

WHY A MOTORCYCLE?

I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

For me, this oft-quoted line sums up completely the joys of travel by motorcycle – whether it is a short ride from home on a crisp, clear morning or a year-long adventure to the other side of the world. The memories that you bring home are of the riding: those days when you and your machine flowed as you wound your way over high passes; or the days when even a few miles seemed to take hours – but the huge sense of achievement as you wearily unpacked your bike at the end of a hard day's ride made you leap out of bed the next day to do it again. It is the riding that you remember the most, the incredible views you saw from the seat of your bike, and the people you met on the journey. Travelling by motorcycle is a wonderful way of meeting people, inspiring interest and passion. Children love them, fellow riders will stop to chat, and for the people you meet on your journey it is a conversation opener – a means of engaging with a complete stranger. Motorcycles are a necessary form of transport in many countries. Many people own one so there is instantly a connection, a shared interest. Motorcycling is also a wonderfully solitary experience, almost a form of mechanical meditation, and yet on your bike you never feel alone.

On a motorcycle you really do feel part of the landscape, completely open to the elements, the noise and the surface of the road. It is only on a bike that you can smell Australian roadkill from a distance of 10 miles, or ride through a busy bazaar and catch the aroma of your lunch before you see it. You can park your motorcycle anywhere – a hotel lobby, or even in your room. If you need to cross countries, vast distances, or find yourself at a closed border, there is always the option to transport your bike by sea, air or train.

Many people dream of travelling by motorcycle, but concerns about their own ability or lack of mechanical knowledge can stop them from taking it any further. You don't have to be an experienced rider or be able to rebuild an engine by the side of the road. You set your own pace and, if there are problems with your bike, you'll always be able to find someone to help. As for dropping your motorcycle – well, if you intend riding on any of

▷ *Motorcycling in South Africa.*



Australia's fantastic dirt roads, the chances are that you probably will. It isn't a big issue. I've yet to own a bike I can pick up, but I've never had a problem finding someone to help. Once you are out there, these issues, if they arise, usually result in new-found friends and a reminder of the kindness of strangers.

The Journeys

The thinking behind this book is that motorcycle travel is so much easier these days, and that any of the featured journeys can be taken as part of an average two- to three-week holiday, a short break taken in your own country, or possibly even a few days out of a family holiday. If you have a little longer, then many of the featured journeys can be linked. It is not necessary to pack up all your possessions, give up your job and take a year out to experience riding in some of the world's most remote regions, but I would definitely recommend it if you can!

▽ *Capital Reef National Park, New Zealand.*



The featured journeys are not a definitive list of the world's best motorcycle trips, but a small selection of journeys that are currently accessible to most nationalities. I have chosen countries where bike hire is available or where there are options to pick up a bike as part of an organized tour. I have included some of the world's classic motorcycle journeys, but also many countries that may not immediately spring to mind when planning a motorcycle trip. I have also tried to include a range of riding terrain. Some countries, such as Morocco, lend themselves to both tarmac and off-road trips. Some routes are considered difficult due to the condition of the roads or the standard of the local driving. There are countries that more naturally lend themselves to relaxed, leisurely riding, combining great roads with sightseeing, good food and accommodation. And then there are routes that really are designed for full-throttle riding. There are also roads that will take you to some of the most beautiful scenery on earth. It is impossible to include all the great riding that some countries offer, but the routes featured provide a flavour of the type of riding you can expect. Many fantastic motorcycle destinations did not make it into the book, either because bike hire or bike-inclusive tours were not available, because the length of the journey was longer than an average holiday, or because current political situations advised avoidance. The Karakorum Highway in Pakistan is an incredible ride, yet a lack of reasonable bike hire and current travel restrictions meant it did not make the final selection. However, these limitations can, and hopefully will, change and open up even more destinations to intrepid motorcyclists.

△ ABOVE LEFT *The lure of the open road can be hard to resist.*

△ ABOVE RIGHT *Travelling with the locals in India.*

Researching this book has been immensely enjoyable, and it has brought back memories of the amazing trips I have taken and the good friends I have made. I have spoken to friends across the globe about their favourite roads and why that journey was so special. I have met operators who started their own tour company purely for the pleasure of meeting other riders and showing them the amazing riding possibilities in their country. The one thing that everyone has in common is their enthusiasm and passion for riding motorcycles.

The Bike

One of the advantages of hiring a bike on arrival is that you get to ride a completely different machine to the bike you have at home. I have occasionally mentioned a particular type of bike when it is so much part of the experience of the journey. If you've always been a sports-bike rider then perhaps hire a Harley in the USA, or if you have always ridden dual sport bikes, opt for a classic Enfield Bullet in India. The bike you choose can enhance the experience, and may even convert you to a machine you would never otherwise ride. Some countries offer a wide choice of hire bikes, others perhaps only one or two models. Have you ever wondered

▽ *Coming face-to-face with the wildlife in Kenya.*



what it would be like tackling dirt roads on a Belarusian Minsk 125cc? Try it – you may be pleasantly surprised.

If you plan on taking your own bike, it really isn't necessary to splash out on a new, fully kitted tourer. If you are comfortable with your current bike, then always consider taking it. A motorcycle will go anywhere; some are just better suited to challenging terrain than others. There is an amazing choice of great motorcycles and the decision is generally down to your budget or favoured brand. Look at your chosen route, comfort and luggage-carrying capacity. The bike's off-road ability and fuel range may also have a bearing. There are no hard and fast rules. All types of motorcycle can be, and have been, used for journeys across the globe.

Travel Requirements

The internet has made planning a motorcycle trip so much easier. It is now possible to arrange bike hire, book organized trips, or arrange the freight of your own machine with the click of a computer mouse. You can read about other people's journeys and email questions to riders on the other side of the globe. This book does not go into any detail regarding visas, *carnets de passage* or health checks, as these all differ depending on nationality, and can change regularly and without warning. The contacts listed on pages 190–91 will help you get started, but then it is up to you. Half the fun of any motorcycle trip is in the excitement of planning the route, deciding the type of riding you want to experience and choosing the bike. Ultimately everyone's trip is unique, and the final decision regarding route and motorcycle will be yours.

Final Words

As you load up your bike, the anticipation of the adventures in store, the challenge of the riding ahead, and the knowledge that you and your motorcycle can go anywhere is a feeling that only motorcyclists can describe. Setting out on any motorcycle journey is supremely exciting and I hope that the following journeys will inspire you to break out and explore the world on, without doubt, the very best form of motorized transport – the motorcycle.



△ *If you choose to travel alone, you can be sure of meeting like-minded friends along the way.*

OVERLEAF *Dune riding in spectacular scenery.*