

5 ways travelling solo can liberate you to self-growth

From a woman who has been there and done that, discover how going your own way can be transformative

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Are you yearning to travel to far-flung places, but others have different priorities? When my kids left home, I turned a negative situation on its head and flipped on the happy switch as I recalibrated into a new version of myself.

The years fly by fast, so I followed my own mantra to 'embrace life'. Solo travel enabled me to be a 'digital nomad' and a 'FOGY' ('fun older gap yearer'). Women traveling alone is no longer perceived as a lonely pursuit, it is an act of self-love.

I found new life-long friends and memories. I saw the Deep South in Elvis's footsteps, visited friends in Oz, and Asian temples at dusk as dragonflies circled overhead. It was life-changing. Here are five more ways solo travel can lead to self-growth to inspire you to pick up your passport:

1. You will see how brave you truly are

Get your first boost from arriving at your destination single-handedly. Your dopamine will uplift you and, without

distractions, you can read, sleep, or party when and how you want. From seeing your bravery in action, you will grow as a person. Your sense of achievement will uplift your wellbeing and give you a new sense of freedom. Live the life you want, and be your own best friend.

2. Learn to be at one with yourself

Alone, the joys are heightened. With no one to take the focus, the experience becomes mindful. Food tastes better, views are more tranquil, and sleep is more indulgent. Be selfish in a good way!

When stripped of others 'beholden' demands, you go with the flow, and the energy and flexibility of how the mood takes you. There is a huge difference between being lonely and being alone. I find exploring new places stimulating and less lonely than being in your own home. Surprise yourself and enjoy the journey.

3. Reap the rewards of company, when you want it

Mix up your itinerary or join tours to meet like-minded souls. Join

groups in places that make you feel slightly less comfortable. Liberate yourself to explore independently where you feel more within your comfort zone.

Discover experiences through apps or magazines. I did cooking classes in Rome and New Orleans. There are even walking tours and rooftop cocktail groups for drinks and dinners. To add to the connection, I published daily blogs on social media as I trailed around.

4. Feel empowered by personal safety

Your peace of mind is important when you travel solo, and safety is imperative. But it can lead to gaining a new sense of being able to cope on your own – now you can survive anything, the world is your oyster!

Keep your wits about you avoiding quiet places late at night – I asked a group of girls if I could walk with them in Nashville when my Uber didn't show. Judge whether valuables are safer on you or left in your accommodation – I took spare everything, including travel

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cards (which I needed when the bank machine swallowed mine in Vietnam) and even a packed a spare phone.

Remember to be as safe as you want to be, and always ask for help if concerned. I was searched for guns in Memphis on Halloween, and chased by a rabid monkey in Cambodia.

When you look back, you will be proud of how you survived the experiences. Even the setbacks will fill you with pride.

5. Discover how to accept your emotions as part of your journey

On days I felt alone, I sat and compiled playlists. Music or

radio is a huge comfort when you need company. I took myself for a walk to see beautiful views in Dubrovnik, tried sumptuous food in Italy, visited art and vineyards, and found huge moments of joy. Treating yourself to what makes you happy can help with those low moods.

But also try to have fewer expectations around constant happiness. I discovered how to be truly present and enjoy the little things there in the moment. Not every day or minute will be perfect – it wouldn't be at home either, but the highs will be higher! Enjoy the journey to self-growth for your mental health and wellbeing, and the evolved new version of yourself. **■**