



**THE**  
**\* ART OF**  
**SOLO \***  
**TRAVEL**



**A Girls' Guide by**

**\* Stephanie Lee**

## **The Art of Solo Travel: A Girls' Guide**

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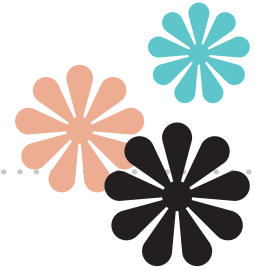
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# Why Travel Alone?

PART ONE

# Introduction

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## I decided to write this because I wanted to share my story.

It is a story which involved leaving the rat-race indefinitely and embarking on an open-ended journey in search of meaning and adventure in different parts of the world. My quest took me across three continents, through many countries and into more cities than I can remember. I sought and found answers in the most unlikely places, and along the way I realised that I had become quite good at travelling by myself.

## Finding resources

I suspect I m not alone in seeking such adventures, and I want to provide a resource for every girl out there who yearns for change, exploration, and extraordinary experiences. Are there others out there?

There are in fact many solo female travellers, but those who document their experiences are few. During my initial research on this topic, a Google search revealed the odd chunky-looking book as well as the occasional travel blog. The blogs were the most helpful as they provided an insight into girls individual experiences; the kinds of situations they faced, and how they dealt with them in their own way. But the posts on these blogs were sometimes old, and I wasn t sure if information was still relevant.

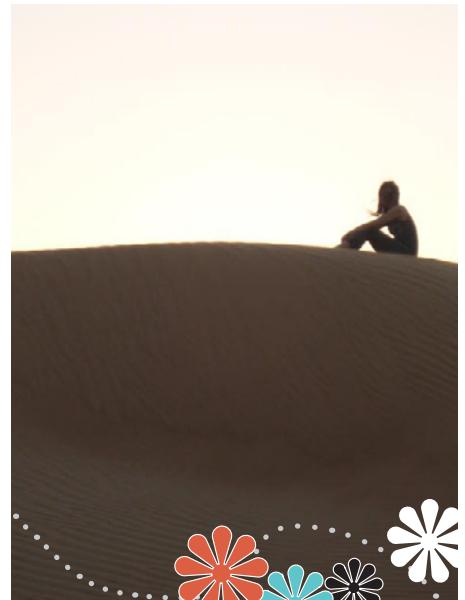
## Travel planning

I researched what I could, and armed with these scattered resources, I embarked on my trip. Along with some wit, some common sense, and a bit of good luck, I learned everything else along the way. The education of my long-term travel is presented in this concise guide, which includes comprehensive travel-planning strategies (for before and during travel), practical tips, and detailed information about how I managed to achieve it financially. I will tell you exactly how much money I saved, and how I saved it; how much I spent, with examples of where I slept and what I ate; and how I travelled; in order to stick to the (rough) plan and the (tiny) budget.

## You're not alone

If you re a girl considering travelling alone, but are unsure of what to do next, think of this as a little companion to provide support. It should help you conquer any fears, doubts or anxieties you might have had when this “crazy” idea first crossed your mind. I hope sharing my experiences will inspire you to get out of that house/cubicle and take action it s time to stop dreaming your life and start living your dreams.

*Anyone can do it. Here's how...*





# The un-average girl

If you are reading this, you're not the average girl. You probably already possess the essential ingredients for adventure.

**You're fiercely independent.**



**You're determined and sometimes dead stubborn.**



**You seek fulfillment through unconventional means.**



**You're tired of the rat-race.**



**Money doesn't motivate you very much.**



**You like taking risks and have a thirst for the unknown.**



**You have an impulsive streak.**



*Great, you're already halfway there.*

# The good and the bad

Just to be absolutely sure that solo travel is something that's right for you, it's wise to sit down and review all the advantages and disadvantages associated with it so that you know exactly what you're in for.

## ADVANTAGES

### 1. Spiritual growth

People often view solo travel as a spiritual journey. Being able to embrace the beauty of self-discovery is one of the biggest reasons for going it alone. Often, when people are by themselves, they experience a more intimate relationship with their travel destinations, and in doing so, might uncover a part of themselves they never knew existed. Whether reading a book at Parc Guell, studying a painting at the Louvre or just listening to music on a train ride – you absorb your surroundings more and you will become more comfortable with your own company.

