THE SOLO TRAVEL HANDBOOK

Practical tips and inspiration for a safe, fun and fearless trip
The only travel companion you really need!

Our definitive guide for #goingsolo, packed with inspiration and advice from our travel experts.

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**WHY GO SOLO?**

Powder-white sand beaches. Lush, tropical rainforests. Vibrant, ancient cultures. Local markets that almost literally pop with colour. Not a day goes by where you don’t secretly wish you were living your Instagram feed, but you can’t convince anyone to take a trip with you. So, why don’t you go by yourself?

Sure, the idea of travelling alone might sound daunting to a first-timer. Too much, even. But with a little bit of confidence and a generous dose of preparation, you’ll find that travelling solo won’t just be fun, but more rewarding than you ever imagined.

**THE PRACTICAL PERKS**

Solo travel is the ultimate indulgence, because it’s all about you. When you’re in charge of your own schedule, you can go where you want and do what you want, when you want and how you want. You’re free to meet new people – which tends to be easier when you’re travelling solo – and really soak up the destination without any distractions. You can travel as fast as you want, or take as much downtime as you like, without having to justify your choices to anyone but yourself. Enjoy it!

**THE PERSONAL JOURNEY**

Solo travel offers the ultimate opportunity for self-reflection and development. At home, our friends, families, employers and colleagues all play roles in influencing the way we live our lives. Travelling alone, you can escape these influences and make your own decisions. Without a travel partner to delegate some of those decisions to, your problem-solving ability increases, making you a more independent, more fearless solo traveller in the process. Expect to get to know yourself better, discovering strengths you didn’t know you had, as well as identifying weaknesses you may wish to work on. Embrace it.

**CHALLENGING THE SINGLE STIGMA**

There must be something wrong with you if you travel alone, said no one ever. Yet, somehow, a stigma still persists. Fortunately, it’s changing. A raft of recent studies have shown solo travel is on the increase and, as more people begin to embrace it, the image of solo travel is being redefined as a luxury rather than some sort of back-up plan. If you’re living a fabulously independent life at home, there’s no reason why you can’t have a similarly fantastic experience on the road. Own it.

So, what are you waiting for? Turn the page, get inspired and get ready to realise your travel dreams – all by yourself.
10 Travel Hacks Every Solo Traveller Should Know

You’re bound to make mistakes on your first solo trip, but you can learn from previous travellers. Monica Stott, founder of thetravelhack.com, has learned a fair bit. Here she shares her top ten hacks.

1. Order Special Meals on Planes

Pre-order a special meal, such as a vegetarian or vegan meal, on flights. Special meals are served first so you’ll get your food faster, allowing you to nod off sooner than your neighbours. Special meals are usually vegetarian or vegan, on flights. Pre-order a special meal, such as a vegetarian or vegan meal, on flights. The vegan meals are usually healthier, light and delicious, which helps you to avoid that groggy, bloated, post-flight feeling that tends to be a by-product of indulging in a rich plane meal.

2. Dress Up for Airport Check-In

Did you know that solo travellers are more likely to get upgraded on flights? You’re also more likely to be upgraded if you look the part, so wear the smartest clothes you’re travelling with to the airport (you can always pack a more comfortable set of clothes in your hand luggage to change into after you check in). It’s also worth asking at check-in if any upgrade opportunities are available. While it is more difficult to score upgrades these days unless you’re a frequent flyer, if you don’t ask, you don’t get!

3. Use Airport Lounges

Airport lounges aren’t just for first-class passengers; you can often buy yourself into them for a bargain. In the UK, airport lounge passes start from around £25 and include perks such as unlimited snacks and alcohol, wi-fi, magazines, and a quiet and comfortable space to relax before your flight. Using lounges during long layovers means you’ll have access to a quiet and comfortable space as well as a place to relax before your flight. Using lounges during long layovers means you’ll have access to a quiet and comfortable space as well as a place to relax before your flight.

4. Pack a Portable Charger

You’ll undoubtedly use your phone a lot while you travel, so pack a portable charger. Make sure to have a way to contact someone in an emergency, and use your phone’s GPS for directions. Portable chargers are cheap and lightweight and you’ll thank yourself when you’re trying to call a taxi at 3am with only 2% battery remaining!

5. Disguise Your Gadgets

Flashy new devices with crisp, clean cases attract thieves, which is the last thing you want when you’re travelling solo. Avoid unwanted attention by making sure your expensive gadgets look less pricey than they really are – cover your camera in stickers, and buy cheap cases for your smartphone and your tablet and scuff them up.

6. Mark Your Baggage as Fragile

Slap a ‘fragile’ label on your luggage to prevent it from being handled roughly in transit. Adding this label will typically also see your luggage delivered to the baggage carousel - it’s often the case that special luggage and equipment is the last to be placed in the aircraft’s hold, which means it will be the first to be taken out again.

