

# MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAVEL PRIMER

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## 7 things to think about when you're traveling abroad to mountain bike

by Mike Brcic

### 1. What are the entry requirements into the country?

Do I need a visa? If so, can I get it on entry or do I need to get it in advance? Do I need a passport? You can find answers to questions such as these at Visa HQ or Project Visa.

### 2. Are there any entry fees?

Some countries charge an entry fee or reciprocity fee (such as Chile). Google '[your citizenship] traveling to [intended destination country] entry fees' to find out if you'll need to pay any fees when you enter the country. Some fees can be as high as \$150, so do some research in advance.

### 3. Will I need vaccinations?

Travel in many countries may necessitate some vaccinations. Check out the [MD Travel Health](#) website for some preliminary information, and then visit a local travel clinic for up-to-date/in-depth information and vaccinations.

### 4. What's the best way to get local currency?

Usually the best way to get local currency is via a local ATM – withdraw enough cash to get by for a few days (but not so much that if you lose it/get robbed you'll be out a ton of money) and your bank will usually convert it at a favourable rate. Check with your bank about foreign withdrawal fees, as they can often be hefty.

Alternatives include traveler's checks (which many vendors don't accept, so they have to be converted to local currency), USD (which is widely accepted in most countries around the world, albeit often at a poor exchange rate), or credit cards (which can be widely accepted depending on your destination, and usually result in a favourable exchange rate).

## **5. What are the hospitals and medical facilities like?**

If something serious happens, like a serious illness or injury, are the local hospitals equipped to handle it, or will you have to be flown home to get the proper care?

Where are the best facilities in your intended destination? Find out in advance so you can demand the best care if something does happen.

Again, MDTravelHealth is a great resource for research about medical facilities in your intended destination.

## **6. How good is local cell service?**

If you're traveling on your own and are going to be getting into remote areas, and especially if you're doing something risky like hardcore mountain biking, it's prudent to find out if you can reach help on your cell or if other means of communication (e.g. a satellite phone) will be required.

[Open Signal](#) is a great resource for finding out if and where you can get coverage in your intended destination. Type in your destination to see coverage and then find out if your carrier can be accessed via roaming with the local carriers.

## **7. Is it safe?**

Every country in the world has some sort of safety risks. Unless you like living on the edge, it's prudent to do a bit of research in advance to find out if there are any areas you should avoid, and what precautions to take.

The Government of Canada keeps a pretty good and regularly updated database of travel advisories around the world. Keep in mind, though, that embassies tend to take a very conservative approach to risk management, and a) will often inflate the actual risk, sometimes significantly, and b) often don't have the resources to get up-to-date, on-the-ground information.

I've travelled to many areas around the world that were subject to travel advisories, yet when I arrived I found no evidence of any significant safety risk, often because the local embassy hadn't bothered to follow up on a travel advisory and/or hadn't been to the area in years.

The best approach is to try and get local advice: connect with locals in the area and find out what the real situation is. Reach out to them via online forums, friends of friends, Facebook, Twitter, etc... and get the insider's perspective. You may even make new friends that you can visit when you get to your destination!

# Thirteen Ways to Be a Mountain Bike Ambassador

adapted from [ethicaltraveler.org](http://ethicaltraveler.org) and [imba.com](http://imba.com)

Whether you're going for a spin on your local trails or venturing to foreign lands, once you strap on a helmet and throw your leg over your fat-tired steed, you earn your title as a mountain biker. Now we all know mountain bikers to be a jovial folk: kind, good-humoured and respectful. And we'd like to keep it that way, in all four corners of the world. Follow these 13 guidelines for mountain bike travel, and you'll help forge a reputation for our beloved sport that we're all proud of.

## When Traveling

1) **BE AWARE OF WHERE YOUR MONEY IS GOING**, and patronize locally-owned inns, restaurants, and shops. Try to keep your cash within the local economy, so the people you are visiting can benefit directly from your visit.

