

We interrupt this exploration of various nations to bring you this important and fascinating topic: all the gear I haul around. This is mainly for scooter nerds and another Chris, because they asked. I found similar lists useful when I was packing for this trip, so here's my list of gear if you're planning on traveling only by motorbike for months on end. Which, honestly, is an awesome idea.

Highlights: even if you aren't planing a trip like this, look into travel underwear and a cheap pocketknife. They will improve your life.



*Trusty. Battered. Home.*

A few important notes: I'm driving a 2016 Piaggio BV350 scooter. It's had its minor problems (the buttons on the dash are chintzy, quickly corrode and stop working, the clamps for cooling are terrible as delivered but these clamps have since been replaced) but this little bike just had it's 24,000 mile maintenance, I've taken it up over 14,000 feet high,

played around in the sand, dumped it over a few times, spent hours at a time pushing it down windy superhighways and generally abused the heck out of and it's been a champ.

Except when some jerk hit it and drove off, which is why the above photo has a big crack in the front fender.

The list below is the crap I've accumulated after nearly 9 months of travel. It's definitely not what I left with, nor what I'd leave with if I was starting this today.

I use several places to store stuff:

1. Top Case - this is Piaggio's largest top case and it's a monster. I think it holds 48 liters and it looks a bit ridiculous on its own but it's been great for this trip. Uses same key as my scooter, which I love. Generally liners and hat in here at all times. Laptop bag goes in here on travel days. This is the only exterior luggage I have that locks. It almost never comes off my bike. I can put two bags of groceries on top of my (large) collection of liners. Would be vastly more useful if top were flat but I'd also be tempted to pile more stuff on there (bad idea for weight distribution).
2. Wolfman Skyline Duffel Bag - waterproof, tough, just a big set of two bags that drop inside one another to keep the rain out. I think it holds 27L. Clothes and toiletries go in here. Doubles as a back rest but also limits my ability to move back on the seat. Carry in and leave at lodging.
3. Oigo Saddle Bags - picked them up when I started having to carry more oil and coolant (due to leaks in coolant system). Would not recommend; rain cover tore on first use, the rubber was quickly falling apart, etc. But they have served my purpose. I keep a 2 gallon container of gas in one (and I've needed it at least twice) which lets me explore the southwestern US and not continually panic about fuel. Other bag is used for food and water.
4. Under the seat - technically this is locked too, I have repair tools, jump start battery

(used only to recharge phones so far, thankfully), fluids, sneakers, sandals, bike manual, etc. Also a sweater.

5. Snack Warmer – colloquial name for the practically useless storage in the front of the bike. It's tiny, dusty and gets real hot. Earplugs and a pad to put under the kickstand when I'm parking on sand go in here. Plus a cigarette lighter-to-USB charger I've never used.
6. Backpack/water – I wear a North Face version of the camelbak (actually has a camelbak bladder in it now, which isn't nearly as good but all I could find to replace the original when it started to leak). Great way to drink water on the road and when hiking.

Top case in normal operation (armored pants are in it here, I don't tend to wear those except on the highway because I'm an idiot):





*Top case showing liners, armored pants and hat. Pants are usually on me or at the lodging, but do end up here when hiking. Hat has been awesome, it folds small and is super rugged.*

My big electric liner isn't in the top case right now, that's at a friend's house post-winter. Medium weight jacket I bought for China lives here instead along with wind liner, rain jacket, rain pants, big electric winter gloves, etc.



*Luggage - this is what I bring inside to wherever I'm staying for the week. Usually also my motorcycle pants and helmet.*

Ok, this is about to get even more boring and filled with excruciating details.

## **Saddlebags**





*Saddlebags open to show contents.*

- Left saddle bag (when on the bike, only matters because I feel happier with the fuel not right above the super hot tailpipe):
  - 2 gallons of gas in a plastic jerry can I picked up at a hardware store along the way. I originally started with two small fuel bottles, I think 30oz each. You can see one still attached underneath the top case. Those are so small as to be nearly useless. I only carry one now and that's because I'm curious how long a plastic water-bottle holder will work (answer: way longer than the aluminum ones!). Ideally I'd engineer a better way to store fuel, but having 2 extra gallons is great.
  - Emergency radio/flashlight/weather radio. Bulky, used little but I like having it.
  - Extra pair of glasses in case mine break. Thankfully not needed but would bring

again (I can't drive without them).

