

Preparing For The Trip – Part Two: What’s Next?

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In part One, we covered details on safety related matters, e.g. using your S.E.E. strategy to mitigate and minimize risk, making sure that your bike, your gear, and you are ready to ride, and finally, what to consider in the event of a crash.

Once safety has been addressed, planning for the trip includes several things mentioned above. What’s the purpose of the trip? Will you be traveling in a group or solo? How much time do you have to take for the trip? What routes do you plan to take? How many stopping places or waypoints do you want to have? What planning tools are available? What maps might you need or are available? How much extra money should you take with you and in what form (cash and/or traveler’s checks)? How many credit cards should you take with you? How much gear and/or gizmos will you need?

The purpose of the trip will help to define several considerations and things to think about. For example, if you are traveling in a group, you will need to look into the group riding guidelines on the Motorcycle Safety Foundation’s web site or what is posted on the Motor Maids web site. Traveling solo? Think about keeping a daily travel or trip blog. It will make a nice journal of your trip, keep track of your whereabouts, and help you remember little details.

Keep in daily contact with your emergency contact. Leave a copy of your trip plan with that person and a backup. Consider calling at the beginning and end of each day. In the event something happens, it’s easier to approximate your location. The amount of time you have to make your trip and what you want to accomplish will help with planning realistic goals. Always plan for a little extra time on either side of the trip to allow for unexpected contingencies.

Available routes hinge on decisions made earlier in the planning process. For instance, if time allows, you might combine traveling on secondary roads and some interstates. What places do you want to stop at or add as waypoints? It depends on what you or your group wants to do.

Several planning tools exist to help put your route together. The American Automobile Association or Canadian Automobile Association can put a “triptik” together for members, mapping out the route in a series of small maps for quick reference. The Harley Owners Group has a trip-planning tool on its web site for national HOG members.

Google Earth’s street view lets you “travel” your route, view local spots, and provide general road conditions. The timeliness of the information depends on when the pictures were taken, but it serves as a good starting point. Each state has a Department of Transportation web site with highway information, usually posting construction project updates on the web site. The American Motorcyclists Association web site has a list of motorcycle related laws by state.

Carrying extra money (cash and/or traveler’s checks) and credit cards can come in handy to cover unexpected or unplanned for situations. Check your balance and credit card limit before leaving home. Let your credit card companies know what your plans are, so that purchases out of a normal range won’t surprise them, especially if you are on the road and need to make emergency repairs that might include a large amount. It’s usually a good idea to split your money and credit cards up and carry them on different parts of yourself and the motorcycle, so that if you get separated from your motorcycle or the money and credit cards, you still have a backup.

When evaluating what gear you might need for the trip, think about what worked or didn’t work well, or what got left behind that you wish you had. Consider a small emergency

medical kit and medications, a good toolkit for emergency road repairs, extra oil and spare parts, a tire repair kit, and cell phone with its recharger. Check with your cell phone carrier for coverage areas. Several stores carry cell phones with plans where you can buy minutes and use that as a backup to your regular cell phone. A small camera is handy to have as well. Consider the weather extremes. What will you need to bring clothing-wise? Plan to dress in layers. Think multi-purpose, lightweight, compact, and sturdy. A rain suit can serve as a windbreaker to help keep the chill down. Then ask yourself, “Do I really need that?”

Think about previous trips and what you experienced on them. Write down your thoughts, talk to others, and brainstorm a bit. Sharing your experiences will help remind you of things you might have forgotten about or not thought of at all. Leverage off these ideas, playing “what if”. Remember “what if”? Sound familiar? The more thoughtfulness you put into the planning stage, the less you have to think about afterward, and the more you’ll be able to focus on safety and having fun. Remember to use your SEE strategy, even in the planning phase, to keep safety first, and to ride safe!