month for the MSTA!!

IF Helene spared Suches, GA, you can still make plans for the *Fall on Two Wheels* this weekend. **PLEASE** check with the website <https://ridemsta.com/ga-suches/> and with coordinator Chris Buck at chris.buck@pm.me to verify the local conditions.

The next weekend, you might find your way to Clarksville, AR for the *ByWay Boogie*. Checkout <https://ridemsta.com/ar-bwboogie/> for all the details... You could use this rally to prep for the following weekend's Super Rally...

STAR 2024 in Kerrville, TX - The website is full of info. Go to <https://ridemsta.com/star/> and click away!! Dennis and his volunteers have put together a terrific event!

Meanwhile, here in sticky Florida, we had two rides for brunches, and one that we veered on the cautious side. Tom's ride to the Hen House was terrific. He says so himself below! Doug's ride to Eggs27 was canceled before Helene ran over the Gulf Coast of FL and into GA. Rather than risk a soggy ride, or closed establishments, or worse, we chose to cancel. I did call them on Saturday, and fortunately, Eggs27 came through just fine.

The Southies led off the month with our cruise back to the OK Corral Gun Club in Okeechobee. It had been a few years since our last visit, and the place has matured nicely! We enjoyed great service, ample servings of tasty menu items, and a lot of table gab! New member Peter Komatz, recently relocated from Jacksonville, stayed behind to take the tour of the Club and all it had to offer! Just a wonderful way to spend a summer morning!!



Great service and food at the OK Corral Gun Club on the South ride

What's Next??

We are back to **LUNCH RIDES!!** Pay closer attention to the calendar and ride announcements this fall! The **East Central LUNCH Ride** lands at **The Lake Harris Hideaway in Tavares on Oct. 5th**. The **South LUNCH Ride** heads back to the **Gator Shack Restaurant in the Babcock Ranch, in Punta Gorda, on Oct. 12th**. And be sure to get to a new-to-us location, **Sleepy Hollow Fish Camp in Floral City, Oct. 26th** for the **West Central LUNCH Ride**.

We have inserted an email response "button" to our announcements to assist our coordinators with the reservation headcount. Click on the green "button", then hit the send arrow. The pre-loaded email will be on its way!! Easy peasey!!

Membership News!!

If you are receiving the *Gator Tale*, but not my announcements, **PLEASE** email me ASAP to correct my files. I believe I'm up to date...

THANKS to Don Moe for his efforts EVERY month to bring our Florida membership up to date with all the news about our new and renewing members!!

Here's what we know today...

These Florida memberships have recently renewed:

Thomas Kusen

These Florida memberships have recently expired or will expire soon:

Michael Ewanus

Robert Holder

Buck Jones

Jamie Rohrbaugh

Roger Spice

Matthew Sturgis

We urge all our members to renew their memberships and continue supporting their MSTA. If you have a question about when your membership expires, please contact the membership committee at membership@ridemsta.com. Renewing or joining can be done quickly and securely online at PlanetReg.com/MSTArenew or PlanetReg.com/MSTAjoin respectively. If you use a pre-printed form from STARreview or an ITR, be sure to mail it to the new member of our new membership team, **Scott Snedden, 11484 Waterwood Dr., Tyler, TX 75703**, and not to the address of any prior membership director.

If you only want to update your phone, email, bikes, or other details, you can do so quickly via PlanetReg.com/MSTAupdate. **Please include enough unchanging information to assure the correct member is updated in the database.**

When you encounter a rider who would seem to be a good fit as a new MSTA member, please pass along one of our brand-new **Invitation-To-Ride Tri-folds!** For each new member you recruit and who provides your name and/or membership number on the application, you will receive a coupon for a **raffle ticket for the motorcycle touring package drawing at our next STAR event**. Any new or current member who joins or renews as a Sustaining Member will likewise receive a coupon for a raffle ticket for each year of the new membership term.

Random Ramblings!!

With 3 rides a month, you have plenty of chances to invite a friend along and introduce them to our group!!