2) Before visiting any foreign land, **TAKE THE TIME TO LEARN BASIC COURTESY PHRASES**: greetings, "please" & "thank you," and as many numbers as you can handle (those endless hours in airport waiting lounges, or aboard trains and boats, are all opportunities for this). It's astonishing how far a little language goes toward creating a feeling of goodwill.

3) **REMEMBER THE ECONOMIC REALITIES OF YOUR NEW CURRENCY**. A few rupees, reals or Nuevo soles one way or another is not going to ruin you. Don't get all bent out of shape over the fact that a visitor who earns 100 times a local's salary might be expected to pay a few cents more for a ferry ride, a museum entrance, or an egg.

4) **CURB YOUR ANGER, AND CULTIVATE YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR**. Anger is a real issue for westerners—even the Dalai Lama remarks on this. It's perversely satisfying, but it never earns the respect of locals, or defuses a bad situation. A light touch—and a sense of cosmic perspective—are infinitely more useful. As former Merry Prankster Wavy Gravy says: "When you lose your sense of humor, it's just not funny anymore."

5) **LEARN TO LISTEN**. The ability to listen is the essence of diplomacy, on both the personal and international levels. Many of the world's conflicts arise when people feel marginalized. Wherever you're from, listen well—and with respect—to all points of view.

6) **LEARN TO SPEAK**. People from wealthy and powerful countries often express their opinions as if they are the absolute truth. Such preaching invites anger and resentment. We suggest tempering conversations with phrases like "I believe," or "My view is," rather than, "Everybody knows...."

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7) The single most useful phrase any traveler can learn: "**CAN YOU PLEASE HELP ME?**" Rarely, in any country or situation, will another human being refuse a direct request for help. Being of service, and inviting others to reciprocate, is what the phrase global community is all about.

8) **LEAVE YOUR PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WORLD AT HOME.** The inhabitants of planet Earth will continually amaze you with their generosity, hospitality and wisdom. Be open to their friendship, and aware of our common humanity, delights, and hardships.

9) **NEVER FORGET KURT VONNEGUT JR'S BEST LINE:** "Peculiar travel suggestions are dancing lessons from God." In other words: go with the flow, and give free rein to your sense of adventure!

## On the Trails

10) Respect trail closures and only **RIDE OPEN TRAILS.** – ask a local bike shop or land manager for clarification if you are uncertain about the status of a trail. Do not trespass on private land. Obtain permits or other authorization as required. This also means staying on existing trails and not creating new ones.

11) Be sensitive to the dirt on which you ride and always strive to **LEAVE NO TRACE** other than your tire tracks. Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable to damage than dry ones. Never throw away trash, and if you come across the odd wrapper, pick it up, if simply out of respect for those who've spent countless hours building and maintaining those very trails.

12) **YIELD APPROPRIATELY:** Do your utmost to let your fellow trail users know you're coming – a friendly greeting or bell ring are good methods. Try to anticipate other trail users as you ride around corners. Bikers should yield to other non-motorized trail users, unless the trail is clearly signed for bike-only travel. Bicyclists traveling downhill should yield to ones headed uphill, unless the trail is clearly signed for one-way or downhill-only traffic. In general, strive to make each pass a safe and courteous one.

13) **BE RESPONSIBLE & PLAN AHEAD:** Know your equipment, your ability, your limits and the area in which you are riding. Prepare accordingly and strive to be self-sufficient: keep your equipment in good repair and carry necessary supplies in case of mechanical breakdown and changes in weather. If riding solo on unfamiliar trails, always let someone know where you'll be and how long you plan to be away for. Always wear a helmet and appropriate safety gear.

# Renting a Bike Vs. Bringing Your Own

By Nate Lessnick

So you're planning your next big adventure and you want to go mountain biking. Amazing! Now you need to decide whether you'll be renting a bike or bringing your own. We've laid out some of the most common arguments for and against both options in the hopes they'll help you choose the one that best suits your needs and fits your plans.

