

I'm not going to lie, the first time I decided to travel alone, after Mr C and I split up, I was sick to my stomach. My internal dialogue, always quite active, went into overdrive. I couldn't sleep with the endless questions going round and round in my mind. Would I get to the airport in time? What if I didn't hear the alarm? Would I find the right plane? What if the hotel was rubbish? What if I got lost?

But I'd paid my money and I was determined to prove that I was capable of travelling alone and I'm so pleased that I did, as I haven't stopped since. I've enjoyed the most amazing adventures, taking in Australia and New Zealand, India, China, Cambodia, the Middle East, Europe and the Africas. Here are my top 10 tips for successful solo travel.

- 1. Caution is wise!** Especially if you are travelling alone as a single woman, but don't let it stop you. Millions of single people happily and safely traverse the globe every year, and there's no reason why you shouldn't either - but be vigilant. Use the same precautions as you would at home and ensure you have copies of your travel insurance, trip details (including Travel Agent details if you've used one) and passport tucked somewhere safe in case your luggage goes missing. I've recently bought the Apple Airtags to track my luggage in case it goes astray, although this is thankfully very rare: [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com). Also let friends and family know exactly where you are going and when you are expected to return. If you share Group tracking, it's worth letting them know, but be mindful of network costs when travelling abroad (for you, not them).
- 2. Start small if this is your first time.** Gain your confidence before embarking on more adventurous journeys. Either book a city break to Europe or, if you are really unsure, book a solo break somewhere in the UK. I find British Airways helpful, [www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com), although Jet2 [www.jet2.com](http://www.jet2.com) were a surprising good find for me this year by an old client of mine who's living her dream life as a holiday planner: [sarah.holstead@travelcounsellors.com](mailto:sarah.holstead@travelcounsellors.com). I know some people are fans of the ubiquitous 'all inclusive holiday', but I don't enjoy these and find them very family orientated and not particularly welcoming of solo travellers. I also don't drink much, so rarely get my money's worth! What I do love are health breaks, and this was another way I became comfortable travelling alone. If I'm feeling flush, I use a company who organise the programme and flights if required: [www.wellbeingescapes.com](http://www.wellbeingescapes.com).
- 3. Visit friends/family abroad:** Book the flight and practice independence by visiting friends or family abroad. If you are feeling particularly brave, you can also book a hire car and drive yourself directly to their door but check which side of the road you are expected to drive on before you land! Otherwise join the taxi or bus queue which most airports have, but research the approximate prices before you board. Your family / friends might offer to pick you up and I absolutely love being met at an airport, but if you want to practice independence, have a go at navigating yourself. Another good tip is to find a friend to travel with and share the challenges with them. It's a good way to build confidence, taking it in turns to be the lead for the day, even if just for a long weekend.
- 4. Try joining a group:** Something I discovered about 10 years ago was the joy of travelling to far-flung places with a travel adventure company. There are loads of them around and vary according to budget and type of adventure of offer. My personal favourite is [www.Exodus.co.uk](http://www.Exodus.co.uk). The team there are super helpful and will even sort flights and visas (if required) for you if you are short on time. The joy of these holidays is that all the planning is taken care of for you, you can dip in and out of the daily activities as you see fit and there's always someone to have dinner with if you want to. I especially tap into these holidays if I want to go further afield – Cambodia, India, China, Egypt and Jordan have been amongst my most favourite destinations. I especially like the fact that Exodus don't set themselves up as a singles only travel company, so there are often couples who just enjoy the company of others or who are taking an elderly parent with them. [www.justyou.co.uk](http://www.justyou.co.uk) is another good company, although I found the other travellers (mainly female) to be a bit older than me and the pace more sedentary.
- 5. Money:** Work out your budget and stick to it (something I'm not particularly good at). However, this avoids the credit card shock on your return home. It's important to check what is and what isn't included in your

booking and then work out how much you will need to take with you. Gone are the days of needing the cumbersome travellers cheques as just about everywhere accepts credit or debit cards and have tap and go set up. It's important to also take some local currency, especially so that you are prepared for the first day or two, until you find your bearings, so get organised and don't rely on the Travel Exchange Centres at the airport, they are usually more expensive and don't always have the right denominations, leaving you with large bills to breakdown when you arrive.

6. **Pack mindfully.** I used to be a rubbish packer and would end up with a mishmash of unsuitable things and then find myself having to hit the local shops. The worst time was in Malaysia, where I had primarily packed for the beach, forgetting it was a 2 centre holiday and I had 4 days in the capital City Kuala Lumpur. When I arrived in the rather smart capital, I was underdressed and my airport outfits were far too thick to cope with the hideous humidity so I went shopping. Malaysians are truly beautiful people, especially the women, but the shops had nothing for a busty, Amazonian European woman and I found myself in the men's departments. I don't have many photos from that era (thankfully it was before iPhones) but I must have looked a fright!

