

GLAD YOU'RE NOT HERE

A solo traveler's manifesto.





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In memory of Ron
and your love of travel.



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RESULTS MAY VARY

(A disclaimer.)

Throughout this eBook and on Solo Traveler, the blog, recommendations are made as to how to make solo travel safe and fun. There are also numerous benefits proposed that you'll enjoy by traveling solo. Naturally, results will vary. Every person and every travel situation is different. The content of this eBook and Solo Traveler are meant as suggestions only. Your safety, satisfaction and fun traveling solo are your responsibility alone and not that of Solo Traveler, its publisher, editor and/or writers.

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NO, IT'S NOT WEIRD.

The world is interesting. What comes naturally – what's a no-brainer – for one person is a struggle for another. For me, solo travel came naturally. In my 20s it was for one reason, in my 50s for another. But, whatever the reason, always, in all ways, it was a great, growing, gratifying experience.

Travel + Alone ≠Weird

It seems that some people come to my blog on solo travel out of angst. They search phrases like, “is it weird to travel alone”. What a sad query. Either they think there's something wrong with them for having this desire or others are suggesting so. I'm not sure which is worse. But I am sure that the pressures to meet the expectations of friends and family by traveling with them can be overwhelming and that it has to stop. It's time to expand our understanding of solo travel as not only a legitimate choice but a wise one.

Travel + Alone = too much for a simple equation

Solo travel has an impact on the person traveling, those who love them, those who don't, their community, country, the world, the universe... Well you get it, solo travel is important.

It's not that solo travelers don't like people. It's not that we don't send the “wish you were here” postcards. It's just that traveling solo offers a truly unique and valuable experience. This book makes the case for solo travel.



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TOP SEVEN REASONS TO TRAVEL SOLO

There are certain aspects of solo travel that everyone enjoys - regardless of age. And I'm not the only one who thinks so. Before starting Solo Traveler, I did a survey and received input from over 70 people on their thoughts about solo travel. Here are their top seven reasons to travel solo:

- Independence. No need to compromise. As a solo traveler, you can do what interests you and you're not dragged to places don't.
- Because you're not talking with a travel companion, you are more likely to talk with locals and learn how they live.
- You are less likely to be treated like a normal tourist. Going solo raises curiosity, respect, concern, interest... from locals. They tend to go out of their way to enhance your experience in their home town.
- You can easily have periods of quiet time for reading, painting, thinking...
- You stretch yourself, develop new skills and often learn more because it's all up to you to navigate culture and logistics.
- A solo trip is more about the destination, culture, history... than your companion.
- From all this, you discover new self-confidence.

Anyone of us can enjoy these benefits. But, depending on what stage of life you're at, the pleasures and benefits of solo travel run much deeper. As I alluded to above, what one gains in their 20s is quite different than in their 50s. Here's how.



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DISCOVER YOURSELF – THE GAP YEAR

Whether it's a traditional gap year between high school and university, or simply time off to explore the world before being sucked into the world of work, it's a fabulous idea to travel as a young adult. It's even better to do so – at least part of your journey – alone.

A gap year is not a year off learning. It is one of intense learning. More likely to be cash poor and time rich, young adults tend to take it slow and really engage with the community they're visiting. As solo adventurers, young adults:

- Discover themselves as they discover the world – without the expectations of family and friends that have defined them over the years.
- Find that they are capable of much more than they realized simply because they had never been given the opportunities before.
- Identify what really interests them without the influence of others.
- Learn self-reliance as they book hostels, manage money, endure a tummy ache... alone.
- Develop skills in decision-making, relationship building, communication, organization...
- Gain confidence as they navigate new cities, situations and circumstances themselves.
- Have time to look, analyse, reflect and come to their own opinions about issues.
- Discover that they actually like their own company.
- Gain maturity.

Oh the Places You'll Go!

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.
You're on your own.
And you know what you know.
And YOU are the one who'll
decide where to go.

*Dr. Seuss speaking at a
graduation ceremony.*



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DEFINE YOURSELF – 20S AND 30S

Unless you've had a driving ambition to be a doctor, firefighter, architect... you probably went through school and/or university in a general arts, science or management program. You are a generalist. Which, by my measure, is fabulous. But what many generalists struggle with is establishing themselves – finding their niche in society. A niche that is not only fulfilling personally but also financially.

Traveling solo is an exceptional opportunity for those at the age of establishment to:

- Explore new career opportunities without the weight of someone else's agenda. Try on a career through volunteer or contract work and see if it suits you.
- Upgrade your credentials for the next step in your career path by taking time for intensive courses, self-study programs or essential reading.
- Confirm your commitment to a relationship. If you're unsure about taking a relationship to the next level, some time away can help you understand who you are, who they are and whether you're a great fit.
- Demonstrate how capable you are to yourself and others. This can help your parents withdraw from parenting you.
- Get grounded in who you are. Whether it's a last hurrah trip before kids or simply time to experience and reflect, traveling alone helps you find you.

All of the above can be achieved on short as well as long trips.



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REDEFINE YOURSELF – 40S AND 50S

Being 52, I think I'm particularly qualified to address the subject of redefining yourself through solo travel. It doesn't matter whether you're single or in a relationship, solo travel is an enriching experience. At midlife, it can be even more so.

