

TRAVELING MADE EASY



Solo

T R A V E L

Lee Mylne

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Solo Travel

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Solo Travel

by Lee Mylne

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Solo Travel For Dummies®

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Introduction

Traveling has long been an important part of my life. The bug bit me hard when I was in my 20s and I've never stopped . . . except for that little blip during 2020, 2021, and 2022, when a pandemic kept most everyone at home. Even then, when border closures kept me within my home state in Australia, I was able to continue to see the parts of it I hadn't seen before.

I was already widely traveled when I swapped my career as a newspaper journalist for the peripatetic life of a travel writer. It seemed a natural continuation of a passion that has grown as the years passed and shows no signs of dimming. I have traveled solo, with friends and partners, with my family, as part of tour groups, and with other travel writers on press trips. Every way of traveling has its own pros and cons, but solo travel brings a different dimension to exploring new places.

For me, solo travel results in the best stories, the ones that are often found when I divert from the day's plan to follow an intriguing road sign or to visit a place that someone's told me about the night before. It's the result of freedom to change direction on a whim or linger for longer in a place that calls for more time.

Traveling solo opens up the world in a way you may not expect. If you're daunted by the thought of going it alone, be assured that the rewards are great. Solo travel will change you and your view of the world. As you leave the comfort of everything you know to see new places and meet new people, cherish every moment — along with every mistake you make — and know that you'll return home with memories and stories to last a lifetime (or at least until the bug bites again).

About This Book

If the idea of solo travel is daunting, you're not alone. It takes a certain amount of confidence to take that first step toward going it alone. Even if you are an experienced traveler, there is a different dimension to traveling alone that might make you hesitate. This book is designed to allay those fears and to show you that

with thorough planning, good research, and backup plans, you can cope with anything that the world throws at you.

I've written countless travel articles for publications around the world as well as about a dozen guide books. I've visited 65 countries, lived in 6 of them, and undertaken some big over-land adventures in Europe and the Middle East. You'll read about some of my experiences as a solo traveler — and the mistakes I've made — in these pages.

I've taken a global approach to writing this book, knowing that some of you will be reading this in the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, or New Zealand. And you'll all be looking to travel in different parts of the world, making your way to every continent as you explore our beautiful planet.

This book aims to give you the tools to set out on your own and confidently go it alone, making friends along the way and returning home — no matter how long or short your journey is — with a new sense of self-reliance. As the Chinese philosopher Laozi said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Reading this book may be the first step you take on your solo travel journey.

Foolish Assumptions

While writing this book I've made the assumption that many of you are either just beginning to consider solo travel as an option or are wondering if it's something you can actually do.

I also assumed that, like me, you already have a deep love of travel but for various reasons you haven't traveled solo before. You certainly don't want to stop traveling, so the other option is to go it alone. But there's some hesitation there — a fear of the unknown, perhaps. That's why you are reading this book — to help you make up your mind.

You may be young and fancy-free, hitting the backpacker trail on an extended trip, or planning to be a digital nomad. You might be an older adventurer but without a travel companion. Or you might simply enjoy being on your own and having the freedom to go where you please. Whatever your circumstances are, I've assumed

that you need reassurance that solo travel is something within your ability to tackle — and I hope this book does that!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, I use a handful of icons to point out various types of information. Here's what they are and what they mean:



TIP

As I've traveled, I've found ways to make some aspects of solo travel easier. These tips should help you, too!



REMEMBER

This is an important point that's key to solo travel or travel in general. It's a nudge to think about something you probably already know but need reminding of. Sometimes it's just about common sense.



WARNING

A heads-up about something that might cause an issue, put you in danger, or is worth avoiding if possible.



FIND
ONLINE

This icon points out helpful online resources as well as items you can find on the resources page at www.dummies.com/go/solotravelfd.

