

TRAVEL, COM

So much for the old cliché about coming into the world alone and leaving the same way. We're pushed by our nature to communicate. We need to be seen, share and be a part of something. It's a concept which at first may seem at odds with those who are motivated to travel and leave the herd to experience the world on their own terms.

Fifteen years ago, when Lisa and I set out, things were quite different. Even finding internet connectivity was cause for wild celebration, similar to finding water in an endless desert!

Today, things have changed. I believe that the main reason for the explosion in popularity of the adventure community isn't because of the new bikes or the plethora of new accessories, but because we're able to record and share our collective experiences faster and more powerfully than ever before. Today, we can leave the herd while still feeling we're part of something.

MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

After a year traveling through Africa, we reached Cape Town, where a friend said, "Hey *Skype* me and I'll give you directions to my house." We had absolutely no idea what *Skype* was. I thought, "What the hell? I don't have *Skype*, I don't want to give you *Skype*... is it infectious?" These days we use *Skype* along with other platforms to stay in touch.

Another favorite has become *Apple's FaceTime*—their free *Apple to Apple* voice and video app. The app comes standard with all *Apple* devices, and to locate and connect with someone it's just a matter of entering an email address or phone number.

If you're looking for a way to stay in contact with your growing *Facebook* fans, then it's hard to beat the simplicity of *Facebook Messenger*.

Most of us use *Messenger* to chat online; the ubiquitous instant messaging service has been around since 2011. However, today it'll do a lot more than just send text. At its core, *Messenger* is a text-, image- and video-sharing app. Sure, we use the video feature to speak with family, but along with *Skype*, we've been able to record B-roll video for production projects and have even been interviewed by national TV channels on *Messenger*. Money is always an issue when traveling, especially abroad, so being able to send and receive funds via *Messenger* is also handy. This little-known feature was launched two years ago in the U.S.



MUNICIPALITY

AND

SAFETY

by Simon Thomas | photos by Simon and Lisa Thomas



/ EMAIL ABROAD

When sitting down to work out which of the thousands of apps you'll actually use to stay in touch, it's important to remember that not all the apps and systems are supported in every country. We struggled during our time in Iran, as most social media, including *Facebook*, was banned. So, you can forget *Snapchatting* that cool photo in Tehran. While we were there, student demonstrations erupted. The government's response was to shut down every email provider for the entire country.

We've learned that it's key to keep communication structure simple, and above all else, consistent. There's no point using a newly launched app, no matter how many cool features it offers, if the people you need to connect with aren't using it, too.

After years of trial and error, searching for an email service that was both flexible, secure and resilient, we found *Gmail* by *Google*. Although it's not the newest, it's still top dog when it comes to getting the job done.

/ GPS LOCATORS

Satellite GPS locator prices have come down so that mere mortals can afford them. The two best known providers are *SPOT LLC* and *Delorme* (now *Garmin*). In the interest of transparency, we've been *SPOT* clients for eight years and are now brand ambassadors, so our experience is with that brand. But no matter

what activity floats your boat, if you're traveling in remote or rugged terrain, then make sure you're carrying a GPS tracker of some type.

The *SPOT Gen3* device is small and light and produced in bright orange so it's difficult to misplace. Getting off the beaten path is inherently risky. The *SPOT* service is a great way to mitigate that risk, reassure friends and family, and increase your chance of being found and evacuated in an emergency.

SPOT Gen3 offers a number of important features:

Tracking—Customizable tracking features are motion-activated. A vibration sensor tells *SPOT* to send updates when you're moving and to stop when you're not.

S.O.S.—With the push of a button, *GEOS International Emergency Response Coordination Center* provides your GPS coordinates and information to local response teams—for example contacting 9-1-1 responders in North America or 1-1-2 responders in Europe.

Check-In—Let family and friends know you're okay when you're out of cell range. Send your contacts a pre-programmed text message with your GPS coordinates or an email with a link to *Google Maps*. With a push of a button, a message is sent via email or SMS to up to 10 pre-determined contacts. Your waypoint is stored in your *SPOT* account for later reference. Stored waypoints can be easily integrated into a *SPOT Shared Page* or *SPOT Adventure* account.

