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## Top Tips for Travelling Solo



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Travelling alone can be a daunting experience. Travel writer Fiona Harper provides her top tips to help you prepare.

No matter whether you travel alone or with a group, travelling invokes an exhilarating sense of freedom. I rather like the way Alain de Botton, author of *The Art of Travel*, puts it: 'Few activities seem to promise us as much happiness as going travelling: taking off for somewhere else, somewhere far from home, a place with more interesting weather, customs and landscapes'.

Travelling solo exaggerates that experience of independent adventure, a little like the first time you rode your bicycle without training wheels. The upside of travelling alone is that you get to make all the decisions, planning escapades to suit your own indulgence and personal desires. Though it can also be intimidating and just a little bit scary too, ultimately, travelling solo is immensely rewarding.

The downside to this freedom however, is that solo travel can be lonely at times. Particularly during the evening if dining alone. Or when rattling around in a plush hotel room with no-one to share it with. There's also the issue of personal safety, more particularly for women but men are not guaranteed an automatic 'safe travel' card either.

As a travel writer spending many months each year on the road alone, I relish the opportunity to take off for somewhere far from home and have picked up a few secrets along the way.

Here are 6 of my top tips for travelling solo:

- 1. Talk to strangers** – Smile at them too. I know most of us since childhood were implored not to, as a solo traveller it's the only way you'll avoid going crazy with otherwise enforced silence. It's remarkable how many doors a smile opens, leading you who knows where. Though do use intuition and common sense, be selective about who you share your charm with, keep your wits about you and buy your own drinks if you're in a bar.
- 2. In case of emergency** – Before you depart register your travel plans with Dept of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) [Smart Traveller](#) so that in the event of a major disaster, someone will know where to start looking for you.
- 3. Dining alone** - Evening meals used to cause me grief thanks to an ex-husband making unfounded derogatory judgements whenever he spotted a lone diner. I've since learned that dining alone is the one exception to the 'no cell phones at dinner' rule. But if you really can't face dining alone, book accommodation with kitchenette facilities, taking the opportunity to shop for produce with the locals.
- 4. Dining with 'friends'** – Many cities have dining tours that visit interesting restaurants, street vendors or markets. Melbourne's [Hidden Secrets Tours](#) are one of the best. Take their intimate Sommelier's City Walk tour, visiting different venues for food and wine and you'll soon feel as though you're dining with old friends.
- 5. Avoid single supplements** – The bane of solo travellers, there are ways to avoid it. [Companion Cruising](#) is a specialist cruise travel agency aiming to match compatible single travellers in a shared cabin, thus allowing each traveller to pay half the regular fare (which are always based on twin share occupancy) Adventure tours that utilise camping or budget hotels are less likely to slug single travellers with a supplement. If you're travelling independently, don't be afraid to negotiate a better deal directly with hotel operators, particularly if travelling in low or shoulder season.
- 6. Catch a thief** – Call me paranoid but I'm always uneasy leaving my luggage unattended while I go to the bathroom or order a coffee while I'm waiting for a bus, plane or cab. Having your luggage stolen is easy to avoid by securing your bag to the sturdiest object you can find. [Korjo](#) have a brilliant padlock with its own wire cable that locks into itself securely. It's tiny enough to fit in my purse yet secure enough to discourage impulsive thieves.

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