

When I sold my home, quit my job and set off to become an International Woman of Mystery I was a little scared of the unknown but I figured if so many other people could do it, so could I. Besides, at 44 I figured I'd not only lived enough to cope with whatever came along, I'd earned a fantastic adventure.

When people started commenting on how brave I was or asked "won't you be scared travelling alone?" I realised I'd been so excited about all the possibilities ahead of me that I hadn't given a thought to the possibility of anything scary happening.

I decided to contact everyone I knew that had travelled alone, even if only for a week or two and ask for tips. Of course all my traveller friends were excited for me, jealous it wasn't them and very happy to help. However, no-one really grasped what info I was chasing and I ended up with some great practical tips but nothing to ease the scariness of travelling alone. Here are the Top Ten practical tips I found most useful:

1. Make sure you have thongs (flip-flops) to wear in all communal showers and a bag you can hang on a hook to keep your clothes dry – not all hostel showers have shelves
2. An eye mask, ear plugs and travel pillow are lifesavers for all journeys and many hostels
3. Window seats are best for sleeping on all types of transport
4. Get a peg-less clothes line – these are fantastic for clothes you don't want to put in a dryer and also for creating a curtain rail around your hostel bed
5. Carry your own light-weight travel towel, they dry quickly and double up as a curtain for your bed
6. Carry a sleeping bag liner – if the sheets are aren't as clean as you'd like, you'll still be able to crawl into bed. A sarong makes a great pillow case too.
7. Make sure you have a spare padlock for hostel lockers so you won't have to sleep with your valuables under your pillow
8. Don't pack in plastic bags – unless it's stuff you won't need at night, the noise is so annoying when everyone's sleeping
9. Carry a head torch and leave it under your pillow so when you get home it's easy to find without waking others
10. Carry waterless hand wash - as well as washing your hands, use it to clean toilet seats or as back up shower gel

Armed with all this knowledge and additional luggage, I set off.

I spent eighteen months following my dream, a loosely planned round world itinerary and becoming a self proclaimed International Woman of Mystery along the way.

The things I learned will stay with me always and have changed my outlook on so many things. These are the Top Ten things I would share with any females planning to travel alone.

1. Become an actress - sign language & acting skills are a must for communicating in a foreign language you don't speak. A little language (phrase book) so you can work out signage and ask for the basics helps but don't be afraid to add your acting skills when in doubt
2. As long as your accommodation is as clean as any eighteen year old boy would keep it, it's probably ok. I soon realised my standards were a little high so I judged by my adult son's housekeeping style
3. It's ok to talk to strangers, – forget your parents' rules and strike up conversations with strangers, sometimes in spite of 1st impressions. Asking the locals is the best source of information and surprises. Some of my best experiences of hospitality and new friendships sprang from asking a stranger a question or commenting on their town
4. Be flexible – don't worry if plans change, flights are delayed or other seeming obstacles occur. You'll get to your destination eventually and getting upset changes nothing but your stress level so carry a book and an Ipod and enjoy the downtime
5. Make contact within a week of exchanging contact details – just like workplace networking, making contact shortly after the exchange means you're serious about staying in touch and resulted in some fantastic opportunities for home-stays & outings that I never would have had if I hadn't followed up on those contacts
6. Accept hospitality graciously – initially I felt I should pay my way and not burden people. After some wise words from one host I understood that if they offer, people are genuinely happy providing accommodation or meals and are pleasantly surprised by exchanges of housework or other assistance (use your skills, fix pc's, a pedicure etc) as thanks
7. Be sensible not scared – in places reputed to be risky visit during the daylight hours rather than after dark and look as if you know what you're doing/where you're going, even if you're sightseeing (you know this is working when people start asking you for directions).
8. Stay in touch with people at home - stick to the habit of emailing, texting or calling weekly to at least 1 regular contact & let them know if for some reason you'll be out of touch. That way they know you're safe and you'll know someone will notice if you don't get in touch
9. Be spontaneous – people you meet may offer invitations that conflict with your plans. If your plans are flexible accept the invitation as you never know what other great opportunities will result from doing something with new people. If nothing else you'll have a good time and still be able to enjoy your original plan another day
10. Don't panic. As long as you have a credit card or some cash and phone contact there's not many situations that can't be fixed. Remember you're strong and capable, take control and most of all ENJOY

By the way, I'm back in Australia now but working to save money and travel again.....I now have friends all over the world to catch up with.