Especially now, we will continue to support our local, small business restaurants. Please send your recommendations to any of the ride coordinators.

Hoping you're living the life you love, and loving the life you live...

When you can...

Join one of our monthly rides!!

And invite a friend to ride along!!

Ride well! Ride often!! Do it safely!!!

ATGATT Van

MSTA Florida State Director





East-Central Ride – The Hen House Eatery, Sebastian, FL – Tom Blake

The Hen House Eatery in Sebastian was our final breakfast spot this year – fittingly, on the last day of summer. The *House* was clean, with nice décor, tons of paved parking and an impressive menu. The food was pretty good, and no one went away hungry – several indicated they would probably skip lunch. Afterward, four of us rode up to Power BMW in Palm Bay to drool over all the eye candy.

Attendees included four MSTA and three Space Coast BMW Club members plus three welcome friends. Our bikes included eight BMW's, a KTM and a Triumph. I was so preoccupied with getting ready and on the road that I forgot all about the attendance sheet and raffle tickets. (Not far enough along in my Prevagen therapy, it seems.) But it finally occurred to me, voila, just note everyone's name on my phone's 'ColorNote' app. The pictures also helped.



I finally got to meet new member Joy M and her husband Larry from northern Indian River County, although they pointed out that we had met in February at the Deland Fish House lunch (before joining up). Turns out they are very experienced riders but tend to do their own navigating. In any case, we enjoyed their company, and hopefully we'll be seeing more of them. I know they're planning on attending STAR. So look for them if you go. Herman G surprised us by riding up from St Lucie County and was easily our LD champ. The rest of us were all "locals" from south and central Brevard County. My thanks to all.

Next up: We're all looking forward to cooler temperatures in October and a return to serious riding. For us, that means heading to one of our favorite lunch destinations, *Lake Harris Hideaway*, near Tavares. Great scenery and atmosphere, good food, decent prices, paved parking and accessible to many Florida riders. They don't take reservations, and it's a popular place, so we want to be there at 11:00 AM when they open.

Florida Rides This Month

Always remember to check the Florida MSTA [Event Calendar](#) and/or your email for updates on scheduled rides. Changes in times, dates, and especially locations are often out of our control and with short notice.

MSTA Florida East Central Lunch Ride

When: **Saturday, October 5th, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM**
 Location: **Lake Harris Hideaway**, 1912 Lane Park Rd, **Tavares, FL** ☎ (352) 343-3585 ([map](#))
 Description: Just a perfect setting for our return to LUNCH rides!! Join us, won't you?!

Contact: Tom, tblakel@cfl.rr.com, or ☎ (321) 794-6147

MSTA Florida South Lunch Ride

When: **Saturday, October 12th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**
 Location: **Gator Shack Restaurant at Babcock Ranch Eco Tours**, 8502 FL-31, **Punta Gorda, FL** ☎ (800) 500-5583 ([map](#))
 Description: Just a wonderful, Old Florida setting with great country vittles!! Do make time, and reservations, for the terrific Eco Tour. You will be glad you did!!
 Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com, or ☎ (561) 386-2594

MSTA Florida West Central Lunch Ride

When: **Saturday, October 26th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**
 Location: **Sleepy Hollow Fish Camp**, 10333 E Gobbler Dr, **Floral City, FL** ([map](#))
 Description: Waterfront, good vibe and tasty menu!!
 Contact: Doug, flwingrdr@msn.com, or ☎ (813) 928-1663

MSTA Fall on Two Wheels Just For Fun

When: Friday-Sunday, **October 4-6, 2024**

Location: **Two Wheels of Suches**, 1915 GA-60, **Suches, GA** 📞 Hotel phone: 706-973-1671 ([map](#))

Description: Our 3rd informal gathering (IG)/(Just For Fun (JFF)) event organized by Georgia members of the Motorcycle Sport Touring Association (MSTA)

Contact: <https://ridemsta.com/ga-suches>

Coordinator: Chris Buck chris.buck@pm.me

MSTA STAR 2024

When: Saturday-Thursday, **October 19-24, 2024**

Location: **Y.O. Ranch Hotel**, 2033 Sidney Baker St, **Kerrville, TX** 📞 Resort phone: 830-257-4440 ([map](#))

Description: **STAR - annual national rally for the MSTA**, and this year, we're riding in the Texas Hill Country.

