

The kindness of strangers.....

Travelling alone may sound daunting but in truth, it's a great way to meet people and an instigator to accept offers that you may under ordinary circumstances, think twice about.

It seems that when you decide to explore unknown territory, you instinctively open up to new and unusual experiences and I learnt that going it alone didn't mean being lonely.

Some of my most memorable experiences were totally unexpected acts of kindness from strangers that would have had the folks at home thinking I'd lost any common sense I ever had.

The funny thing is, when you're travelling, the places you visit and everyone you meet becomes more interesting. As do you to them. You also become more attuned to your instincts about people and places and learn to trust your own judgement.

Perhaps it's easier to approach or to offer hospitality to 1 person than it is to several, perhaps a solo person is more likely to start a conversation with others to avoid loneliness or, perhaps it's a combination of both. Whatever the reason, it worked for me.

I found myself jumping in a car with a young girl I'd asked directions of. Part way through her explanation she told me "you don't look like an axe murderer, why don't I just take you there." Not only did I think that was funny, I couldn't believe she'd be willing to go out of her way to take a stranger to their destination. I decided she didn't look like an axe murderer either and enjoyed a ride that saved me a long walk, an unexpected tour with a cheerful, chatty guide and some great tips for other local

Result: Runner up

places to visit. Now I'm not sure why, but I wouldn't think of jumping into a stranger's car at home.

Another thing I wouldn't do at home; in a busy restaurant I offered to share my table with another single client to avoid waiting while couples were being given preference. I couldn't have predicted I'd spend time with someone who was funny, great company and an ex tour guide.

After discussing what I'd seen, what I'd missed and that I was leaving town the next day, my companion generously offered to give me the night tour including local spots I hadn't even heard of and driving me an additional 113kms (70miles) round trip to see a famous gravesite. I'd also never go to a cemetery at 11pm with a stranger at



home but now have photos to prove I did somewhere!

Something I've often done at home is, find myself in conversations with strangers. Not only did I continue that habit but I often wound up spending time with those people and they constantly surprised me with their generosity.

Often when people found I was travelling, they'd ask me to join them for dinner and then pay for the meal. Others bought drinks and

many were generous with their time and showed me around.

Some people I met at hostels offered to drive me to my next location which led to more incidences of me getting into cars with strangers. I still haven't told my family all of my 'adventures' for fear they'll lock me up and throw away the key. Those

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people not only saved me a fare but wouldn't accept petrol money saying they'd rather I got to see more of their country.

Other people I met at hostels invited me to visit them at home and meant it. I enjoyed many stays with new friends and was overwhelmed by the VIP treatment they gave me. From complete strangers I now have great friends who I'd love to show the same hospitality to.

I even had the great luck to briefly meet someone who then went to great lengths to find and return something I'd lost at the place we met. The item was of great sentimental value and I'm still amazed and thankful for that person's exceptional kindness.

My experiences of being alone in foreign countries where I didn't always speak the language have resulted in fantastic memories, wonderful friends and a constant desire to keep travelling but the most surprising thing was finding the world is not as harsh as we perceive it to be.

My faith in the kindness and generosity of people has been restored and I now hope I can hold onto that at home and show it to others so yes, you will still find me talking to strangers.

Photo: Jimi Hendrix grave, Seattle USA