

Preparing for the trip

This practical guide to undertaking a road trip by motorbike is intended as a supplement to the feature written by Nick Gorringer for the Hertfordshire Rider digital magazine. While it contains a stack of useful information for anybody intending to undertake a road trip by bike, to get the most out of it, make sure you also read the feature within [the Hertfordshire Rider magazine](#).

When my shiny new BMW R1200GSA arrived I immersed myself in the world of overland adventure, joined forums, read books, went to meetings of hardened travellers and attended lectures and briefings. I started to form a good picture of what I was facing and how I should prepare myself and my equipment.

At this point, two things happened that would have a huge impact on my trip. First I met Will Wilkins, author of [Woolonging to Woolwich](#) in which he rides by motorcycle from Australia to London. Will was organising a charity ride around the UK to raise money for cancer research for [Adventure Bike Riders Against Cancer](#).

I volunteered to help as this was a great opportunity to familiarise myself with my new bike whilst testing camping gear, navigation and my ability to spend time with myself. I covered Lands End to John O'Groats and back, which was a great initiation into the world of hours in the saddle and sleeping in bizarre places. I was now hooked, I wanted to do more of this!

The second thing that happened was less inspiring. Ten months before the planned departure I slipped two discs in my lower back. I was seriously out of action and all I could think of was not being able to go on the ride. Little did I know that this was going to have such a big impact when I did eventually go.

After a summer of physio, exercise and multiple occurrences of prolapsed discs I made the final commitment to Globebusters and they accepted me on the trip. In the months building up to departure I ended up in hospital several times with back problems until on one occasion I was prescribed medication to give instant relief, which gave me the confidence I needed. I had painkillers that would allow me to 'get out of jail' and to an airport if things went wrong on the road.

In the meantime I had been reading [Sam Manicom's books](#) about his seven-year adventure riding around the world. Sam had suffered similar back issues and had managed to overcome them. I tracked him down to get some tips; it was immensely helpful and a great confidence builder.



Useful websites

Before you set off on your adventure, you need to talk to as many people as possible, who might be able to give you guidance on the practicalities of a major road trip. These are the sites



and forums that Nick used, but there are plenty more out there depending on where you live and where you're planning to travel.

- ▶ [Adventure Bike Rider Forum](#): A good place to post questions or just read of other riders' experiences.
- ▶ [Horizons Unlimited](#): A motorcycle travel community website. Offers endless advice and articles on global motorcycle travel by people who have done or are doing it.
- ▶ [The Trail Riders' Fellowship](#): The TRF offers the chance to ride locally on the green lane network. An opportunity to ride your bike in more challenging environments and a community of local riders.
- ▶ [Globebusters](#): Lots of rides and adventures to whet the appetite.

Choosing the right kit

How do you prepare yourself and your bike for two months on the road, travelling across every imaginable type of terrain? There's no correct answer, as everyone's trip is different and everyone's requirements and expectations are different.

My choice of a BMW GSA was an obvious one though. Shaft driven, a 400-mile range, plenty of carrying capacity and a good support network across the globe. I had the electronic suspension replaced with a manual set-up, the standard exhaust was replaced with a narrow unit that allowed panniers of equal sizes, an enduro gearbox was fitted and I used Touratech to protect every vulnerable part.

Storage was taken care of by a pair of 42-litre Metal Mule panniers and a Touratech tank bag. I was determined to carry all my gear in these lockable boxes to aid with security. I made a few other small additions such as a water bottle carrier and mounts for a Go-Pro from various sources. The bike certainly looked the part, more catalogue poser than desert rat at this stage.

Tyres are subject that no two people seem to agree on, so a phone call to Kevin Saunders sealed the deal. Heidenau K60 Scouts, dual purpose with a deep tread was the way to go.

I'd opted not to have the standard BMW navigation installed, but GPS is important on a trip like this. I would carry all the necessary paper maps and the route notes provided by Globebusters but ultimately I needed to be able to navigate my way in the most efficient manner.

I was determined that I would not go through the scenario that so many before me had with GPS, it can seriously detract from your enjoyment of the trip you are on if you don't trust, can't charge it and most importantly don't know how to use it. (This proved very true for some of my companions on the big ride).

I opted to stick with my Garmin Montana 650T which I'd used for green laning and marine navigation. I was familiar with it, it was waterproof, it could run on AA batteries and it hadn't let me down yet! I sourced a charging cradle for the Montana and fitted it to the GSA. Ready to go.



Riding kit

This was an easy decision as it would be the best I could afford for the changing conditions I was going to encounter. That meant BMW Rallye 3 trousers and jacket which can cope with sub-zero temperatures right up to 50 degrees. For waterproofing I binned the internal liner and bought a set of Berghaus waterproof walking trousers and jacket which were lightweight, easy to put on quickly and quick-drying.