Beyond the Book

I've put together an online resources page to help you find more information about some of the accommodations and organizations that can tell you more about everything that comes with being a solo traveler. Here's just some of what you'll find:

- »» Links to websites with more background info on places mentioned in this book
- »» Links to tourism businesses that are solo-friendly
- »» Visa, passport, and other important travel info

Simply go to www.dummies.com/go/solotravelfd. Be sure to bookmark the site so you can easily find it later.

Where to Go from Here

Armed with the knowledge you'll glean from this book, you'll soon be ready to hit the road as a solo traveler, so start planning your next trip!

How should you navigate this book? You can start at the beginning and read it straight through if you want. There's lots of info throughout, and even if it's a section you're not sure you need, there might be some tips and tricks in there that might be useful.

If you're just beginning to think about whether you're ready to step out as a solo traveler, start with Chapters 1 through 4. They'll give you lots of reassurance that going solo is well within your grasp, and tips on how to plan and execute your first solo trip.

If you prefer, you can dip in and out of chapters that grab your interest or seem relevant to the travel you're planning. If you're wondering how to meet people on your travels, take a look at Chapter 8. Is dining alone your greatest fear? Turn to Chapter 7. If you're wondering where to stay, you'll find plenty of ideas in Chapter 6. If you're looking for ideas for where to go, turn to Chapter 12.

There's no time like the present to start planning your next trip. Thanks for reading this book first. I wish you safe and happy travels!

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Coping with the challenges of traveling solo
- » Exploring a destination for the first time
- » Opening channels of communication

Chapter 1

Exploring the World as a Solo Traveler

Going out into the world as a solo traveler is something you should do at least once in your life. Even if you have traveled widely, the experience of traveling alone is one that will change you and the way you see the world.

Traveling to places beyond your home base expands your worldview and shows you that despite our differences, people are fundamentally the same the world over. By going it alone, you will open yourself to people and experiences in a way that traveling in the cocoon of companionship prevents. It's a brave step, but one that will change you in ways you can't imagine before you set out.

In this chapter, I discuss how to build your confidence when traveling solo for the first time, how to get the most out of going back to favorite destinations, and give you tips on how to stay safe when you're on the road alone.



Throughout this book, I reference all kinds of online resources to help you plan and enjoy your travels. To find a handy list of links to all these resources, go to www.dummies.com/go/solotravelfd.

The Pros and Cons of Going It Alone

If you're new to solo travel — or just contemplating it for the first time — it might seem daunting. It's no small thing to be out there in the world on your own, with no support system or ready-made friend to share the ups and downs with. It's a worthwhile exercise to weigh up the pros and cons of traveling alone before you decide to abandon the idea — and with luck, you will come to see that the benefits of solo travel do outweigh the downsides.

Like life in general, all travel has its bad days and disappointments, especially if you are on the road for a long time. The hotel room might not be quite what you expected — but oh, how that sunset from the balcony makes up for the tiny bathroom! Then there are the truly awful days when you really just want nothing more than to go home to your own bed . . . but the next day will reveal something wonderful, and you remember why you are on this journey!



REMEMBER

This book is definitely pro-solo travel, but I also guide you through all the realities of a traveling life on your own, not just the good ones. As with all styles of travel, traveling alone can be a roller-coaster that you need to learn to ride. Knowing what the ups and downs might be is the first step towards a smooth ride.

Why traveling alone may be the best decision you ever make

Traveling solo may be the most empowering decision you ever make. No matter your age or gender, learning to be self-sufficient while dealing with everything that travel throws at you will teach you more about yourself than you could ever imagine before you start out.

From the moment you begin to plan your trip, you'll be free of the shackles of traveling with someone else. There's no need to wait for others to confirm their vacation dates or save up enough to travel. By traveling solo, you can start your trip whenever it suits you — and you alone! Take advantage of cheap deals, make your bookings instantly, and be spontaneous.

The same applies once you are on the road. Want to stay somewhere an extra day or two, or move on more quickly than you

planned? You can do it. There are no compromises or negotiations to be made, no one to consult . . . just the freedom and flexibility to do exactly what you want to.

