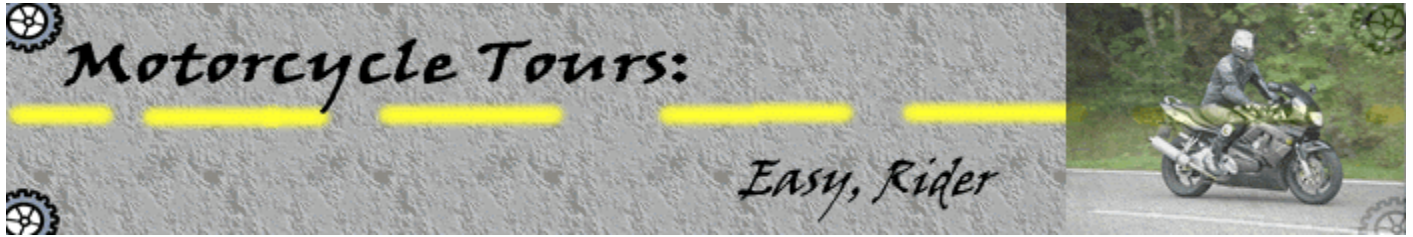


## Motorcycle Touring



The growing popularity of motorcycle or vespa touring is evident when you consider that such tours are now offered in almost every country in the world. But can't you just ride off on your own without help? Sure, although reasons to work with a travel consultant to find a first rate tour operator are very compelling.



Three major advantages immediately stand out: First, tour operators are experienced in their destinations, know the lay of the land and can lead you to places and roads you might otherwise miss on your own. You'll see areas other visitors may never discover.

Secondly, by carefully selecting and arranging lodging and dining throughout the tour, riders are freed up from taking valuable vacation time to worry about where they'll spend the night and where they will find the best meals.

Thirdly, should you choose to travel with others from a tour group, tours give riders the chance to enjoy the company of others, often from around the world. Lasting friendships are not unusual.

### Some Rules of the Road

Tour operators will arrange either individual travel or group tours. Going with a group does not mean *staying* with a group at all times. For many tours, the group rides together each morning and riders can then choose to join up with the others for the day or part of the day or not at all. Single riders frequently meet up with the group later in the day. Many tour groups set up a briefing after dinner to discuss the next day's routes and options. It's also common for each motorcyclist to receive a personalized tour book that outlines daily itineraries, distances, time en-route, suggestions for special activities and directions to the hotel.

So how much experience do you need before taking a tour? Obviously, a rider's experience will vary, and it's often up to the individual. Usually, the only formal requirement is a valid driver's or motorcycle license, but many tours recommend at least the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's basic or even its experienced rider courses before participating in a tour. Participants should have the ability to safely handle a large motorcycle in traffic. They should also have confidence riding in a variety of road, traffic and weather conditions. Tour operators say that experience is important.



Riders can expect paved roads unless they hear otherwise. An average ride of 200 miles a day is not unusual and is generally regarded as a comfortable distance. Shorter tours are available as well for riders who want to test their comfort level. Some riders prefer to ride long and hard all day; other riders want an easier pace, perhaps to amble along and enjoy

the countryside scenery. Operators offer a variety of tours that meet most personal preferences.

Some tours ride every day. But many others offer "free days" where riders stop for two nights, for example, in the same hotel. This provides a chance to rest, relax, or see the sights in a particular area.

Depending on where you are in the world, weather conditions can have an impact. If a tour is in the mountains, such as the Alps, for example, the winter may bring icy conditions. Most tour operators take this into consideration and schedule rides at times of the year when weather is not likely to be adverse. But riders should be prepared on all tours to face a variety of conditions.

And when it rains? Tour riders may have to endure the rain if a planned destination *must* be reached. That's why the proper clothing is essential to minimize discomfort.

### **The Risks of Motorcycle Riding**



This perhaps brings us to the risks involved. How much risk is there in a motorcycle or vespa tour? Motorcycle riding is, by its very nature, a risk-filled sport. But to say how much danger is very difficult. It all depends.

It depends on the tour itself and on rider's ability. Experience here helps - road or weather conditions that may be an intense challenge to a newcomer could be of no concern for an experienced rider. Another consideration is that in foreign countries, riders may be on the wrong, or left, side of the road, and this requires different handling. But riders can overcome any potential problem by practicing prior to the trip.

