

The why and how of solo travel

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The prospect of traveling alone can be daunting. Where do you begin? Will you be safe? Lonely? Bored? There are a lot of things that can keep you from taking the leap and going it alone. As the illustrious Jan Levinson-Gould said, “there are always a million reasons not to do something.” I’m here to tell you why you should take the leap anyway.

We’ll start with a list of various benefits of solo travel and then get into various strategies and tips as to how to do it. Keep in mind that the list of benefits is in no way exhaustive.

Why should you travel solo?

You have the freedom to do what you want:

Want to sleep in late? Or skip the “must-see” museum that you couldn’t care less about? Or spend far too long admiring that one painting that attracts you in a way you can’t explain? With no one else but yourself to worry about, you can spend your time exactly the way you want. You can see what you want to see, explore what you want to explore. Perhaps the most powerful upshot of this is that you can discover what you yourself truly enjoy doing, without the outside influence of others.

You have flexibility:

When traveling in a group, making plans in the first place can be such a hassle, and once these plans are made, they’re all but set in stone. Indeed, changing course on a dime is nearly impossible. But when you’re solo, you have the gift of flexibility. Say you hear that the next town over has the best strudel that you have to try — just go! Or maybe the hotel you’re in gives you the creeps — just leave! Or if you want to stay a few days longer to

spend more time with that cute guy from the bar with the charming accent and the super tight pants — guess what? There's no one there to stop you.

You'll be more engaged with the destination:

When on vacation with your friends, it's easy to get swept away in the conversation and the company. You'll be laughing and talking and laughing some more, and after a while you'll notice you've hardly looked around.

While these moments are undoubtedly valuable, it can impede your immersion in the destination. On the other hand, if you're alone, and there's nothing to engage with but the destination itself, you'll notice things you wouldn't otherwise. Without the buffer of familiar faces, you'll get to know the place and the culture on a deeper level.

You'll meet new people:

Travel offers the opportunity to meet some of the most fascinating people. However, if you're with friends, it's not hard to spend the whole time talking to them and never meet anyone new. When you're alone, you'll be surprised at how much easier it is to strike up a conversation with a stranger, or for them to strike one up with you. You'll make new friends and expand your circle — you never know what kind of crazy connections you'll make.

You'll gain confidence:

If you're traveling alone, you have no one to rely on but yourself. You have to figure things out, problem solve, and make decisions all on your own. It's certainly a challenge, but guess what? You're up to it. You are more capable than you know, but it can take responsibility in a foreign environment to

discover that. You'll come back from your trip more self-assured and independent.

You'll be forced out of your comfort zone:

Being in a foreign place alone is certainly not a comfortable position. You'll experience things you've never experienced before, and that prospect can be scary. But, as we all know, getting out of your comfort zone is the only way to grow. Who knows what these new experiences will bring you, or what new thing you'll fall in love with? While traveling solo, you'll face your fears and become more comfortable with your discomfort. You're sure to return with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

You'll learn how to be alone:

Alone time can be hard to come by in everyday life. Not only are you likely very busy, but there's also a stigma against spending quality time with yourself. The truth is, solitude is healthy and necessary. It can increase empathy, creativity, and productivity, as well as offer the opportunity to think deeply and introspectively. Most of all, it allows you to reboot and unwind. When traveling solo, you'll have your fair share of alone time. The more time you spend with yourself, the better you'll get at it; you'll reach for your phone less, look around more, and end up feeling more comfortable with yourself.

You'll learn about yourself:

A solo journey into the unknown will undoubtedly reveal a lot about yourself. Uninfluenced by others, you'll become more aware of your preferences, your habits, your biases. You'll learn about your limitations, and you'll push past

them. You'll have the space to explore important questions, and the freedom to experiment with their answers. The more time you spend away from people and places that expect you to be a certain way, the more you'll discover who you really are.