- Silk glove liners - these things get caught on any velcro (like, say, the kind all over motorcycle gloves) but I still use them with some frequency when it gets cold out. Tiny.
- Hand sanitizer and glasses cleaning liquid. Waste of space; I'm a dude and just rinse stuff off if I'm lucky.
- Rock Straps - never used them but glad I have them in case the straps on the duffel fail or I need to do some emergency lashing.
- Cord and cables for electric gear.
- Right saddle bag:
  - 1000ml reusable water bottle I use all the time.
  - Typically a bottle of rye. I like Bulleit, it's a solid choice at a decent price point, commonly available and the bottle is perfect for fitting in a saddle bag. Probably totally illegal to carry an open container like this. The problem with saddle bags is suddenly I have room for this kind of crap.
  - Small cutting board - It's so small that I might take it along again although honestly I don't think I've used it since I acquired:
  - Collapsible camping bowl. Bottom is a cutting board. Hugely useful. Might get a collapsible mug to go along with.
  - Bag with butter knife, spoon, fork, paring knife and some cold medicine. Silverware is just normal stuff, *just* fits in the bag, works great.
  - Band aids, vitamins, emergency allergy medicine after January's Mystery Event.
  - One small re-usable bag: originally I put an ice pack in this and hung it from my front hook on the scooter to keep carrots, etc. in. Then I got the saddle bags and it all goes in those. Except the ice pack, which I didn't use enough to justify keeping. Use this bag and a handful of plastic ones I've picked up along the way for groceries.
  - Usually food of some sort. I eat a lot of sandwiches (spinach, mustard and cheese!) and those ingredients typically come in about 6-7 servings worth so I make the extra sandwiches for travel days. Pro-tip: mustard does not have to be refrigerated, it just



loses flavor after around two weeks. That happens to correlate pretty much exactly with how fast I go through a small bottle.

Bottle of sunscreen lives in camelbak. I can't believe you're still reading.

## Duffel Bag



*I've undone the outer liner and you can see the inner liner still strapped down.*

One giant bag gives you the most usable space and it's a giant pain to pack and find anything. Also the rainproof requires folding each bag down a bit (fighting when you over pack) and I invariably remember one thing after I'm all done assembling it. I've been on the road 9 months and I still do this all the bloody time.

Ok, we're getting kind of embarrassing here with the extra crap I'm hauling. Clothes broken out after this "other stuff" list:

- Big, heavy hanger: motorcycle armor is heavy. It will shatter your hosts' hangers. I know this because I've shattered bigger-than-normal hangers at motorcycle dealerships. Be a nice guest, bring your own hanger.
- Yes that's a surge protector. I have two laptops and a cell phone. I use that stupid surge protector all the time. Airbnb and motels are frequently both poor about providing usable outlets.
- Network cable: never used it, everybody has wifi. Would not take again, use cell phone as hotspot to book new lodging if I ended up somewhere without wifi. I can't work

without internet which is the only reason I brought it to begin with.

- Bag of bags: trash bags, zip lock bags. Would not take again other than some ziplock bags to put cellphone in when rain looms.
- Two envelopes (one shredded, now a plastic bag) one labelled “odd” and one “even”. Keep two months or receipts in these (this month & last month). Two months is enough to cover any disputes, anything I might need for a warranty gets digitized.
- Kindle in box it came with. Had Kobo Glow HD, it broke frequently. Hate to be tied to Amazon, but Kindle (paperwhite) is a solid e-reader. Keep in box to protect it, also keep cord (not needed) and stamps in the box.
- Small USB speaker: had before trip so brought it along. Wouldn’t buy this particular one again but I do use it.
- I have 3 pairs of motorcycle gloves: heaviest electric ones (in top case), medium weight (now in this bag) and lightest weight (I’m in Phoenix, they stay in helmet or top case if not on my hands). Lightest summer gloves lived here most of the journey.
- V60 coffee maker (dripper)?!! I would NOT take this along, I actually picked it up while in China because it was so hard to get coffee in the morning and it was actually cheaper to buy this then keep getting it in stores (when I could). But I can’t just throw it away! Um, that being said I’ve used it in a couple of Airbnbs that lacked coffee makers. Filters in the saddle bag (along with coffee if any left after the week). I am embarrassed to be carrying this.
- Laundry pod thingies. Laundry on the road is a pain, handy to be able to carry some soap along. Would seek other options, picked this up along the way.
- Some extra velcro from mounting the gas fuel bottles, extra USB cable (too many; next time I’d carry my phone charger and one other), extra earbuds I picked up at The Broad because I left mine in the room and wanted to listen to their audio tour (IT’S A TRAP! Their stupid app doesn’t let you control the audio volume, it’s so loud it’s impossible to use).

## Toiletries:

The black leather square I picked up at TJ Max and it's been PERFECT. Holds all I need, can sit on back of toilet or whatever small, random shelf is available at the lodging.



*Do I seriously need a picture and the details of my toiletries bag?*

I'm not going to list these, pack what toiletries you need. However, I do keep a few bars of hotel soap on hand for when I hit an Airbnb without soap (this is not uncommon). That's the only vaguely useful bit of information here (other than get a case to put them in).