Solo travel will definitely push you out of your comfort zone, even if you're traveling in your own state or country. Knowing that — *expecting* it — will help you deal with it. You'll face your fears and overcome them (the worst ones will probably never even eventuate).

Making all the decisions, from where and when to go, how to get there, where to stay, how to cope when things go wrong (which they inevitably will sometimes) and meeting new people along the way will give you a new sense of independence. Your confidence will grow and your self-reliance will be stronger every day. You'll learn to deal with people of all kinds and to keep yourself safe in situations that you may not have encountered at home.

Most of all, traveling solo will change your perspective on the world. Without the distraction of a companion, you'll be more aware of your surroundings and more observant of what is around you.



REMEMBER

Solo travel also allows you to learn about yourself. Time on your own inevitably results in self-reflection — “Hey, I did that!” — and time to contemplate what you're seeing as you travel. It may make you appreciate what you have at home and how your life has panned out so far. Then there may be those moments when you give thanks for a life that is far removed from those you are seeing on your travels. Clean running water — or *hot* water for your daily shower — may suddenly seem not so much a necessity, but a privilege.

If you're traveling to escape a difficult or traumatic situation — a romantic break-up, a job that didn't work out, a bereavement that you need time to adjust to — then traveling alone can be a healing process. Getting away from your everyday life and thinking about challenges you face on the road, or simply soaking up the beauty of the world, can put things in perspective again.

Solo travel gives you the space to be yourself, to take each day as it comes, ditch the pressures of your everyday life, and — even for a short while — become the person you know you really are.

Knowing it won't all be smooth sailing

All travel has its ups and downs, whether you're on your own or not. Solo travel might seem to amplify those highs and lows when you have to cope with them yourself. But knowing from the outset that it won't all be easy is the first step to dealing with problems when they occur.

There are moments when things go wrong when you'll really wish you had a traveling companion. For example, when you're waiting by the luggage carousel in Lisbon while your bag is holidaying in Havana, you're on your own, with no one to borrow clothes or toothpaste from. Or you lose your wallet and cards and there's no travel companion to lend you money to tide you over until the bank can sort things out for you. But you will cope because you always do!

Travel can be exhausting and it's important to look after yourself mentally, emotionally, and physically when you're traveling alone. It's quite natural to go through periods of loneliness or to feel homesick from time to time, and those times are likely to be when you're tired. Sometimes all you want is to have someone along to help you make decisions or to toss ideas around with. Just know that these feelings will pass. Take a day off from everything, curl up with a book, have a cry, and you'll be ready to tackle the world again.

Culture shock is one of the big things that can upset your equilibrium. When nothing is familiar, people don't behave the way they do at home, and you're floundering to make yourself understood, it can feel like you can't cope. But you will.



TIP

Doing your research before you leave home can help you anticipate and deal with culture shock if you are going to a foreign country. If you are well prepared for what you are seeing or experiencing, culture shock can be a great learning experience. Be open to the differences between what you are used to and how other people live. There may be a degree of discomfort, but that will ease as you adjust to new surroundings, new languages, and new sights, sounds, and smells.

Language barriers are one aspect of culture shock that may be hard to deal with; not everyone in the world speaks English, and communication may be difficult in some places. One of the biggest

challenges you may face in some parts of the world is that you may not be able to make yourself understood, particularly in a situation where it is important, such as illness or being a victim of crime.

Solo travel will definitely help sharpen your problem-solving skills, and you will learn to be self-reliant very quickly.

Why solo travel doesn't have to break the budget

Travel expenses can be higher when you're a solo traveler, but that doesn't mean you'll have to scrimp to avoid busting your budget.

The most annoying part of solo travel on a budget — any budget — is the single supplement that's imposed by some tour companies and cruise ships. Hotels generally charge by the room rather than the person, so you'd be paying the same amount with a friend or partner, but sharing the cost; while that's not strictly a single supplement, the effect is the same. However, there are ways around it (see Chapter 6 for more details).