<b>Renting</b>	<b>Bringing your own</b>
<p><i>Peace of mind</i></p> <p>Not having to worry about taking your bike apart, packing it up nicely in a bike bag or case, lugging it half-way across the world and building it back up again. And most of all, knowing you won't be running the risk of damaging your bike while in transit.</p>	<p><i>Tried and tested</i></p> <p>Bringing your trusty steed along with you means you'll be saddling up on the bike you know is perfectly suited for your riding style and fits you like a glove. Opt for a rental and you may find yourself on a bike you just aren't as fond of or doesn't fit you as well. You'll already be riding on foreign trails, do you really want to be riding an unfamiliar bike?</p>
<p><i>Testing out a new ride</i></p> <p>Renting a bike invariably means getting to test out some new wheels. Whether you've been itching to try a 29er race machine or an all-mountain shredder, renting a bike gives you the perfect opportunity to try something new. And if you're already considering purchasing a new ride, what better way to assess compatibility than on a mutli-day trip?</p>	<p><i>Cheaper</i></p> <p>Despite all the fees associated with airline bike travel, you'll still end up saving money by bringing your own bike (in most cases). Depending on the country you're visiting, the duration of your trip and the bike you end up with, you should expect to pay anywhere from \$50 to \$90 a day for a rental, whereas airlines will generally set you back roughly \$50 - \$150 each way for oversized luggage.</p>
<p><i>Freedom and flexibility</i></p> <p>If you're planning on traveling before or after the biking portion of your trip, renting a bike allows you to get up and go as you please without having to worry about carrying a cumbersome case around with you or finding safe storage space for your bike.</p>	<p><i>Shit happens</i></p> <p>Accidents can happen whether you're riding your own bike or a rental - only difference is you could be hit with a hefty price tag if your rental shows signs of damage, much more so than if you were to get your own bike repaired.</p>

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## **Conclusion**

Opting to rent a bike or to bring your own on your dream mountain bike trip will very much depend on your destination, the length of your trip and your overall travel plans.

If you're leaning towards bringing your own bike, keep in mind that oversized luggage policies vary drastically amongst airlines. Before booking your flights, we strongly suggest looking up the contending airlines' bicycle policies to inform your decision. Once you've booked your flights, we recommend contacting your airline to let them know you'll be carrying a packed bike.

Alternatively, if you're thinking of renting, keep in mind that rental costs will likely be higher and availability much slimmer in remote areas such as Argentina or Nepal. Which is why we'd recommend basing your decision on your destination: heading to Utah or BC for 5 days? Treat yourself to that nice plush ride you've been dreaming about by renting. Heading on an epic journey to Peru or New Zealand? Consider bringing your perfectly tuned all-mountain rig.

# Questions to ask when renting a mountain bike

By Mike Brcic

## **1. How often are the bikes maintained?**

Some shops do an awesome job of maintaining their bikes; they clean, lube, and repair broken parts after every rental. Other shops might not be so diligent, and nothing can ruin your ride more than a bike that keeps breaking down. So make sure you ask about their maintenance policies.

## **2. What year are the bikes?**

Are the bike new this year, or are they a few years old? Most bike shops replace their rental fleets every year, but some don't. Rental bikes get beat up pretty bad, so the shelf life for a rental bike is usually not more than 1 year, depending on how often they get rented/used.

## **3. How do you assess damage vs wear & tear?**

Rental bikes get a lot of abuse, especially if you're using them at a lift-accessed bike park. A lot of the abuse is regular 'wear-and-tear' (that bike shops shouldn't charge you for, like a slightly bent derailleur) but often it crosses into the area of actual damage (like a derailleur that's broken right off the frame, which they should charge you for). Ask the rental shop in advance what their policy is regarding damage vs. wear-and-tear.

And on that note, do a full bike check with the shop before you take the bike out of the store, and note any existing damage (just like you would with a rental car).

## **4. What kind of pedals does the bike have?**

Most rentals have flat pedals (i.e. pedals you can use regular shoes on). Some have combination flat/SPD pedals (i.e. flat on one side, SPD on the other). Very few rental bikes come with SPDs, so if you do want to ride with your SPD shoes, you'll need to bring your shoes and pedals with you - or you can ask if the shop has the appropriate pedals for your shoes and can put them on for you. If not, then ask if they can put your pedals on the rental bike for you, to save you having to lug a pedal wrench around.