Also on the menu were:

- ▶ **BMW System 6 flip helmet.** Being able to stop and talk whilst people can see your face is a huge benefit.
- ▶ **Alpinestars Tech 7 motocross boots.** Protection is king when it comes feet and ankles and there is little better than MX boots for this.
- ▶ **Klim Dakar lightweight gloves** and a pair of **Harley Davidson winter gloves.** Both excellent.
- ▶ **Samsung Galaxy S4 ACTIVE phone.** Waterproof, dustproof and shockproof with a standard USB charger and an excellent camera and removable SD card.
- ▶ **SPOT Gen3 tracker.** For everyone to follow my journey and let me check in every day to say I was OK.
- ▶ **Additional under layers and fleece.**

Sorting the paperwork

Before you undertake a big bike trip it's essential that you get all of your paperwork in order. As you cross from one country to another, the officials that proliferate just love to see lots of paperwork which is why if you skimp before setting off, you're absolutely guaranteed to regret it...

► Passport

Once outside Europe, crossing borders by land under your own power requires pre-arranged Visas in some of the countries on the planned route. Passport was to be 'lost' to embassies for up to four months before departure to gain the required visa stamps. This can be a pain if you need to travel during this period. I managed to get a second passport issued that I could use in parallel. It's not easy but they'll issue one if you persist.

► Visa

A minefield of confusion, administration and cost. Fortunately, Globebusters had arranged for a company called The Visa Guys to work with us on this one. They make sure all your submissions are correct and walk your documentation through the process ensuring you get the correct stamps for the correct entry windows at the the correct crossing points. Seamless and excellent value. Cost was about £450.

Chinese visa. Accessing China riding your own motorcycle isn't easy. You need a government approved guide, your bike needs to be pre-approved, you need to be pre-approved, your route needs approving, your accommodation needs pre-approving and your time entry is very explicit; you get an eight-hour window. Globebusters took care of this; a wealth of experience allows them to take riders into China where and when no one else can.

► Money

Euros and dollars in small notes. Work out a daily budget for fuel, food and beers and carry it all in cash. This involves a huge pile of notes that need to be hidden around your luggage. It's important to keep tabs on how much you have, to declare it when crossing borders. Don't rely on credit cards or cashpoints.

► Jobs

Although painless, this takes planning as the time windows for such a varied combination are quite complex. It's also expensive, at about £500.

► Insurance

Surprisingly, the easiest to sort out. Bike insurance for Europe was covered by my Carole Nash policy, additions for non-EU 'western' countries was added via green card cover, anything outside central Europe was impossible and would have to be sorted at the entry point to the country. This was sorted in a phone call or two and cost a minimal amount.



How much?

There's no denying that a really big bike trip costs a lot of money, but if you view this as the trip of a lifetime, you'll see that it's worth saving up for. That bottom line if pretty hefty, but half of it is accounted for by the bike and kit – all of which is still available for use afterwards. So yes it's a lot of cash, but the experiences en route are priceless...

Bike	£17,500
Trip	£14,000
Visas	£500
Jabs	£400
Fuel	£1200
Kit	£2000
Spot tracker	£500
Phone calls	£200
Spares	£500
Food & Spends	£2500
Flight Home	£700
Total	£40,000

DIY or guided tour?

This question is the one that stops so many people making the decision to go on a big ride. We've all seen Charlie and Ewan riding around the world on TV, we want the adventure, the exposure to different cultures and ways of life. We want to experience life on the road and have a romantic view of a nomadic life sharing bread and stories with other travellers.

The reality is, unless you've taken the massive decision to make overland travelling a way of life and are prepared to forego the luxuries of home life, family and security then this is not going to happen. You may be more than capable of planning, executing and managing such a trip, but realistically, will you?



The other option is a 'guided tour', but don't be fooled by the title. Yes, you have a guide, yes you do have a support vehicle and you do have pre-booked accommodation. You may have help in sorting out your visas, get assistance crossing borders, you get great advice on kit and group discounts on spares etc –but you still have to do the ride, spend hours in the saddle, negotiate for fuel, pick your bike up in the sand, find water and food and navigate through an ever-changing network of roads, deserts and cities to get to your location.

I think there's a stigma attached to such trips. The view is that it's not doing things properly or it's a bit soft. I certainly had these doubts the closer the trip got. I thought why do I need babysitting, I can do that, I have learnt a lot since signing up, have I wasted my money? Should I just go on my own anyway?

Thankfully, I stuck with my original plan, I did the ride, I had the benefit of an experienced overlander guide and the security of a back-up van, but I was able to fully enjoy the countries I travelled, the people I met, the local cultures and the occasional exotic beer without the worries of where I was going to stay, what if I had a breakdown, what if I get arrested and so on. It's not a soft option, it's a less-aggro option, a way to enjoy your journey and someone to have a beer with and share your tales of the road with each night.