### **Road Companions**

If you're wondering about what kind of company you'll be riding in, it might help to know that you'll meet all walks of life. Younger riders in their 20s are common, and older cyclists well beyond retirement are also easy riders. All types of cycles are also represented, so you might not have to worry if your aging bike will receive frowns from more upscale riders.

Also note that some tour operators have provisions for spouses who, for one reason or another, do not want to ride along. Support vehicles follow riders. Often, the tour will allow the spouse to join the driver in a support vehicle at no charge, but check this kind of arrangement before booking.

Many tour operators also allow other family members to join the tour. Friends might join a rider in their own car, or they may have the option of renting a reasonably priced auto through the tour company.

### **Creature Comforts on the Road**

Other things your travel consultant will consider when choosing a tour operator with you are the amenities offered throughout the trip. What kind of hotels or other accommodations are offered? After a long day, you may want to unwind in a sauna or swimming pool.

Since motorcycles have limited carrying space, luggage is always a problem. Many tours provide luggage vans so riders are unencumbered and can simply ride their motorcycles without baggage. However, you may have a two-suitcase limitation and set drop-off and pick-up times for your luggage.

Many riders wonder if they can take their own bike. Most tours allow this option but will also rent you a motorcycle, which may be the best choice for those traveling far from home. Overseas tours often offer provisions for shipping bikes, but it is

very expensive. Some operators say that unless you are riding overseas for a long period of time, say a month or more, it is not worth the several thousand dollars to ship your bike. Riders who rent generally have several choices of cycles, and the best tours allow riders unlimited mileage with no extra charges.

### **Tour Packages**

What you will have to pay for on the trip varies, so be sure to speak candidly about finances with your travel consultant. Most tour prices are based on two persons sharing a room, but single occupancy is available on some tours. Lunch meals are usually not included in tour prices because riders may end up in several different places at lunch time, depending on if they decide to ride with the group or on their own. Alcoholic beverages are also usually not included.

Generally, in addition to the tour price, gas, incidentals and spending money should be the only other general costs, but be sure to account for airport taxes (if applicable), laundry, some meals, personal gifts, road tolls, and souvenirs. Guides may also expect tips, so ask beforehand if you need to include that in your budget.

Most tours are anywhere from five days to two weeks in length. Consider how many hours or days you are comfortable spending on the road, and let that guide you in selecting the right trip. If you're interested in custom or self-guided trips - don't hesitate to ask, because most tour operators offer them. Your travel consultant can help you identify and arrange your ideal trip.



Lastly, most tour operators do not provide insurance or medical coverage. Operators suggest you check your medical, accident and trip interruption insurance coverage, with which a travel consultant will be able to assist you. Also check your health coverage, because it might not cover a motorcycle trip.

Regarding damage, many companies do not demand damage deposits upfront. However, riders are often responsible for the first \$1,000 or more of damages to motorcycles, regardless of the cause.

### **What to bring**

Here's what you may need to pack:

- Your motorcycle driver's license
- If you're taking an international trip, you will need your passport, of course, and possibly an international driver's license with a motorcycle endorsement; it depends on the country, so check with your travel consultant
- Helmets are often mandatory, depending on where you are. A full face helmet is also recommended
- Earplugs, if you like them
- Protective/windproof motorcycle jackets and trousers
- A one-piece rain suit if you're bringing a leather jacket - just in case
- Insulated, waterproof gloves; two pairs if you have room
- Quality riding boots, insulated and waterproof
- A small bag with a clear map pocket/window
- A highlighter pen and regular pen; for marking/highlighting your route on the maps
- Swimming gear, swim suit and beach towel, if applicable
- Strong and comfortable walking boots or shoes
- A camera, if you anticipate photo opportunities
- With some guided tours, guides carry laptop computers to read email; you may want to see if you can check your email, or if you will need to make other arrangements
- Maps and destination guides (available from your travel consultant)

Like any vacation, motorcycle holidays can be as action-packed or relaxing as you like. You may also combine your trip with other activities like white-water rafting, fishing, or skiing, or a stay at a rustic lodge or luxury hotel – it's all possible with proper planning. When you're ready... just sit back and enjoy the ride.