In addition to great riding opportunities, there will be a full schedule of fun activities, including:

Welcome Ceremony, New Members/First Time Attendees Meeting, New Members Ride, Ladies of the MSTA Meet & Greet, Annual Members Meeting, Lunch Ride, Closing Banquet & Awards, Annual Bike Raffle- a Canyon Red 2024 Suzuki GSX-8s, Event T-Shirts, Vendors and Seminars

Contact: <https://ridemsta.com/star/>

Coordinator: Dennis Villarose ipnman2002@yahoo.com

Future Florida Rides

Note that the future ride events are included to facilitate longer term planning. The destinations and/or dates may be changed just before the ride dates. Please check the Florida MSTA [Event Calendar](#) for any updates.

MSTA Florida East Central Lunch Ride

When: **Saturday, November 2nd, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**

Location: **Renegades On The River**, 1171 County Rd 309, **Crescent City, FL** 📞 (386) 524-4179 ([map](#))

Description: On the St. Johns!! Lots to see, and plenty to choose from!!

Contact: Tom, tblakel@cfl.rr.com, or 📞 (321) 794-6147

MSTA Florida South Lunch Ride

When: **Saturday, November 9th, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**

Location: **Camellia Street Grill**, 202 Camellia St. W., **Everglades City, FL** 📞 (239) 695-2003 ([map](#))

Description: OK...This place is way south...So, it costs a little more to get things here, and so it costs a little more to enjoy their scrumptious vittles!! That said, this place has always treated us well and offered us really tasty options!

Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com, or 📞 (561) 386-2594

MSTA Florida West Central Lunch Ride

When: **Saturday, November 23rd, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**

Location: **Johnny's Egg House**, 133 S. Scenic Highway, **Frostproof, FL** ([map](#))

Description: Look for Westies and Southies at this one!! Always a good time, and you can get breakfast for lunch!!

Contact: Doug, flwingrdr@msn.com, or 📞 (813) 928-1663

MSTA Black Friday Lunch Ride

When: Friday, November 29, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location: **Cherry Pocket Steak n Seafood**, 3100 Canal Rd, **Lake Wales, FL** ☎ (863) 439-2031 ([map](#))

Description: Our annual Black Friday Lunch Ride. It's been some time since we were here...New owners and recently recommended...The location guarantees you won't be fighting shopping traffic here!! We'll be looking for you...

Contact: Van, busavanflmsta@gmail.com, or ☎ (561) 386-2594

For additional Florida events and information, [click here](#) to see the Florida MSTA website's Events page. The Florida MSTA chapter also has a presence on Facebook with upcoming events and past photos: [click here](#).

Florida MSTA Apparel



As a reminder, our Florida State Storefront is open online for your MSTA-branded apparel! Go to mstaflorida.qbstores.com. We have made arrangements with the supplier for our National Gearbox to allow our State membership to buy shirts, hats, etc. with our State logos directly from the source!!! No muss, no fuss!! Order yours today!! They offer both embroidery and digital print options. Click onto the Embroidered Apparel or Shop By Logo for each option.

Don't hesitate to contact Queensboro directly with any and all questions. They are very customer friendly. They also offer Polo shirts and T-shirts with pockets!! Shopping finds online... We found some fun motorcycle t-shirts you can order online. Click the image for this particular t-shirt. There are other fun motorcycle t-shirts online at <https://teespring.com/shop/motorcycle-tshirts>.

These MSTA websites have extensive event information:



National MSTA RideMSTA.com **SE Regional MSTA** MSTA-SE.com **Florida MSTA** FLMSTA.org

We're also on Facebook: facebook.com/FLMSTA/

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Classified Ads

To find a buyer for your motorcycle items, please send your ad and pictures by email to editor@flmsta.org. Don't trash it, recycle it! One man's trash is another man's treasure!