### 2. Flexibility

Flexibility is by far one of the greatest advantages of travelling alone. Your itinerary is your own, and there's no need to coordinate with other people. Remember the times you wanted to go to the museum but your friend wanted to go shopping? Good news. No more arguing over where to go and what to do, no fighting over maps and guidebooks. You get to go wherever you want, whenever you want. You answer only to yourself.

### 3. Openness to conversation

Being on your own presents you with a new social dimension, and makes it easier to meet people. When travelling with others, you make less effort to talk to new people. When you're alone, you will be compelled to chat to random strangers while sharing long-haul waits at the train station or the airport lounge. Sometimes a stranger might just happen to be going the same way as you, and you could end up with a temporary travel companion. Travelling alone also increases the possibility of romance.

### 4. Practical skill development

Along with increased independence and confidence, travelling alone also helps you develop skills such as map-reading, sign-spotting and language-grasping. There are many challenges to be faced on the road, and you will be forced to confront them yourself. Remember that what doesn't destroy you will only make you stronger.

### 5. Learning about yourself

This is by far the most rewarding aspect of travelling. Every traveller I've met has learned a lot about themselves through travel – who knows what you might discover? As for me, I found out quite a few things about myself that I never really knew before:

- \* I actually didn't hate my job.
- \* I discovered a creative flair for writing.
- \* I love living in Sydney, and missed it like crazy when I was away.
- \* I can sleep anywhere and live simply, but acquired new-found appreciation for home comforts.
- \* I can be calm in demanding situations.



# DISADVANTAGES



## 1. Loneliness

An obvious reality you will have to face is loneliness. Sure you like travelling in solitude, but at times the feeling can get overwhelming. There's no one to share dull delays with, no one to keep an eye on your luggage, no one to lean on for moral/emotional support when things go wrong. You have to do everything yourself – find accommodation, book transport, hunt out food. It's a lot to do, and it does get tiring after a while. Worst of all, if you get sick, there is no familiar face to look after you.

## 2. Eating alone

Another overlooked factor of solo travel is that you have to eat by yourself, most of the time. Not only is this incredibly boring, if you cook for only one person it is difficult to prepare a variety of food. If you go to a restaurant you might feel awkward and self-conscious. Also, there's no-one to hang out with late at night if you want to go for a drink and a quiet chat.

## 3. Being alone for those awesome moments

You don't get to experience incredible moments with someone else. However it's still okay to experience that mind-boggling sunset on your own. Take an awesome photo or shoot a video to bring home with you to share with your friends and family.

## 4. Cost

Things are more expensive for one person than if you share them. Single rooms cost more than dorm rooms, and for girls travelling alone, it's usually a good idea to have your own room for security and privacy.

*“Of course it is only fair to list the disadvantages”*

## 5. Harassment

Unwanted attention from men is also a big part of solo female travel. This can range from the mildly annoying to downright harassment. In many countries, if you're alone, you're available. In these situations, it's helpful to learn how to say "no thanks" in the local language. Wear a fake wedding ring, or keep a photo of a male friend as your boyfriend or husband. Carry a mobile phone with you and pretend to answer a call and leave. If they are really persistent, just go to the reception or concierge at the nearest hotel and stay there. After a while they will usually go away.

**I think we've covered the big picture. Having been through all of the above, I can certify that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.**

*Are you still excited?*



# Quit your life (and get a new one)



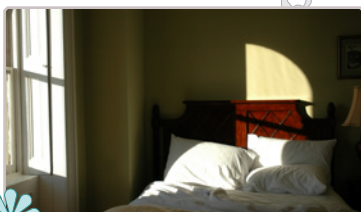
Let's get down to details. How does one begin to embark on the fascinating road of extended travel? I want to tell you how I went from Sydney inhabitant to world-wanderer.