7. Always Carry a Business Card from Your Hotel

As soon as you arrive at your hotel or hostel, grab a business card from the reception desk with the hotel’s address and phone number. If you get lost, you can jump in a taxi and give the card to your driver to ensure you get back to your hotel safely. If a business card isn’t available, ask a member of reception staff if they could write down the address in the local language for you. Make sure to then keep the information somewhere handy when you head out to explore.

8. Travel With an Unlocked Mobile (Cell) Phone

If you have a contract phone, ensure it is unlocked before you travel. This means you’ll be able to use any SIM card from any mobile network across the world. Pick up a local SIM once you arrive and you’ll avoid roaming fees and enjoy cheaper calls and texts – you can find SIM cards at the airport and convenience stores in touristy areas.

9. Keep Your Travel Essentials in Your Suitcase at Home

Adopt this travel hack if you’re a frequent traveller and don’t want to forget those all-important essentials. When you return from a trip, leave key items in your suitcase. Items such as your passport, plug adaptors, miniature toiletries and insurance documents can stay in your case because you won’t need them at home, and leaving them in your case means you’ll never forget to pack them.

10. Use Free Walking Tours to Help You Eage into a New City

Most cities have free walking tours, and these tend to attract other solo travellers. Solos usually stick together once the tour is over and go for drinks or dinner together, so it’s a great opportunity to meet likeminded travellers while simultaneously avoiding the anxiety of dining alone on your first night in town.
With mountains to climb, rivers to raft, ancient ruins to uncover and jungles to explore, South America is the ultimate adventure destination. Don’t let its size daunt you – whether you’re looking to do a big trip or a short haul, South America is more conducive to solo travel than you may think.

Logistically, it makes sense for longer-term travellers to follow the Gringo Trail, the classic route that encompasses the continent’s most popular destinations from north to south (and vice versa). This lends to plenty of opportunities to buddy up with other travellers heading in the same direction. At the very least, you’re bound to bump into the same people more than once along the way. South America has one of the world’s best hostel networks, many of which can organise tours and transport for you, which makes it easy for solos to ease into the destination when they first arrive. While Spanish is the national language in all but three countries (Guyana, French Guiana and Suriname), English is more widely spoken these days, and locals are overwhelmingly friendly.

Key considerations for solo travellers

Language: A basic understanding of Spanish will give solo travellers a lot more confidence. Consider signing up for a few weeks of Spanish tuition in your first destination, which is a great way to get acclimatised.

TOP TIP
Consider taking preventative medication to thwart altitude sickness, which is a particular risk in Bolivia (especially if you fly into La Paz, which sits above 4000m).
Safety: Travel in South America involves a degree of risk taking. Clue yourself up on potentially dangerous regions and activities to help you make more informed travel decisions.

Budget: Travelling in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay can be as expensive as travelling in Western Europe. Travel in Colombia and Peru is a little cheaper, while your savings will stretch further in Bolivia.

Health: A yellow fever vaccination is required for travel to South America. Be vigilant in protecting yourself against mosquito-borne diseases.

LEFT Spot sleepy Galápagos sea lions at Puerto Ayora and marine iguanas in groups relaxing on the islands’ beaches.

ABOVE The tropical hues of Cartagena in Colombia are a photographer’s dream.

GALAPAGOS ON A BUDGET

Thought cruising Ecuador’s Galápagos Islands was out of reach for solo travellers? Think again. Many cruise companies offer the opportunity to share a berth with another solo traveller – and sometimes solos score the whole room to themselves if nobody else books the other bunk. If you have time to spare, head straight to the capital Quito to score a last-minute deal – travellers are rarely left waiting more than a few days to secure a berth for as much as 50% off (typically a saving of more than US$1000). Choose a standard boat that sleeps around 16 passengers, as they create an intimate environment perfect for getting to know your shipmates.

Taking a 4WD tour from San Pedro de Atacama in Chile to Uyuni in Bolivia, traversing desert moonscapes and taking silly selfies at the salt flats. Tours rarely leave until vehicles are full so bank on doing this tour with others.

Watching the sunrise over Machu Picchu in Peru, whether you hiked or took the train from Cusco.

Mountain biking down Bolivia’s infamous Death Road and debriefing with your fellow riders over a few beers afterwards.

Wandering the cobbled streets of Cartagena, Colombia, photographing the city’s pastel-hued beauty.

★ If you’re on a budget but prefer having your own room, try El Viajero, a ‘poshtel’ in the beautiful Colombian coastal city of Cartagena. This super-central, air-conditioned retreat is the only hostel in town with breakfast included, and offers a great roster of nightly activities.

(elsiajerohostels.com)

★ With five large hostels across three countries, Loki (named after the trickster Norse god) is a sure bet for solo travellers keen to meet new people (and party). Loki Cusco in Peru is housed in a beautiful 16th century building, while Loki La Paz in Bolivia boasts a glass-walled sky bar.

(lokihostel.com)
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