While solo travel means you don't have anyone to share the cost of things like accommodations or car rental with, it also means you have complete control over how, when, and how much you spend while you're traveling. Effective planning, knowing how much you have to spend, and pre-booking where you can in order to know what your available funds can stretch to are the keys to sticking to your budget.



TIP

The cost of accommodations can be kept to a minimum by choosing to house-sit, home swap, or stay in a shared room in a hostel (and if you don't fancy that, hostels have private rooms that are often cheaper than a hotel room). See Chapter 6 for more ideas on ways to keep your cost for accommodations down.

Traveling solo means no one is going to insist that you spend up big on a fancy dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant . . . you can opt for those three-minute noodles in your room if you like. And if you do go to an expensive restaurant, as a solo diner you can order what you like without potentially having to subsidize someone else's menu choices, and you can savor every minute of the experience without distraction.

Look for ways of saving money — you have no one to negotiate with over how you do that — and make the most of free activities you can find in your destination. Many outdoor activities such as hiking or hitting the beach are free, as are many museums, galleries, and festivals.



REMEMBER

Overall, the independence you have as a solo traveler will be a benefit that will outweigh the fact that you have no one to share costs with.

Things to consider when traveling independently

Solo travel doesn't necessarily mean being on your own all the time. Some solo travelers prefer to travel, at least some of the time, as part of an organized group. That option might be something that if you are just starting out on your solo travel journey, you might want to consider — you'll be solo but not alone.

Purists might argue that joining a group tour is not solo travel, but I think it's a very reasonable way of easing yourself into a greater adventure in the future. As a first-time solo traveler, you will be gaining an insight into how you feel about being the solo in a crowd — and learning that you will likely never be the only one! If you are contemplating a trip to a place where you might be worried about security or about making cultural missteps, such as the Middle East or Africa, a group tour will give you reassurance that you'll have guides to lead you through the tricky parts.

Taking care of your health is vital to a successful solo trip. Preparation is important; make sure you have all the necessary vaccinations before leaving home and carry with you everything you'll need to deal with minor ailments or injury (see more in Chapter 9). With no companion to take charge if you get sick, it's important to avoid that happening if you possibly can. And I really can't stress too strongly how important it is to have travel insurance to cover not only any potential medical costs but also every aspect of what can go wrong when you're traveling.

Will you get lonely? The honest answer is yes, probably . . . at least sometimes. Maybe you'll be missing someone's birthday or a family gathering of some kind. Maybe you've just spent too much time on your own lately and need to start reconnecting with other travelers or meeting the locals in a more meaningful way.

When everything around you is unfamiliar, or things don't quite go to plan, it's easy to give in to loneliness. The trick is not to bury yourself in your room, but to get back out there and engage with the world again. Have a good cry, then get on with it.

Recognize that there will always be moments when you wish you had someone to share the experience with, but comfort yourself with the thought that at least *you* are getting to do it (rather than sitting home, dreaming about it).

Is it safe to go it alone?

All travel comes with risks, but that's no reason to stay home. Life is full of risks, and people take them every day without thinking too much about it. As a solo traveler, particularly abroad, you'll need to keep your wits about you and take precautions that you might not bother about at home — but for the most part, you'll be safe as long as you're sensible and maintain an awareness of your surroundings.

Research your destination before you go, even if you're traveling in your own country. Find out which neighborhoods to avoid or if there are particular scams you should know about. Talk to other people who might have visited your chosen destination, or look at social media sites that might have useful information about the area you'll be in.

Basic security measures — like not leaving your drink unattended in a bar, keeping your cash or valuables out of sight (or locked in your hotel room safe), and not walking alone at night — will help lessen your risk of assault or robbery. For women solo travelers, an extra level of vigilance should be applied, particularly about revealing that you are traveling alone or where you are staying. Being friendly is fine, but in some cultures this can be misinterpreted. Again, research is the key.



REMEMBER

Traveling alone is common, and most trips are without any major safety issues for solo travelers. Common sense, knowledge of the place you are visiting, and some basic precautions (outlined in Chapter 3) will help to keep you as safe as possible.