

something I've done in dozens of countries

across six continents. But not all destinations are right for solo travelers. Here are some tips.

—Visit walkable destinations connected by trains, buses, ferries and flights. Getting around this way will be straightforward, prices will be per person, and you increase your odds of meeting others, unlike destinations best seen or reached by car, where there may be fewer interactions. I've found places outside the U.S. and Caribbean are sometimes more friendly to individuals, with reduced-fare single-person rooms. Youth hostels are great for 20somethings and travelers of any age on tight budgets who crave conversation and don't need upscale accommodations.

—Traveling offseason can save a lot of money. One year in October, it was cheaper for me to spend a week in Costa Rica than to visit the Adirondacks in upstate New York. The offpeak flight, local transport and single accommodation in Costa Rica was less than the car rental and pricier double rooms during fall foliage season here.

—If you can't fly nonstop, turn your stopovers into perks. I've visited Fiji, Iceland, London, Paris and Rome, at no extra cost, all on extended layovers.

-Ask others about their vacations to get ideas for your own trips, and read up online and in guidebooks. Publishers can vary tremendously so look at a variety of brands in a bookstore or library, then travel with a guidebook that best suits your priorities.

-Keep expectations to a minimum so you're not disappointed. Instead, be flexible, go with the flow and treasure the unexpected. I've stumbled upon some amazing hidden gems. Bedouins invited me for tea in the caves of Petra, and a Portuguese model in Lisbon declared his affection for me by saying it was "love at first look."

-Be prepared for the occasional bad day. I've been tired, cranky, lonely and frustrated, suffering from food poisoning and stressed out by emergency landings, 14-hour flight delays, altercations with customs officials, bad weather and other complications. But temporary misery is part of travel, and can help you enjoy the magnificent moments that much more. And sometimes the worst experiences generate great stories later on.

—Write in a journal every night. It records your adventures while also giving you the conversational outlet to express and process the details of your action-packed day.

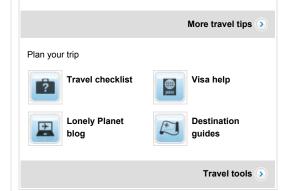
—When dining alone, bring a book or journal. Eating at the bar may feel more comfortable than a table for one.

-Be respectful, inconspicuous and dress to blend in. Local fashion norms vary, but I typically wear jeans with subdued colors, dark shoes and subtle accessories so as not to attract undue attention.

—English has become the world's second language, but learning to say hello and thank you in the local tongue goes a long way.

-Be cautious but not paranoid. If there's a site that piques your interest, but it's out of the way or you have concerns about personal safety, take a day tour or hire a guide. Independent female travelers may face harassment and other dangers, while men traveling alone may be targeted by scam artists and touts peddling illicit activities.

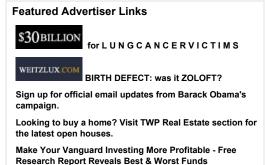
--Ignoring verbal aggressors -- whether beggars, vendors or passers-by -- is frequently the best defense, although in some cultures, like the markets in Istanbul, a simple "no, thank you" works better. Intimidation and harassment are never fun; feel empowered by your ability to say no.



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-Check guidebooks and consult with local tourist offices and hotel staff for advice on what to watch out for. Take special care after dark, in dense crowds, and with likable strangers. The freedom of being far from home can release inhibitions in wonderful ways. In fact, I try to do something new every trip. But if you feel as though you're taking a risk, have an exit strategy, inform the hotel staff of your whereabouts, or make sure you're in a place where you can shout out to others.

Gratifying solo travel comes from following your bliss. Don't let societal pressures rattle you. Don't let loneliness paralyze you. Educate yourself so you know what you can, and cannot, do. Most of all, embrace the exciting possibilities before you.

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