## Clothes



Ok, this is actual potentially useful. Good thing I buried it under paragraphs of blather. What clothing to take was A Big Deal when I was planning for this trip. Most of these go in a big bundle, look up the bundle method and master it. I haven't so my clothes are always wrinkled, but it's still an efficient way to pack. Here's what I have:

- 2 pairs of pants (one worn, one packed). Both are Patagonia magical textile stuff and are impressively rugged, pack small and dry quickly. Two pairs is plenty and I really wear one pair 95% of the time. I'd bring two anyways.
- 2 long sleeve button down shirts: The blue one is "wrinkle free" which is a lie but it wrinkles a lot less than the white one. I started with the white one, picked up the blue

later and haven't used the white again. One is enough.

- 2 t-shirts: one for pajamas one for wearing (sometimes as an undershirt). Perfect.
- Pajama bottom. Might be tempted to use shorts instead although I've had some cold nights so whatever. If you're doing Airbnb or camping trust me: you'll want some PJ's even if you're the type to normally sleep nekkid.
- 1 textile t-shirt: I almost never wear this. Maybe if you're in humid, hot areas then this makes sense but I wouldn't take it again. If you do a lot of jogging or something, then maybe.
- 2 button down t-shirts: daily wearers in warm weather. Cotton is actually great in low humidity; it doesn't smell nearly as quickly and it absorbs and holds sweat which is good when it's really hot and dry. Because they have collars I can't use them as an undershirt to the dress shirt, otherwise I'd only need one t-shirt.
- 1 long sleeve tech undershirt: used for layering, good in cold.
- 1 loose, medium weight long sleeved shirt: another Patagonia product and I use it a lot. Hoodie sweatshirt could replace this, take one or the other.
- Long underwear: pants only, I use the long sleeved tech-shirt in place of the top. Take a pair, I've heard silk is the way to go, these are some kind of tech fabric and ok. Scooters offer more leg protection against wind than a motorcycle but on a cold day you'll be very, very happy to have these.
- 1 big heavy sweater (not pictured, it's in a bag under the seat of my scooter): some kind of fancy tech fleece thing is probably better but I own a big wool sweater so used it and needed it in The Cold Times.
- 1 pair swimming trunks which I've never used but feel like I should carry anyways.
- 1 pair of shorts which I use rarely. Handy on laundry day, though.
- Too many socks! Socks are the Achilles Heal of traveling. I can't find any kind of quick-dry sock. Ideally you need at least 3 pairs of socks for each kind of footwear you're bringing and that's if you're ok hand-washing these in the sink all the time. 4-5 pairs is more realistic and they'll still be a pain. See discussion of footwear, below.
- 3 pairs of underwear: two stored, one worn. Wash your underwear every day, let that

pair dry and wear the other. Get quick drying travel underwear, it's actually more comfortable and lighter than what you're probably wearing right now. It also costs a lot more. I have used my 3rd pair a couple of times if I don't have time to dry the others during long travel days. Travel underwear is kind of life changing.

- 1 pair fancy motorcycle underwear: I have a pair from LDComfort and they work GREAT. If you're going to spend 9 hours riding a motorbike you really, really want to look into something like these. Let's not go into details but you can thank me later.
- 1 pair cooling sleeves also from LDComfort. Work great, haven't used them on this trip. Used a lot during Kansas summer, though.
- 1 warm knit hat which lives in my camelbak. Used mostly when it's unexpectedly cold on a hike, which has happened a few times. Bring one!
- Coat? I have a medium one that packs down really small in the top case and I can also use it as a liner. I acquired it for China, my original several months had me wearing just my motorcycle jacket and/or liners around. This looks pretty silly at times but is doable. Think about replacing one liner with a crush-able, high-tech jacket but honestly this won't work if you use an electric liner (and those ARE SO WARM).
- Rain jacket and pants, both big enough to fit over my armor, live in the top case. Sometimes I use the rain jacket on its own and it looks silly because it's huge on me, but whatever. Get a nice one, the cheap rubber tops will just shred on your poky motorcycle armor. Although cheap rubber pants have worked well for me!
- Motorcycle armor is its own post. I wear REV'IT! Sand 2 Hi-Viz jacket with the optional back protector. Works pretty well, definitely durable, liners are a pain. Ventilation is a big zip up the arm, this is genius. If you're not doing a ton of hot weather riding I'd look closely at a leather jacket you think looks cool off the bike too. Armored pants are hard; I have the previous generation of pants that match the jacket. For me, over-pants MUST unzip from ankle to crotch. If I can't take them off in the parking lot without removing my boots (I call this The Parking Lot Strip Show) then I won't end up wearing them. Armor you won't wear is useless. You can't always mix and match pants because the zippers are different from different manufacturers (jerks!) so pants are hard. I do a lot

off hiking and don't want to wear the armor during that, so these have worked fine. Helmets depend on your head shape but the Sena bluetooth helmet speakers are worth getting. I had a ram-mount to hold my phone, sent it home early in the trip because I never use it, just use audio instructions. This is ... not ideal, but viable.