HELP/SPOT S.O.V. (Save Our Vehicle)—Alert your personal contacts that you need help in non-life-threatening situations. Or, use *SPOT S.O.V.* for professional services on land.





Custom Message—Stay in touch while off the grid by sending a custom message. Set it up to send your GPS location. Use this feature as a secondary okay message, or transfer a personal help alert if you're using a *SPOT S.O.V.* service.

PRO TIP—if you're wondering where to stash your *SPOT* device, consider attaching it to your riding suit. If you're injured and in need of help, the last thing you'll want to (or be able to) do is go crawling around to find it.

/ SMARTPHONES

Smartphones are getting smarter, but when it comes to travel there are limits. If you're running a U.S.-based cell phone with one of the big networks in Canada or Mexico, it's worth checking your rate or data plan to see if using partner networks is included.

PRO TIP—Make sure to purchase a quality, ruggedized, waterproof case for your phone. *Pelican* is our recommendation.

Carrying a cell phone is still a great idea even if you're not getting coverage from your usual service. When Lisa and I ride into new countries, we'll usually stop by a cell phone store or street market and pick up a local pay-as-you-use SIM card. Most SIM cards come with monthly refillable plans from \$15–\$45 per month (often much less in Asia). The plan will come with unlimited text and normally unlimited voice calls, but not international. You'll usually also get a small data allowance.

You're more likely to get better Wi-Fi and cellular data coverage around larger cities or major roads, so keep in touch when you can. Just like at home, when you're near a Wi-Fi signal, just connect to that and get busy.

/ SATELLITE PHONES

If you're really going off-grid you might have to think about a satellite phone. Until the launch of the *Iridium* network, SAT phones were astronomically expensive and out of reach of the average adventurer. Today they'll set you back anything from \$499 for a *Globalstar GSP-1700* to \$1,295 for an *Iridium Extreme*.

Unlike cell phones, SAT phones offer just a few features, but those features

may save your life. SAT phones are worth some investigation if you're riding into an area that is sparsely populated or remote. If population numbers are low, then cell phone coverage will be lower. Just bear in mind that a SAT phone, unlike your cell, needs line-of-sight to the sky to work, so don't expect to be able to receive a call in the hotel lobby.

PRO TIP—Avoiding jail! Depending upon where you're traveling, let's say along the Silk Road (Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, or Iran), then that sexy SAT phone might just land you in some very serious trouble. Just like carrying a drone, carrying a satellite phone in many developing countries can cause major issues—even leave you languishing in jail. Both drones and SAT phones are considered tools for espionage. Research how these tools are viewed by the region or country you intend to travel through, or make sure to hide them well.

/ DATA SECURITY AND BACK-UP

One last gem to share is more about the safety of your precious photos than personal safety. Lisa and I have waited for years for technology to catch up with our needs for small, secure and portable drives to store our video and photos. Over the years and the miles, we've lost data, journals, video and photos, when so-called "ruggedized" hard drives failed. When that happens it's soul-suckingly depressing. The problem with most platter style hard drives is that they depend upon spinning discs and read arms which are sensitive to shock, vibration and even air pressure. You best bet now is to go with a ruggedized



Solid State Drive (SSD) solution.

Take some time to look into *Glyph Tech*, an American-based SSD company (**GlyphTech.com**). We've moved all our critical data over to *Glyph ATOM* SSD drives. These rugged external hard drives are physically tiny and have no moving parts, but offer huge storage. They'll also easily fit in your pocket or even your tank bag for easy access.

At the end of the day, everyone's communication needs are different. That said, no matter how much we may want to get away from things, sharing our experiences and letting our friends and family know we're safe is an important part of any adventure. If you have any handy communication tips not mentioned above, please let **ADVMoto** know! **ADV**



Simon and Lisa Thomas are considered by many to be the world's foremost adventure motorcyclists, with more real-world experience

than anyone on the road today! They've ridden their way into a life that most of us can only imagine. Since setting out on their journey in 2003, the duo has so far amassed a whopping 450,000 miles on their ride, through 78 countries on six continents. Along the way they've traversed 27 deserts, survived a broken neck in the Amazon, cheated death and are still traveling today. As explorers, writers, photographers and public speakers, this pair inspire adventure. **2RidetheWorld.com**