## **5. Does the seatpost have a quick release?**

Depending on the type of riding you're doing, a quick release seatpost (vs. fixed) is often very useful to have. Many rental bikes come with fixed seatposts, so ask in advance!

**6. Are the components stock or have any of them been replaced?**

Sometimes shops will swap out the stock parts on a rental bike with cheaper parts, to avoid having expensive parts get thrashed. If you have your heart set on a bike with XT components, then make sure that the XT components that usually come with a certain make/model are actually on the bike you're going to ride.

**7. Do you offer a discount for multi-day rentals?**

Most shops do, but often they don't post it on their website. If they don't have a multi-day rate, then try and negotiate one. You should be able to at least get a free day for a 7-day rental.

**8. Do you charge a security deposit or take a pre-authorization on my card?**

Often shops will take some sort of deposit or pre-authorization on your credit card when you rent it. We've heard of some shops charging as much as \$2000, so if you have limited available credit on your card, find out how much the deposit/pre-auth is in advance, to avoid any last-minute surprises and/or no bike!



### Chill time:

- swimwear
- flip flops
- towel
- cotton t-shirt
- cotton hooded sweater
- jeans
- down-filled coat
- trail shoes or boots
- backpack (for day hikes)

### Personal and First Aid

- toiletries i.e. toothbrush and toothpaste, shampoo and conditioner, soap etc.
- sunscreen (oil-free for sport)
- insect repellent (with deet)
- anti-bacterial wipes
- anti-bacterial gel
- toilet paper (depending on the country you are visiting, this could be hard to find!)
- chamois crème
- first-aid kit (ibuprofen, band aids, polysporin, tweezers)

### Random stuff you don't realize you need, until you're in the Amazon jungle of Peru or the mountains of British Columbia:

- electrical tape (tape your bike tube or pump to your bike, without leaving a sticky residue)
- duck tape (tape up holes in a bug net and/or everything else duck tape fixes!)
- solar panel battery charger with USB adapter
- international travel adapter and converter
- zip-lock bags
- grocery bags
- zip ties
- foam roller (travel size)
- tennis ball (for rolling out knots in your worked muscles)
- elastic bands

# Health and Safety Issues for Mountain Bike Travelers

By Mike Brcic

Below are listed some common concerns related to mountain bike travel, and what to do to mediate or alleviate them.

## Altitude sickness

If you're mountain biking in the mountains, altitude sickness may be a risk. Altitude sickness may develop in travelers who ascend rapidly to altitudes greater than 2500 m, including those in previously excellent health. Being physically fit in no way lessens the risk of altitude sickness. Those who have developed altitude sickness in the past are prone to future episodes. The risk increases with faster ascents and higher altitudes.

Symptoms of acute mountain sickness, the most common form of the disorder, may include headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, malaise, insomnia, and loss of appetite. Severe cases may be complicated by breathlessness and chest tightness, which are signs of pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs), or by confusion, lethargy, and unsteady gait, which indicate cerebral edema (brain swelling).

Altitude sickness may be prevented by taking acetazolamide 125 or 250 mg twice daily starting 24 hours before ascent and continuing for 48 hours after arrival at altitude. You'll need a prescription from your doctor to get acetazolamide.

Other measures to prevent altitude sickness include:

- Ascend gradually or by increments to higher altitudes
- Avoid overexertion
- Eat light meals
- Avoid alcohol



## Bites and stings from larger animals

As mountain bikers we tend to travel to off-the-beaten-path and remote areas, where we can often encounter critters and animals that we don't find in urban and more developed areas. This risk can go up significantly if traveling in less-developed areas. Any bite or scratch by a mammal, including bats, should be promptly and thoroughly cleaned with large amounts of soap and water, followed by application of an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol. The local health authorities should be contacted immediately for possible post-exposure rabies treatment, whether or not the person has been immunized against rabies. It may also be advisable to start an antibiotic, since wounds caused by animal bites and scratches frequently become infected. In the event of a venomous snake bite, move the victim a safe distance from the snake and place him or her at rest, with the affected extremity immobilized and kept below

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the level of the heart. Remove constrictive clothing and jewelry. Apply a pressure bandage which does not impede blood flow. Avoid tourniquets, which are no longer recommended. Bring the victim immediately to the nearest medical facility for administration of antivenom and supportive care.