Also pack your onboard bag with care. It's wise to stock up on water and snacks and you will most likely need a pen for a landing card. If you suffer from food allergies and the flight offers a meal, book it in advance when choosing your seat. It's also wise to take 'free from' snacks with you as these are rarely available on board. If travelling further afield, it's also a good idea to get your food allergies translated into the local language or dialect which you can share with hotels and restaurants. I really struggled in China as I'm gluten allergic and soy sauce is used in just about everything. I returned from that holiday particularly thin! You can find detailed packing tips in my blog: <https://jettysocials.com/blog/>.

7. **Journal.** I not a natural diary keeper, but for some reason, I find myself drawn to noting down my travel adventures. I think it started with recording my mini wins, such as getting there on time and in one piece or asking to change rooms because as sometimes happens as a single person, I was given a poor room. I also found that journaling eased my anxieties as once it's down on paper, it's out of my head. These days, updates on Facebook or Insta have overtaken old fashioned paper and pen updates, but whatever works for you, make notes of what you are enjoying and what not to do next time.
8. **Enter into the spirit of things!** Once you're there, you need to make the most of it. So what if the hotel doesn't quite live up to expectations or your room doesn't have a sea view? Making yourself miserable by not letting go of minor worries and complaints, will only make matters worse. You are in an amazing part of the world, so make the most of it. I also recommend getting out and about to check out the local area ASAP and scout some interesting restaurants or tourist places. It's important to get your bearings.

If travelling to Europe, I find the 'hop on, hop off' tour buses particularly useful. You can usually use the same bus pass all day if you wish, so I tend to do the complete loop first, find out what appeals to me most and then go back to the place that interests me most. Obviously a great guide book is an essential tool. I tend to prefer Dorling Kindersley as they often have separate travel maps and have very good quality visuals. [www.dk.com](http://www.dk.com). That being said, they don't cover everywhere, so [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) have a wide selection of reasonable alternatives. To avoid disappointment, do buy your guide in advance and don't leave it until you arrive at the airport as they are often out of stock.

9. **Eat alone!** Being able to eat alone is one of life's little pleasures but so many people I know would rather grab a snack from shop and hide in their room. Be bold, be brave, be confident. I promise you won't be disappointed, it's a liberating experience and a great chance to people watch. By all means take a book or an electronic equivalent, but don't waste this luxury by constantly staring down at your table. Watch the world, especially local people and cultures and take time to enjoy and savour your meal, one bite at a time. Waiters can be your friend and if you find yourself being led to the back of a restaurant by the kitchen or the toilets, stop them and point to where you want to go. Obviously it's unreasonable to hog a table for 4 in prime position if it's just you, but seek a compromise and choose the seat that's right for you. I try to find a

window seat so that I can truly watch the world go by. And smile. If people look over, they are probably admiring your confidence and envying you. Resist the urge to always join others. If I found myself in one hotel for a week or more, I used to find myself being befriended by couples which was very kind of them, but not always welcome. If they become very insistent, I would suggest that I join them for dessert or coffee. Some people don't understand the power of eating alone, but try it, you might enjoy it!

- 10. Coming home.** I know it sounds simple, but pack up ALL of your belongings. Check the safe and the bathroom. I've left numerous PJs languishing in bathrooms around the world. Obviously your passport is sacrosanct and you won't get far without it, so check the safe or, if you've had to leave it with Reception, don't forget to collect it when checking out. If you've had good service and are able to tip, it's nice to reward staff who've looked after you. If you've been part of a tour, there is usually a suggested tip for the driver and/or tour guide. If you've run out of local currency, they are usually happy to accept sterling, Euros or Dollars.

And finally, one note of caution. If you've had an amazing time, you might want to exchange personal details with those you've met either on the same trip, or in the hotel or local area, which is great. (isn't that one of the many joys of travelling - connecting with like-minded souls around the world?) However, be aware that some people will abuse this exchange of details. If someone local asks for your details to connect you with his family, it's probably wise to take their details and decide if you want to connect, when you get home and achieve some perspective.

Also, it's OK just to have been happy to have had a lovely time with people, to wish them well and move on. Don't feel under any obligation. Not everyone needs to become a life long friend and as Brian A. 'Drew' Chalker said in his poem, Reason, Season and a Lifetime: *'People always come into your life for a reason, a season and a lifetime. When you figure out which it is, you know exactly what to do'.*

I really hope these solo travel trips have helped and I'd love to hear if you have more to add, or if you are inspired to take a leap of faith and go on your first solo adventure, drop me a line and tell me more. Alternatively, if you have questions, you can contact me [julia@jettysocials.com](mailto:julia@jettysocials.com).

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