## Footwear

Probably my biggest research before this trip was what boots to wear. I like wearing boots (my default footwear for years is a cowboy or other leather boot) and was looking for protective motorcycle boots I could just wear all day long. Everyone I asked said, "you will be miserable, bring sneakers too." In my case, they were wrong.



*Gaerne Balance Oiled Boots after 8 months of wear (hint: still going strong)*



There are a ton of opinions on boots and I tried on the Gaerne Balance Oiled Boots as they were the most commonly recommended for “as close as you’re going to get to comfortable off-bike and on.” They are super comfortable for giant boots except they don’t breath well, so they can get very hot and damp inside. The person where I bought them described them as “walking on a cloud” which, compared to other motorcycle boots, is totally the case. They are tough. They are waterproof. Tread has a good amount of grip (even for rock scrambling!). They offer a lot more protection than a non-motorcycle boot but less than the most aggressive motorcycle boots. I took them as my only shoe and hiked Arches, Zion, the Badlands, Denver, Salt Lake City and nearby mountains, Los Angeles, etc. I’ve also pinned one leg under my scooter in a wash of gravel and didn’t hurt my ankle or foot at all.

I love these boots and they were totally the right choice for me.

Problems? Man can they get hot. They are also ugly as sin, although with long pants on they look like some kind of ugly moon-boot instead of obviously a motorcycle boot. Not sure that’s better. I was warned that the soft sole would get chewed up if you stood on pegs a lot; I ride a scooter so no problem. I have worn down the heel a bit, which I do in all my shoes and boots, but nothing outrageous given what I’ve put them through. That time I accidentally hiked 18.6 miles? Yeah, I was wearing these. That sucked, but it wasn’t because of the boot. If you do get these boots: toss out the cheap paper insoles and buy some nice ones (think like \$30+ at a hiking store). It took me a few weeks to do that and it made a huge improvement.

I am now also hauling around a set of sneakers. I bought them because I spent a month in China and it just didn’t make sense to wear huge motorcycle boots with no motorbike in sight. I got small sneakers (someone recommended even smaller climbing shoes) that don’t take up much space but you know what is a pain? Suddenly I need sets of boot length socks and another set of normal shoe socks. THAT is some wasted space. I would not take sneakers on a trip like this again.

I do recommend a set of nice sandals. I have some kind of imitation Birkenstock, they work great for me. Birkenstocks are better but if you're an idiot and don't resole them in time you'll wear through the cork and have to buy very expensive new ones with some frequency. I am that idiot.

I had shower sandals (flip flops) but they were a waste of space for me. Tossed.

## Laptop Bag

Odd to break this out, it lives in the top case during travel days and in my lodging otherwise. I carry two laptops. This seems silly but my work laptop is locked down and even if it wasn't I really don't want to do any non-work stuff on it. I'm a computer programmer, I keep a blog (intermittently!), I hate working off my phone. Two laptops, two sets of charging cables (actually three, I bought a spare for my work laptop when I left one at a friend's house, extra now lives under scooter seat). Both fit in one bag with some loose paper for taking notes, postcards I'm way behind on sending, some pens and the USB cable I use a lot. Phone charger also goes in bag.

## Under the Seat

Clothes and stuff mentioned above, but my tool kit is:

- 1 can of oil.
- 1 can of coolant. I hate carrying these, if I could avoid it and the 2 gallons of gas I could go back to not needing saddle bags which I'd prefer. On the other hand, this bike uses NASA grade fluids that you often can't find at the local hardware store. Vexing.
- Tire pressure gauge.
- Manual bicycle tire pump. If I get a flat this will suck but works just fine for getting tire pressure up. Although these tires (Micheline City Grips) do hold pressure very well.

- Set of tire plugs/worms and reamer. I should really check how these have been surviving triple digit heat...
- Bag that holds a screwdriver and set of changeable heads (including hex and torx), bicycle tool (more hex), common wrenches, a sludge wrench, needle nose pliers. I was careful in the nearly year before this trip to start setting aside any tools I needed when working on the bike.
- Bike manual.
- Small bag holding thin rubber gloves.
- Alaska Leather Sheapskin Buttpad - makes long trips doable. AirHawk did not work for me (it was an very expensive torture device); I think your choice depends highly on how much padding you naturally provide and your gender.
- Pocket knife - I got a cheapo Gerber single blade (half serrated) locking knife for like \$10 because I know I'm going to forget and some TSA agent is going to confiscate it. If you've stopped carrying a pocketknife because of idiotic airline regulations (like I did), buy a cheap one! I use this knife almost daily in part because it's so cheap I have no fear of using it in ways that could damage it.