If bitten by a scorpion, apply ice, immobilize the affected body part, and seek immediate medical help. Scorpion bites are painful but generally not dangerous, except in infants. To prevent scorpion bites, sleep under mosquito nets, wear gloves and protective clothing when working around piles of wood or leaves, and be sure to inspect and shake out clothing, shoes, and sleeping bags before use.

### **Food and water precautions**

A broad range of diseases may be acquired by consuming contaminated food or water. When traveling in developing countries, it is essential to exercise discretion in the choice of meals and beverages.

Do not drink tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered, or chemically disinfected. Vigorous boiling for one minute is the most effective means of water purification. At altitudes greater than 6500 feet (2 km), boil for three minutes.

Chemical disinfection with iodine is also effective, as are water filters. Those with smaller pores (reverse osmosis filters) provide the broadest protection, but they are relatively large and are readily plugged by debris. Those with somewhat larger pores (microstrainer filters) are ineffective against viruses, although they remove other organisms. Objective data comparing different filters is limited. In all instances, manufacturers' instructions must be carefully followed for the filters to operate effectively.

Do not drink unbottled beverages or drinks with ice. Do not eat fruits or vegetables unless they have been peeled or cooked. Avoid cooked foods that are no longer piping hot. Cooked foods that have been left at room temperature are particularly hazardous. Avoid unpasteurized milk and any products that might have been made from unpasteurized milk, such as ice cream. Do not eat raw or undercooked meat or fish. Avoid food and beverages obtained from street vendors.

Insect repellents

## **Jet lag**

Jet lag is common when a traveler crosses more than five time zones. Symptoms may include sleep difficulty, fatigue, malaise, nausea, loss of appetite, and other gastrointestinal symptoms. Levels of performance, both intellectual and physical, may be less than par. Sleeping pills may be helpful in promoting sleep and adjusting to a new time zone after arrival. Options include newer medications such as zolpidem (Ambien) (PDF), as well as short-acting benzodiazepines such as temazepam (Restoril). The chief side-effect of all sleeping pills is drowsiness or dizziness upon awakening.

Other helpful measures include:

- Get adequate rest before departure
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Eat light meals
- Avoid alcohol

Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule for meals, sleep, etc. as soon as possible

## **Sun exposure and heat stroke**

All mountain bikers should protect themselves from excessive sun exposure. Adverse effects include sunburn, sunstroke, damage to the eyes, and skin cancer. Especially in the tropics, riders should stay out of the midday sun, wear sunglasses, and apply sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher, with both ultraviolet A (UVA; wavelength 315-400 nm) and ultraviolet B (UVB; wavelength 280-315 nm) protection. Sunscreen should be generously applied to all exposed parts of the body approximately 30 minutes before sun exposure and should be reapplied after swimming or vigorous activity. Surfaces such as water, snow, and sand may reflect ultraviolet light and increase the sun's effect.

Heat stroke may occur in those who are exposed to excessively high temperatures for a number of days. The elderly are at greatest risk, especially those with chronic medical problems. Heat stroke often occurs during physical exertion but, particularly in the elderly, may also occur at rest. The first sign may be an abrupt collapse, but there may be early, subtle findings, including dizziness, weakness, nausea, headache, confusion, drowsiness, and unreasonable behaviour. If early symptoms of heat illness are observed, remove the victim from direct sunlight, loosen clothing, give cold fluids, and make sure the victim rests for at least 24 hours. In the event of heat stroke, the victim should be brought immediately to the nearest medical facility. To prevent heat stroke, drink plenty of fluids, eat salty foods, protect yourself from sun exposure, and avoid alcohol and strenuous exercise when the temperature is high.