Midlife is a time for change. Jobs and relationships may have lost their lustre. Empty nest syndrome leaves people with, well, an emptiness. Unanticipated changes can throw you for a loop. Traveling solo helps one through these situations like no other form of travel. By traveling alone you:

- Discover who you are when you're not responsible for a spouse or children.
- Return to your job or relationship with new ideas, experiences and dreams to share.
- Build confidence after a divorce or loss.
- Demonstrate your youthfulness to co-workers; it's difficult to see an adventurer as old.
- Reduce stress, a major contributor to health problems, by relaxing and traveling on your own schedule.
- Save money. It's much easier to book hostels, hospitality stays, great deals... when you travel alone.
- Inject challenge into your life that may otherwise be on autopilot.

Solo travel is truly rejuvenating at midlife.



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POSITIVE AGEING - SENIORS

The title of this section is a tribute to a solo traveler for whom I have a great respect. Claudia is 68 and continues to travel on her own. She contributes to Solo Traveler and connects on Twitter where her name is, of course, @positiveageing .

Traveling solo as a senior has a unique quality. There are health and safety considerations that are more obvious at this stage. Seniors can be more vulnerable. But it is also a time when traveling alone may be the only option or, with a “now or never” attitude, a time for adventure. Regardless of the reasons, there are safe ways to travel solo as a senior and:

- Do what you couldn't afford or didn't have time to do in the past.
- Fulfill lifelong dreams.
- Revert to your personality rather than your role in family or community.
- Feel really useful. Volunteer programs need the lifetime of skills you've developed.
- Eat dessert first – or do anything else you want to do that may have been judged in the past.
- Settle in and enjoy communities for long periods You now have the time and, if you are wealthy relative to the local economy, this can be quite possible.

Solo travel doesn't have to mean that you leave your province, state or country. Travel solo close to home if that is what's right for you.



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SOLO TRAVEL AND COMMUNITY

When you travel solo, you're focused on all that is new in the moment, not your companion. Because of this, people are more inclined to talk to you. They feel they have something to offer and less like they will be interrupting.

And you are more inclined to talk to others. You need to reach out because you are, after all, a social being.

My point is that, when you travel solo, you experience the world more intimately than when you travel with a companion. The benefits for communities everywhere are great. Every interaction increases our understanding of others. As a result:

- Stereotypes break down.
- Our common humanity is shared.
- We discover how small our differences really are.
- Our understanding of other cultures deepens.
- Our appreciation of the challenges faced in other countries increases.

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." —*Mark Twain, 1857*

When we return home, we bring this new understanding and spread it to family and friends thereby increasing harmony in our home community.



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SOLO TRAVEL AND GLOBAL SOCIETY

“I believe there is a moral sense and a global ethic that commands attention from people of every religion and every faith, and people of no faith.” *Britain’s Prime Minister, Gordon Brown*

Based on this premise, Mr. Brown proposed global institutions for the creation of a global society in a [TED talk](#) in July 2009. Essentially, he argued that our problems today are not local but global and it’s only by creating a global society founded in our common morality that we can overcome them.

Mr. Brown proposes that the Internet will help create this global society. Fast, democratized communications is essential. But, naturally, the Internet is not the only source of change. I propose that travel – and particularly solo travel – will contribute as well.

As described in the previous chapter, when we travel solo we tend to enter cultures more deeply than when we have companions to lean on. When we are dependent on the community at hand we learn of its strengths, weaknesses, differences and similarities. We gain a better understanding of why people are the way they are. The Internet is virtual. It provides a view from the outside. Travel – and particularly solo travel – takes us inside the individual parts of this potential global society.



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SOLO TRAVEL FOR EVERY ONE AND EVERYONE

My argument in this manifesto, is that solo travel is good for individuals and good for society.

Like all travel, it's fun and rewarding. But it goes deeper. There are benefits, like the freedom to follow your own schedule, that everyone enjoys. There are also benefits specific to every stage of life. So, solo travel is good for every one.

But it is also good for everyone. Solo travel increases an understanding between different cultures in a way that most other forms of travel doesn't making it good for communities, cities and states.

Now, after writing for eight pages about the merits of solo travel, I must say that traveling with a companion is a fine way to go. It has its benefits. But that was not my purpose here. My objective was to legitimize solo travel. To make it better understood. To stop the Google searches on whether it is weird to travel alone. And to encourage people to take to the road solo.

I hope that, as you've been reading, you've also been planning your next solo adventure.



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WAS THIS A WORTHWHILE READ?

If you enjoyed this eBook, why not link to it on your blog so that your readers can enjoy it as well. Or forward it to friends who may be interested. Or family who don't yet get why you go solo? Maybe it will help.

Most importantly, go forth and travel.

And, as you do, or even as you think about travel, go to the Solo Traveler blog and talk about it. Add your comments to the discussion. Email with suggestions for topics you'd like written about. Fancy yourself a writer? Then send a proposal or piece from your journal and you just might get published. (Sorry, this is a free ebook. Imagine how little cash there is to pay writers.) Bottom line, engage in travel, engage with the world.



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