

Aging LifeStyles: Should women travel alone?

by Joe Volz and Kate Bird

Many older women routinely travel alone today. Some travel for fun, others do it to visit family or friends.

That's a far cry from the way things were when many of our older citizens were growing up. They grew into adulthood believing that solo travel for women was unheard of. Their mothers never traveled on their own.

For many widows and divorcees, solo travel became possible, or necessary, when their children grew. It's surprising these days what they see when they hit the road in today's alien world?

For starters, strangers are more likely to chat with a woman alone. On a trip to London, Muriel ate at the famous eatery, Ye Olde Cheddar Cheese Pub, where essayist Samuel Johnson was a fixture long ago. The custom here was to place single men and women at a long, rectangular table, if they were willing. Somewhat to Muriel's surprise, she enjoyed chatting with her neighbor and got some tips on out-of-the-ordinary tourist sights.

Cecily first started going on trips by herself after leaving her workaholic husband at home. Initially, she did not venture more than 100 miles from her Indiana home. Once, she stayed at a hotel on Lake Michigan for a few days to enjoy the sun and swimming. She found she liked the idea.

Cecily then broadened her range to include France and Ireland. Along the way, she had many pleasant and sometimes humorous experiences.

Once, while driving in southern Ohio, Cecily decided on the spur of the moment to visit her brother Bill in Cincinnati. It was late, so she stopped at the first motel she saw off the highway. Checking in, she thought the desk clerk was eying her strangely. The same thing happened in the restaurant with the waiter smirking as he served her.

The next day, Bill joined her. Almost immediately he said, "Cecily, you can't stay here. Prostitutes bring their clients here."

By sticking to a few basics, women travelers can protect themselves, keep out of danger and have a jolly time.

As Cecily discovered, women alone need to be careful in choosing a hotel or motel. Often you can check this out simply by observing who's going in and out. If there are couples and families around, it's likely to be OK.

It's a good idea to make a reservation ahead of time. This gives you the chance to scan travel books such as Frommer's or AAA in order to find an acceptable place. These books usually give a range of prices, so you can choose one that suits your budget.

Other women also are a good source for recommendations. At night, Pam said she calls the local police for suggestions. Police always know the places women should avoid.

Another rule is to never go exploring in a lonely place at the end of day. Marjorie found this out the hard way while hiking in a state park. After walking for an hour, she noticed that daylight was fading.

Marjorie started back down the trail only to find herself at a crossroad, not knowing which trail to take. Painfully aware that she had not passed anyone, she almost panicked knowing that no one knew where she was hiking. That was her first and only hike in the winter at dusk.

Some women dread eating alone in restaurants. If you're traveling alone, you have to get over it.

Michele always carries a book or magazine so she can immerse herself in it, confident she won't be disturbed. Reading is a barrier to conversation. Also, if other diners stare, you won't even know.

Women alone find that waitresses treat them one of two ways. The first is their service is careless. Perhaps, they have bought into the stereotype that women don't tip well. The second way is they are friendly, smile pleasantly and even chat; these waitresses deserve a 20 percent tip.

Today, the travel industry offers tours directed at women. An acquaintance organizes women-only trips to explore women's role in religion. She took a group to Greece to visit Delphi where the ancient Sybil prophesied how kings would fare in battle. The trip appealed to feminist souls.

The cruise ship industry is also eager to book women travelers. Since cruises are expensive, some offer accommodations aimed at two singles to split the cost. This works best if you have a friend you can travel

with, though some women don't mind sharing with a stranger. Some cruise lines, such as Club Med, organize trips for singles who are recently widowed and/or divorced.

Resources:

"Italian Affair," by Laura Fraser, Random House, Incorporated, 2002.

"Tales of a Female Nomad," By Rita Golden Gelman, Crown Publishing Group, 2002.

www.gutsywomentravel.com

Contact Club Med online at www.clubmed.us

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