

## Motorcycle Men's Shed Moto Camping Advice

This is all personal, YMMV etc, but here's my take on it. For reference I currently have 5 tents, one of almost every type described here so I've seen most options first hand. I'll try not to make specific recommendations but give you the pros and cons and hopefully enough knowledge so you can make a decision that suits you.

### Before You Set Up Camp

You will need to charge your various electronic devices. If you've got a cigarette lighter outlet, no problem, you can get a 12V 4 port charger for about \$15 on eBay. If not, consider getting one fitted or investigate other means of connecting to your battery. You can charge your phone or power bank during the day's ride. The only other thing was my helmet bluetooth system (Cardo Packtalk Slim for reference) which is a nuisance with the cable dangling so I charged it after stopping. This takes about the same time as setting up camp and has no measurable effect on the bike battery.

### Tent Or Swag?

A swag sounds great - quick to throw out on the ground and crawl inside, quick and easy to roll up in the morning. It's also bulky, heavy, and when it rains you have to stand out in the rain to pull your pants on, then find your boots are full of water. The tent lets you keep all your gear inside, safe from rain and mosquitos and gives you a little sheltered place to sit and phone home, read a book etc.

### Tent Construction

I'm going to recommend a conventional tent here. I've seen the instant up type but from what I've seen they tend to be big and heavy and of unknown durability. So standard two skin tent (inner and fly). The vast majority of tents these days use flexible hoops (fibreglass at the cheap end, aluminium, titanium and carbon fibre if you've got the cash). Some brands have air tube tents that look pretty good. You do need to carry a pump but they are just as quick to pump up as to insert poles. (I have a family size air tube tunnel tent. Nice but you need a truck.)

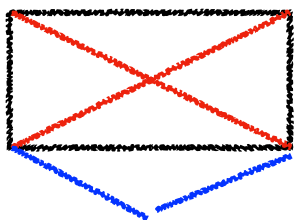
Size is the next consideration. I recommend two person size or three person size for a couple. This gives you room to bring your kit inside or if travelling with a friend, two can squeeze into a 2 tent and leave your gear in the vestibule. YOU NEED A VESTIBULE! Don't consider a tent without it.

I've drawn a few common layouts below. Black outline is the tent, red lines the poles, blue is the vestibule (can be both sides).

### Pole Layouts

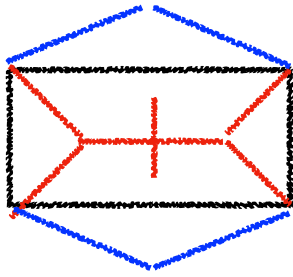
Tent designers have wild imaginations for pole layout so I'm sure you will see ones I haven't drawn. Hopefully the basic principles will guide you.

Cheaper tents (under \$100) tend to have a simple cross:



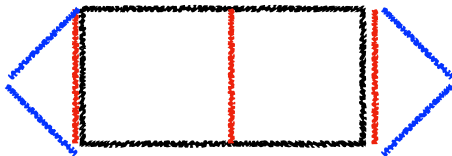
It's fine as far as it goes. Self supporting (it will mostly stay up with no pegs) but the big flat areas on the long sides tend to sag inwards which can make it feel cramped, flap in the wind etc.

Most mid range tents (\$200-\$500) favour a wishbone layout:



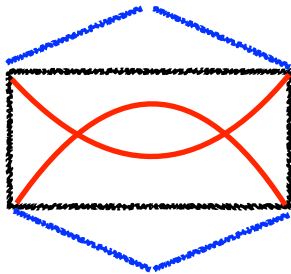
This works well as it keeps the canvas panels smaller and better triangulated so less flapping and they are far more roomy inside. They are self supporting and a single peg in each vestibule is all you need unless it gets very windy.

Other arrangements you will see are tunnel tents:



All the panels are curved so they are wind resistant, nice and roomy inside and they are quick to erect. Downside is they won't stay up without those pegs at either end so you can't pitch them on super hard ground.

One layout I don't recommend is this one:



They look good initially but the space where the hoops overlap tends to form a flat spot on the roof and when it rains you get a little pond. Think hard before you commit to this type.

### **Dedicated Motorcycle Tents**

You will see tents designed "specially for motorcycles". They are big, asymmetric tunnels (bigger hoops at one end). You can usually fit the bike in the big area which has no floor, or if you're in the same spot for a few days it's a nice place to sit in the shade. It's also nice to stand up to pull your pants on. Downside is they are big when packed, heavy (typically ~6kg when my lightest tent is 1.1kg), slow to erect and expensive (\$500-\$800)

### **Extra Credit - Integral Pitch Tents**

Most tents you erect the inner tent, then drape the outer over it. Many high end tents and a smattering of mid range feature Integral Pitch. This means the inner and outer tents are attached, usually by velcro or similar, so when you erect one you erect both. It is much quicker to erect and when it's raining the inner doesn't get wet. Downside is it is slow to dry condensation on the underside of the fly and you sometimes end up folding it up damp. On balance I find it significantly better and I'll certainly be looking for it on my next hike / bike tent.

## **Tent Materials**

As noted for pole material varies from fibreglass (cheaper tents) to aluminium (that covers most of us) and more exotic materials in specialist tents.

The outer skin of the tents is nylon or some variation. Yes there are differences and loads of proprietary variations but it won't matter for most people.

Inner tents show far more variation. 4 season tents (useable all year round) tend to have nylon taffeta inners - plain material, lightweight but keeps the wind out and if you should get a drip from the outer it will usually not get through the inner. The downside is reduced ventilation which can be a problem in warmer weather.

