

The WOW life

# 16 Tips for solo travelers

Don't let safety worries put you off traveling alone. With hundreds of solo trips under my belt, I'd like to share my hard-won travel advice for lone travelers.

by Cindy-Lou Dale

**D**espite the horror stories that make the headlines, bear in mind you're usually at no more risk while traveling than you are at home. However, we can feel more vulnerable when we travel, and sometimes unwittingly put ourselves in dodgy situations through lack of local knowledge. So, here are a few common-sense rules that I follow when traveling solo that should help keep you safe on your adventures, too.

## 1. RESEARCH YOUR DESTINATION

Be as prepared as possible—this doesn't mean planning out every detail of your trip, but instead being financially secure, having things like travel insurance and visas sorted, and of course, reading up on customs. Understand your destination when it comes to planning what to do if something goes wrong.

## 2. NETWORK

Network and find travel buddies. Put up a Facebook post to see if your friends know anyone in new places you're traveling to. Even if your friends aren't the type to travel, you might be surprised by who knows whom and where. Forums are also a great way to meet other travelers—check out Nomadic Matt's Forum, and the Thorn Tree Forum by Lonely Planet. There are often regional Facebook groups, like Chiang Mai Digital Nomads and Backpacking Africa, for example. There are new apps as well, like Wandermate and Tourlina, that are designed to connect solo travelers.

## 3. TRAVEL DURING THE DAY WHENEVER POSSIBLE

It is a fact that more incidents happen at night so if you're going to embark on long journeys, try and travel during the day. To avoid unwanted scenarios be sure to pre-arrange your airport transfer if arriving at night.

## 4. DON'T HIRE A TAXI OFF THE STREET

Make the most of reliable local sources such as hotels and restaurants who'll book legitimate and trustworthy public transport.

## 5. DOOR SECURITY

One of my best tips for solo travelers is to carry a little plastic doorstop. It takes up no space and is great to have to shove under flimsy hotel room doors at night.

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Store the phone number and address of your hotel on your mobile phone. Also, have it written down in the local language, in case you get lost.

Drink in moderation and always be aware of your surroundings. Male or female, getting plastered while traveling alone is never a good idea and increases the likelihood of running into trouble.







## 6. DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Over the years, one of the best lessons I learned traveling alone is how to blend in, and that means dressing like a local when necessary. Sometimes this may mean covering your hair or wearing long sleeves, which is why you need to research your destination beforehand, checking out what the local customs are regarding modesty and the meaning of gestures. Also, I always wear a wedding band.

## 7. BE CAUTIOUS WITH YOUR POSSESSIONS

Most people travel with a camera, a smartphone and a tablet or laptop. Try and avoid flashing these around and only take them out of your pack when necessary. It is also smart to keep these possessions within reach, along with key documents such as your passport, visa and wallet.

## 8. LOOK LIKE YOU KNOW YOUR WAY AROUND

Don't look too touristy—use a local carrier bag and avoid taking out maps or guidebooks on the street. Instead, find a safe place to step aside and find your bearings before moving off again.

## 9. HAVE CONFIDENCE

Standing around with a paper map and looking confused can often attract the wrong kind of attention. Acting with confidence even when you are in an unfamiliar location will go far. If you feel uncomfortable, use your best judgment and seek help.

## 10. LEARN A FEW KEY PHRASES

Practice commonly-spoken words and phrases in the local language. Not only will it make you feel more familiar with your surroundings, but it will help you to engage with people in the area, who will admire you for it.

## 11. DON'T BE AFRAID TO CALL FOR HELP

Now you know some of the local language; don't be afraid to use it and make people aware if you are in trouble. Often, bystanders will step in if they know you're in trouble.

## 12. ALWAYS LET PEOPLE KNOW WHERE YOU'RE HEADING

Whether you check in on social media or send a simple message to family or friends back home, letting people know where and when you will be traveling is a very good safety net.

## 13. FIND OUT WHICH PLACES YOU SHOULD AVOID

Store the phone number and address of your hotel on your mobile phone. Also, have it written down in the local language, in case you get lost.

## 14. MAKE CONTACTS IN THE DESTINATION YOU ARE VISITING

Whether it's friends of friends, long-distant relatives or a travel community, make use of people that you know in the places you are visiting.

## 15. GET DOWN WITH THE LOCALS

Talking to locals is one of the safest things you can do because they are the ones that know about the area and can tell you where to visit and what to stay away from. Bonus: I always get really good info about where to eat or where to go next when talking to a local person.

## 16. BE SMART

Drink in moderation and always be aware of your surroundings. Male or female, getting plastered while traveling alone is never a good idea and increases the likelihood of running into trouble.

Solo travel isn't lonely, and it's not as daunting as you might think. It gives you time to plan and think and very soon you'll find yourself surrounded by other solo travelers who all initially had the same misconceptions. It's all about taking that first step and embracing the adventure.

