

Planning a Solo Adventure

Traveling alone has a lot of perks, from meeting new people to changing your mind on a whim.

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Photo caption

Solo travel offers a lot of freedom and flexibility.

Would you like to go on a trip with someone you know intimately, do exactly what you want to do, whenever you want to do it, and never once have to share your dessert? Then get on board with one of the hottest trends in the travel industry--Traveling Solo. The changing demographics of American households, the frustration of trying to mesh friends and partners' work schedules and interests, and even the popularity of the book and movie *Eat, Pray Love* mean more and more people are hitting the road alone. For many people, traveling solo is an intriguing concept, but for some, that fascination is mixed with fear. So what are the ways to tip that scale in your favor and acquire the skills of successful solo travelers?

Optimizing your solo travels means mastering three basic concepts: (1) the practical mechanics of what to do when "It's all on you", (2) dealing with the number one concern of solo travelers--loneliness, and (3) embracing the experience to get the most out of being on a trip with yourself.

Practical Mechanics

Do your homework. You won't have a navigator to say get off at this exit or a friend to watch your luggage while you roam about checking out the bus vs. taxi option at the airport. Advanced planning before you leave home is paramount. Whether you are heading up to wine country or flying to Berlin, know your route, transportation options and the general lay of the land before you leave home. Print out maps of things you want to do or put those destinations into your mobile phone or GPS. Make at least your first night's hotel reservation ahead of time and know how you are getting there when you arrive.

Be Safe. Trust your gut. Going solo means the fun of talking to new people alone and accepting impromptu invitations. But if something doesn't seem right, trust your intuition and know that it is best to pass on that conversation or opportunity and exit. Also, dressing and behaving in the manner of the place you are visiting goes a long way towards not labeling you as an outsider and that is good for both safety and enjoying your visit. Open your eyes and take your cues from those around you.

Don't be Lonely

Put lines in the water. One of the things most solo travelers worry about is being lonely, or if not lonely, not having someone to share the wonderful food, art, or performance they are experiencing. This is where having put lines in the water ahead of time will really pay off. Having connections at your destination is a matter of asking people at home to E-connect you with locals they know via email before you leave home. Ask your friends, your doctor, your colleagues--everyone. A certain percentage of these "lines" will pay off. You can follow up when you arrive and set in place at intervals that suit you, dinners, lunches, coffees or drinks. The nice thing is--one connection leads to another connection and you can pepper your aloneness with as much local companionship as you want to add to your vacation.

Meet people on your terms. A solo trip has room for as much or as little interaction as you want. While enjoying the freedom and flexibility of a solo outing, it is actually easier to meet people when you are a solo traveler. Become a regular at a local coffee house and not only get great local tips, the aura of a regular means you will meet other locals as well. Choose places that have communal tables. A person alone is much more approachable than a group, or even a couple, so don't be surprised if people strike up a conversation with you. Enjoy it! Need a loneliness fix? Get the benefits of a group without being one by signing up for a local walking tour of something that interest you at your destination. Ask people to take your picture or offer to take theirs.

Embrace the Experience

Go for it. Now that you have bravely taken your trip, get the most out of it. Put aside your electronic devices and look around. Walk as much as possible or take public transportation. Keep a journal both as a silent companion, but also to note how this experience is changing you. Write down the lessons you are learning from this trip. Contemplation and personal growth come naturally on a solo trip. When traveling with someone, sometimes we temper our curiosity to fit another person's expectations--solo travel allows uninhibited observation of others and unbridled curiosity.

Mistakes-who cares! One of the nicest things about solo travel is you learn to cope with your own mistakes and laugh. Got on the wrong train? No one to blame, so you shrug and get off at the next stop and make an adventure of a place you didn't intend to see.

No one else to please, so please yourself. You want to linger in the cafe for an hour? Do it. This museum is boring? Leave. Don't rush through your trip. Make conscious choices and please yourself. Get lost on purpose. Solo travel lets you be spontaneous and design your own adventure without compromise or negotiation.

Have themes. As you get the hang of solo travel, it is fun to have recurrent themes that you explore. Maybe you visit every place with an eye towards "What is the coffee culture?" Or maybe in each location you look at the dynamics of people and their pets? Or maybe you just want to sip an Old Fashion in every place you visit and compare and contrast that simple pleasure. Go ahead--it's your trip!

"To awaken quite alone in a strange town is one of the pleasantest sensations in the world"--Freya Stark

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