

# What to Consider before Hitting the Road

## How to Plan, What to Bring, and Tips on Traveling Together

### Our bikes

There we are—two aspiring world cyclists in a bicycle shop in Rotterdam. We stare at the different models until we see the price tags. There isn't a single bicycle under €1,500 (\$1,600). The owner spies us and soon sees that we are two newbies. He plays on our insecurities.

"A touring bicycle is a specific thing. It takes you through all kinds of weather, has a sturdy frame, thick tires, strong luggage racks, and is reliable enough to do this day in and day out," he says. "But I wouldn't recommend a basic model for such a long trip."

"What about that bike?" asks Zoë pointing to an old one hanging on the wall.

"That's what people used to cycle around the world in the old days," says the owner. "If you want to repair your bicycle every hundred kilometers, you can," the bike mechanic adds with a chuckle.

We are both thinking the same thing: in the past, the roads were much worse and such light-weight equipment didn't exist. If such bikes survived those conditions, then why on earth wouldn't they now? We go home and start searching the internet for "old road bike," "retro bike," and "vintage bike." Our eyes twinkle when we see the results. We immediately feel the chemistry we missed in the bike shop.

Two days later, we arrive at an apartment building in a suburb. The bikes are standing at the door and look brand new. Two azure Giant Troopers with chrome details, front and rear luggage carriers, 21 gears, down-tube shifters, simple rim brakes, and an old-fashioned dynamo. They are matching women's and men's models.

"These are my parents' bicycles," says Eric, the owner. "Once a year they went cycling for a couple of weeks in Germany and then brought the bikes to the bicycle shop for maintenance. They are at least 25 years old."

"Then they're older than me!" Zoë shouts.

"The old front panniers and handlebar bags are included," says Eric, "I don't believe they are waterproof, but maybe they will come in handy." Ten minutes later we are standing with the bicycles by the trunk of our car having paid only €220 (\$235) for both.

"My mom and dad will be happy that their bikes are going around the world. They always dreamed of that. I am glad that you are making that dream come true," Eric tells us.



### Turning your dreams into a plan

- Dream out loud, even if it still seems like a vague dream.
- Dare to ask for help. If you don't ask for it, you won't get it.
- Ask, learn, talk, read, and search. The answer comes from being proactive.
- Trust that the answers will come. Suddenly, they will be there.

### Our top tips for planning

- Don't plan too far ahead. Life is unpredictable and part of the adventure is discovering as you go.
- Leave enough white space in the planning. The further ahead you plan, the more room there should be for flexibility.
- Don't overestimate yourself physically or mentally. Getting ahead of schedule is much more rewarding than having to catch up.
- It's impossible to do everything. With a goal, you need a schedule and with that comes sacrifice.
- If you have no experience with something, trust your intuition. Take a leap of faith, and test your limits.

### Our tips for traveling together

#### Before you go

- Take time to think and plan together. Brainstorming during an active day in nature can be very inspiring.
- Develop a strong common goal by designing your trip together.
- Discuss individual expectations. Give each other space to think and explain ideas. Don't criticize each other during brainstorming sessions.
- Accept your partner's expectations. Realize that they may differ from yours and support each other.
- Talk about your fears. What do you do if the relationship breaks down on the road? What if someone loses their wanderlust and wants to go home?

#### On the road

- Your travel companion and life partner is the only person who knows your full story. Other people may have opinions but trust the choices that are best for your relationship. You can only make those together.
- Taking the least painful path is often like running away from the problem. Dare to make the choice that is best in the long run, even if it hurts the most now.

### Route planning

#### Long term

When we set out, we didn't do it with a four-year schedule in mind. We had no idea how long each leg would take or even what some of the legs would consist of. We always wanted to travel in a flexible manner that would allow us to follow our adventure.

Even doing that though, it is useful to have a rough idea of how long a part of the journey might take—whether that is to allow for preparing mentally or knowing the season we will arrive somewhere.

To make a long-term estimate, we calculated an average daily distance which also included rest days.

For example, 62.5 kilometer (39 miles) of cycling per day, plus a rest day every fifth day mean about an average of 50 kilometers (31 miles) a day.

These are examples of the quick-calculating distances we use:

- Cycling: 50 kilometers (31 miles) per day
- Hiking: 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) per day
- Canoeing: 22.5 kilometers (14 miles) per day
- Skiing: 15 kilometers (9.5 miles) per day
- Skating: 30 kilometers (18.5 miles) per day

Day to day, things like terrain, weather, and other factors meant these totals weren't fixed, but everything tended to even out in the end. That meant that we knew that in one month we would cycle about 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) or skate 900 kilometers (560 miles), including rest days.

#### Short term

Most of the time, we didn't worry too much about short-term planning. We had our route but weren't afraid to deviate from it. We changed courses if we found that a road was too busy, there were no camping spots, or if we received an unexpected invitation.

Every evening we looked at the plan for the next day and adjusted it if necessary. Having a daily goal and mentally preparing for it was important for us. There were, of course, some days when we had to be stricter with our route: for safety reasons in the snow or when we had limited places to resupply.

#### What tools did we use?

We did almost all of our planning on the computer. While hiking and canoeing, we relied on trail guidebooks.

We usually reviewed the plan for the next day on our phone using a navigation app or Google Maps. Sometimes we just used paper

maps, trail guides, or GPS. For the first two years of our trip, we used our phones to navigate. Then we switched to GPS because of its reliability, waterproofing, and better battery life.

#### How did we plan our route?

We always tried to make use of existing information. The less there was available, the longer the planning process took. We kept to this order:

- Use of established long-distance routes. Such well-established routes usually have GPS files available and sometimes even complete guides with daily distances, sleeping options, and other amenities.
- Google Maps and Google Street View. If there were no existing routes, Google Maps was the starting point for initial planning. We used Google Street View (or satellite photos) to estimate the quality and amount of traffic on a route.
- Open data. Sometimes satellite photos were too old to give reliable travel information. If we needed concrete information, we used open data that was often available on government websites. Road maps showing asphalt and dirt roads were the most useful. We rarely needed to use this step during planning.

### Our indispensable travel items

- 1. Waka Waka:** a solar-powered flashlight and power bank.
- 2. Sleeping bag liner:** makes the sleeping bag warmer, more hygienic, and more comfortable.
- 3. Rain poncho:** much more ventilated than a rain suit.
- 4. Chopping board:** for cutting vegetables, bread, and other food.
- 5. Sandals:** Zoë's favorite cycling shoes.
- 6. An all-purpose knife:** for splitting wood, making tent pegs, and so much more.
- 7. E-reader:** a thousand books packed into 200 grams (7 ounces).
- 8. Spotify subscription:** for offline music while camping.
- 9. Hand saw:** indispensable for making campfires.
- 10. Seating pad:** keeps your butt warm and dry on any surface.