Three season tents (winter excluded) are often all mesh. It's a little lighter which matters a lot for hikers, not so much when the motorcycle is carrying it. Basically it just keeps the bugs out but be warned the outer tent doesn't quite touch the ground and on a cold windy night it can be @#\$\$ freezing.

The halfway point (taffeta sides and mesh ceiling) is probably the best solution if you can find it. I don't have this but will certainly look for it if / when I buy another tent.

Pegs vary from cheap bent coat hanger wire (OK, maybe a bit thicker) to mini star pickets, to titanium star pickets.

Floors vary from poly tarp at the low end (strong but heavy and packs up big) to thinner and lighter but potentially more flimsy nylon floors. It's the old story - strong, light, cheap - choose any two.

## **Tent Colour**

Most hike tents are light colours so it's light and bright inside. Mine's fluoro green and when the sun hits it in the morning you don't need an alarm clock. Darker colours are better if the light keeps you awake but dark and gloomy, you will need a light. (BTW Aldi head torch ~\$12 is hard to beat). Decathlon has an interesting technology, white reflective outer fly and blackout inner tent. It is pitch black inside (can be disorienting) but stays remarkably cool in the sun. Some people favour camouflage colours for camping in places they shouldn't but I figured I was more likely to lose my tent in the bush or to need rescuing than to need to hide so fluoro green it is.

## **Mattress**

A lot of people don't like the idea of sleeping on the ground and so go for a stretcher. They tell me they are comfortable but it puts you closer to the roof of an already low tent and can make holes in your floor. You also need an insulated mat because the sleeping bag compresses under you and air circulates under it and you can get very cold.

My favourite solution is the self inflating mattress. I've got a cheapy (~\$24 at Kmart comfortable but a bit large and heavy), a couple of old Thermarests and a Sea To Summit (~\$120 and much better technology especially when packing). Get the latter if you can afford it. If you can't, \$15 gets you a 1cm thick foam mat which might not sound much but it's vastly better than sleeping on the bare tent floor.

## **Sleeping Bag**

All sleeping bags have a temperature rating. In the expensive, hiking store brands this is determined by standard test procedures and it can generally be trusted. In bulk store brands it's determined by a random number generator. I'd recommend 0C rating as fairly versatile in our conditions.

I have a mummy bag but recommend the quilt type. It's a tiny bit heavier but easier to open out flat. When camping with my wife in warm weather we often take just her quilt type bag. And get a sleeping bag sheet. It adds a little warmth, keeps your bag cleaner (washing a down bag is a major undertaking) and if it's warm it may be all you need.

Down is the best filling, light and warm and packs small, but very expensive. Expect to pay \$400-600 or more. For those on a budget a good synthetic bag is maybe \$150. A bit heavier and more bulky, possibly less durable, but perfectly comfortable. The \$60 specials are a waste of time and money, best avoided. It may sound like a lot of money but a good down bag lasts forever - mine's about 45 years old and it may have lost a little insulation but it's still good for frosty nights.

### **Cooking & Eating**

Cheap plastic plates, cup and cutlery can be had for ~\$15 and it's all you need. A small billy can or saucepan is also worth carrying - see below for why. I also carry a stove. The square ones with aerosol type gas cans aren't really suitable as they are too bulky. Also the butane in those cans remains liquid below about 5C so you can't make a cuppa on a cold morning. [edit: Anaconda now sells isobutane in aerosol cans, but the things still too big] I've got an Aldi hiking stove that works great (about \$30 if you can catch them) or Kmart's knock off of the Jetboil is excellent.

### **Going Bush / Additional Items**

The above list is all you need if you're going to camp in caravan parks etc. You might pay ~\$30 but you get toilets, showers and usually a camper's kitchen with kettle, microwave, toaster, seats and tables. And usually saucepans etc but don't count on it. Sadly I have seen some I would prefer not to eat out of. If you are going to wild camp then you will need more, brief list as follows:

Plastic garden trowel (Bunnings - \$5) because there are no toilets in the bush. Best include some poo tickets as well

Water supply - you need to have at least 2 litres on you, preferably more in hot weather. A Camelback or other hydration pack plus a bottle in your luggage should do it. On which topic, cheap hydration packs are around \$20 and work fine, high end big name brands anything up to \$200. The cheap ones work fine for the money

Chair - The Aldi version for ~\$40 is pretty good. Helinox is lighter and stronger but \$\$\$  
And finally a small hammer to knock those pegs into hard ground. I also have some 200mm coach screws and a battery drill for EXTREMELY hard ground but you don't really need it, only used a couple of times in the last 5 years.

### **How To Carry All This Stuff**

I have panniers, top box and a tank bag for quick grab stuff. None of it's fully packed and I don't have anything strapped on the seat. Obviously hard luggage is great but all you really need to get started is a couple of dry bags and some Rock Straps or Andy Straps (way better than the old ocky straps), total cost under \$100. Another advantage of small, light equipment. If you need more space, cheap throw over bags and some bin bags to keep stuff waterproof.

### **Brand Recommendations**

My advice is to go to a serious hiking store and check out the gear there. A lot of it is made for people who carry everything on their back and for whom a gear failure can be life threatening. You may decide you don't need that level of gear, or can't afford it, but at least you will know what you are looking at.

At the low end, a careful selection of Kmart, BCF etc gear works great for the money but shop carefully as they mostly cater to people with a car. As you go up in price everything improves in size and weight, convenience, strength and durability. Mid range brands are things like Naturehike, Vango, Decathlon. High end stuff is Sea To Summit, Mountain Designs, Mont, North Face, MacPac etc. Silly expensive is Hilleberg. There are dozens of other good brands that could well work out great too. Choose carefully and happy camping.

## NOTES