## The reason why

When the urge to travel surfaced in me around two years ago, I was on the brink of settling down in Sydney. I had a beautiful house, a nice car, a promising career, a glamorous job. It was as if my life was pretty much all planned out and that was it. I was 28 years old and though it would seem like I had everything under control, my life felt bland. Wanderlust was stirring within the depths of my soul, and I had to do something about it.

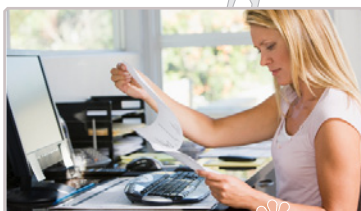
I decided to quit my life to pursue a different one. How this is done will vary from person to person, but in my case I got rid of all my material possessions in order to go on my journey with a free mind and spirit. Planning is required, and it's best to start at least 6-12 months before you go. My preparations took me around 11 months.



## Your home

When you travel, you have to leave home. Whether home is a room in your parents' house, a rented flat, or your own place, you need to grasp the idea that you will be away from it for an extended period of time. Once you start long-term travel, the premise of home will never be available. If you are able to accept this concept, you can then start taking action.

In my case, I decided to sell the house I lived in, along with most of the possessions in it. I could have kept it and rented it out while I was away, but I wanted to leave everything behind, not only physically but also mentally. Paying a mortgage while halfway across the world would have been burdensome and stressful. I had to let it go, and though it was difficult emotionally, the greater goal kept me on track.



## Your work

This is probably the easiest to renounce, as getting away from it could be one of the many reasons you decided to go. Perhaps you're unhappy with your job, or maybe you're merely looking for a change but are not quite sure what to do next. Taking time off to travel is often a good remedy for those who find themselves in career limbo.

Many employers are supportive of their staff taking sabbaticals. It is quite a common practice these days for people to take a travel year off, and a lot of companies permit this because they are keen to keep good employees who will return to work for them after gaining some international experience. Try to negotiate an agreement. If this is not possible, resign and look for a new job when the time comes.

No matter which option you choose, always remember to maintain the professional relationships you developed while you were working there.



## Your family and friends

Excited out of your mind, you start spreading the word to your family and friends that you're planning extended travel. Alone. Contrary to sharing your enthusiasm, most of them think you're a complete loon.

### Some common reactions I received were:

Won't it be boring?

Is it safe?

You're crazy.

Damn you must be rich!

(Not really, but more on how much I spent a little later.)

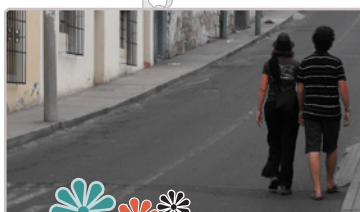
### And the only one I love:

I'm so jealous.

Convince them that you're sound of mind, and that you have thought it through. To assure everyone that you will be taking good care of yourself:

- \* Install Skype/Instant Messenger on your wi-fi phone or laptop for free calls to your loved ones wherever wireless internet is available.
- \* Promise to write back every two weeks, even if it's just a short note to say which city you've just landed in.
- \* Set up a travel blog (and start writing posts) in order for people to keep up to date with your adventures.
- \* Set up an account with a photo-sharing website like Flickr, Picasa, or Photobucket so you can upload your photos.

With all of the above, they will spend less time worrying about you and more time being envious of all the exciting things you are doing all over the world.



## Your significant other

How do you tell your partner you want to travel? Without him/her? There is no easy way to break the news, and in this tricky situation it is better to be honest. Tell them the reason you want to go alone, and how it would change your life. After discussing it, you might decide to either go your separate ways, or wait it out for one another. Long-term travel is truly a test of any relationship, and either way, the relationship will evolve during your time apart. Your partner might find this hard to accept, but you need to be strong, and stick to your decision because if you don't, there will always be a tiny part of you that will regret it.

