

International Bicycle Touring FAQs

Q: Should I rent a bike from the touring company or bring my own along?

A: The answer to this question depends on many different issues. If your body type requires you to ride any kind of custom bike, take it along. If the tour is strenuous or involves many miles of hill climbing, chances are you'll be most happy with your own bike, especially if it is a high-end bicycle. If the terrain is questionable and the bike is likely to take a beating, you may want to leave your high-end bike at home and use a rental. Most tour companies will not provide expensive bicycles. Ask the tour company for detailed information regarding the model, age and gears of its bicycles. If your tour is not demanding (30 miles or less per day), it's best to consider renting a bike for the tour, but be sure you take your saddle and pedals along with you to swap out. It's not fun lugging a full-sized bike box around the world with you, but you will enjoy the harder trips more with your own bike. If you do buy a new custom bike, consider having it built with S&S Couplers so that you can take it apart and fit into a regular suitcase. You may find that you will be responsible for a surcharge of up to \$150 per flight to check a full-sized bike box, so check this also before booking your flight.



Q: I am bringing my bike along. What spare parts should I bring?

A: We suggest bringing 4 extra spokes for each of your wheels, extra cables, and any other small custom parts that might be hard to find. If you have odd-sized wheels, bring extra tires; regardless of wheel size, everyone should bring spare tubes. A full Campy Colnago might not be a good choice for a Vietnam trip, since you would be unable to purchase compatible components, so check with the tour company about spare part availability in your tour's region. Bike Fridays are very popular with our clients - they are also very hard to find parts for outside of the US, so if you choose to bring one, bring plenty of replacement parts.

Q: Why do tour companies suggest we do not purchase bargain airfares or use airline mileage plan tickets?

A: Bargain airfares sometimes come with severe restrictions, so be careful and read the fine print before purchasing. Using mileage plan tickets can lead to trouble if your flight is delayed or cancelled. Last year, one rider's flight out of Seattle was cancelled. The rider had used airline miles to buy his ticket, so he had to wait behind every other paid passenger to get on a flight. He ended up arriving one day later than expected, which could have been a disaster if he had not planned to arrive one day early for the trip. Try to **arrive one day early**, no matter what type of ticket you buy, and you should be okay even if you have flight trouble. If your trip budget depends on using airline miles, check

flight availability before booking your tour, as these seats are often unavailable on the necessary dates.

Q: Why do tour companies suggest I buy independent trip insurance for their trips?

A: Because they have had so many clients cancel their trips for medical or personal reasons and lose their money. If there is any chance that you might have medical issues, please buy the insurance; it's tough to lose \$2,000-\$5,000 on a trip - and it happens all the time. Be sure to check each tour company's cancellation policy before booking a trip. Also check your policy to make sure you have proper coverage. Will it cover you if other family members have emergencies and you cannot depart? Of course ANY bicyclist may get injured at any time while training, so getting the insurance for any major trip makes sense.

Q: What do I do to make sure I have clean clothes without doing laundry every day?

A: First, take clothing that is not cotton. Poly propylene and nylon work great, and wash and dry very quickly. Second, remember the "shower stall shuffle": always wash your cycle gear when you bathe after the ride and hang it up in your room – that way, it will be ready the next day. Take two sets of everything and you should be fine.

Q: How do I ride my bike for so many days without getting a really sore behind?

A: First, make sure you put in training miles in advance so that you arrive feeling good and ready to ride. If it's winter, try spinning classes or get an indoor trainer to get that all-important "saddle time". Second, always wear clean bike shorts and apply Chamois Butter or other lube product to that area of your body each day. After bathing apply a small amount of Zinc Bacitration ointment. This will help keep away those very painful saddle sores. Last, remember that almost every tour has rest days built in and you do NOT have to ride each mile, each day - it's your vacation, so enjoy it!

Q: Any other suggested items to bring that are not usually mentioned in the tour book?

A. Even if the tour company provides food and "bars" on the ride, they may not be what your body is used to. Carry a supply of your favorite energy bars, gels, and/or drink mix just in case your body doesn't agree with the local favorite.

Q: What kinds of cyclists normally ride CBC tours?

A: You will find that most all bicycle tours feature a wide range of age groups and riding "types". The core of our group is in the 35-65 age, with the 45-55 zone being the largest category. The whole group does NOT all ride together - groups of similar riding abilities usually buddy up over the trip. Riders are free to ride all day, or stop as many times as they wish. Generally, the people are nice and friendly.

Q: Will I be comfortable traveling alone on one of these tours?

A: These tours are a fabulous idea for the solo traveler. Many people sign up specifically for these tours because they want to enjoy the company of other great Pacific Northwest cyclists. You can choose to share a room with an assigned same-sex roommate (to save money and provide companionship) or reserve your own room and live it large!

Q: What about local currency, passports, security and banking?

A: Most countries we visit provide ATM services, so that you can draw out local currency upon arrival at good rates, rather than paying expensive rates for airport exchange services. We suggest always carrying an extra \$100-\$200 in USD for emergencies. It's also a good idea to scan your passport and credit cards and save them digitally in your email account, and to keep hard copies at home with a friend. You should also keep hard copies of these items a safe place in your luggage, separately from your originals, along with one alternate credit card and some USD in case of wallet loss or theft.

Q. What's the best way to keep in touch with friends & family back home?

A. Internet cafés are common in most countries, even in small towns. Expect to spend a few dollars per hour if you want to check and send email. You can usually find inexpensive international phone cards for less than \$.20 a minute once you arrive in the country you are visiting. These cards are much cheaper than calling internationally from a hotel line. Look for one with a toll free access number in the country you are visiting that can be used anywhere along your trip. If you call the toll free number from your hotel there may be a small local call charge.

Q: What level of gratuity is expected for the tour guides and crew on these tours?

A: All tour company employees rely on rider gratuity as a substantial part of their salaries, so it's important that Cascade Bicycle Club members and their guests reward the crew for a job well done. Ideally, one person of the group should get a tip envelope ready, and someone else should buy or bring a thank-you card for riders to sign. Plan to tip about \$10 per day per rider, though this amount is not carved in stone. In some countries, this is a lot of money, but given that the average tour costs \$2,200 or more, it's still less than 5% of the total cost of your vacation experience. Have everyone sign the "thank you" card as they put money in the envelope, then present this to the **crew lead** at the final night's farewell dinner. Let the crew lead decide how to distribute the funds to the crew.

Q. Where can I find additional international travel information?

Passport & visa information, as well as travel advisories, are available at <http://travel.state.gov/>.