# Where to go?



**Surely everyone has got a dream destination they want to visit at some point in their lives. Why not now?**

However, whether you're travelling alone for the first time, or are a seasoned traveller looking for the next exciting place to venture to, choosing where to go is sometimes the toughest decision you have to make. As a solo traveller, it's wise to start with a place that's relatively safe and easy to get around. Although I haven't been to every country in the world, I can share my experiences in the following places:



## Japan

In my opinion this is one of the safest countries in the world for women travelling by themselves. Despite a large language barrier, the Japanese are extremely respectful, considerate and helpful to foreigners. The streets are filled with people at all hours, and I never once felt insecure about walking back to my hotel late at night. There are plenty of interesting things to do alone, and going to a restaurant or pub by myself never bothered me at all, mostly because of the sheer volume of people and tourists around. I made many new friends, both local and foreign, during my trip here. The country is spectacular, and you will be very busy immersing yourself in its amazing culture. A great place for first-time solo travellers.

## Egypt

Be warned, women might feel quite awkward in Egypt, especially alone; generally there is a lack of women out in public. If you are obviously foreign, you may get frustrated by the touts and taxi drivers. You will be constantly surrounded by people offering to help you, which might seem nice except that these people are often touts in disguise who expect some form of payment for their advice. Plus, there are taxis everywhere in Egypt and they will toot their horn incessantly to get your attention, whether you want a taxi or not.

Otherwise, I didn't really feel unsafe, only uncomfortable. To minimise harassment, find other solo travellers to go out with when you get there.



## Western Europe

Western Europe is a great place for a solo adventure. People are generally friendly and helpful, and I rarely felt intimidated. There are plenty of other solo travellers to meet up with, and getting around on your own, even if you don't speak the language, is very simple. Out of all the European countries I travelled to, I found France to be the easiest to navigate alone. The local people are very helpful, despite their bad reputation! I never experienced any harassment from men in most of Europe except Italy and Spain, where they tended to be a bit more persistent. In these cases, try to be polite yet firm and tell them straight out if you're not interested.

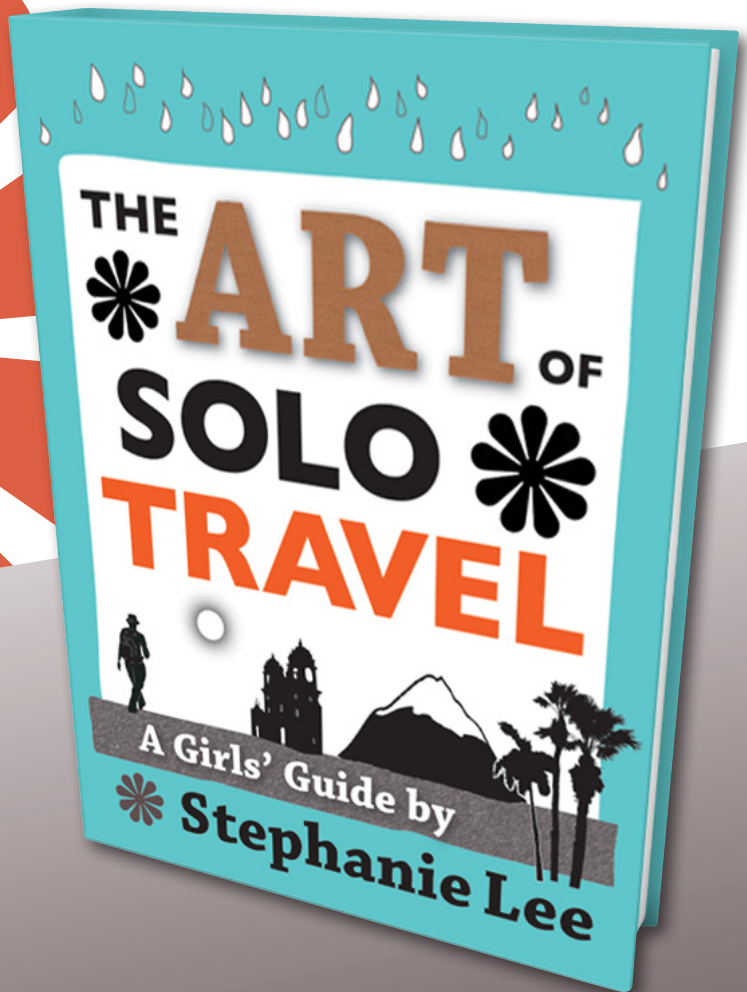


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*A Girls Guide, by Stephanie Lee*

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