

MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

FOR WOMEN IN TRAVEL



An Initiative to Make Travel More Inclusive



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WHY WE CREATED THIS EBOOK FOR WOMEN WHO TRAVEL

A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



Who run the world? GIRLS—No, WOMEN.

Despite the still present social and economic barriers women still face, we're still participating in meaningful international experiences at higher rates than men. From Nellie Bly and Bessie Coleman, to Laura Dekker and Cassie DePecol, women have been proving time and time again that we have the spirit, grit, and empathy to travel the world—and to do it darn well.

As part of GoAbroad's mission to support women who travel and provide the best and most comprehensive resources for meaningful travelers, our writers share their words of wisdom—from the inspiring women who travel and from men who travel with women.

With more and more women packing their bags and globetrotting, this Ebook was created to help ensure that women continue to be inspired to travel and have access to the resources they need to participate in international programs safely, happily, and successfully. Everyone deserves the opportunity to travel meaningfully, and GoAbroad is dedicated to providing every student with the tools, knowledge, and confidence they need to do so.

Keep on, keepin' on, ladies!

This is an open book (pun intended). It will continue to grow as we share more stories and add more voices.

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Rebecca Murphy's desire to experience the world began as a young child during her first viewing of *The Sound of Music*. Four languages, 17 countries, and two misadventures to Maria's Meadow later, Rebecca now fills her time writing about and marketing amazing places all over the world. Her travel experiences include studying abroad in Austria and Argentina, as well as backpacking Europe.



Julia Zaremba is an avid traveler, lifelong artist, theater geek, interior designer, future author, and occasional teacher. Originally from Germany, she was raised and started her university studies in Texas, before moving to Italy for her first formal teaching experience. Since then, she has traveled throughout Europe and the Americas, constantly on the look-out for the next adventure.



Jason Schroeder is a 2016 graduate of Ball State University, where he majored Digital Video Production. Though he originally wanted a Hollywood career, his two semesters abroad in Chile and New Zealand inspired his desired career change to multimedia marketing for travel organizations. Having already worked with companies like ISEP, Indiana Tourism, and Mr. Pictures, Jason is currently focused on writing and multimedia resume builders before he heads to South Korea to teach English in the Fall.



Jade Lansing is a freelance writer, teacher, intercultural exchange facilitator, and non-profit consultant. In the past, she managed a small Ethnographic Field School in Morocco, did research for the United Nations in Beirut, and edited a newspaper in Cairo. She has a master's degree from the American University in Cairo, which mostly qualifies her to smoke copious amounts of sheesha and rant about foreign policy at parties.



Jason Rogers is a graduate of the College of William & Mary and La Sorbonne, and has lived and worked all over the world, from China to Brazil. Based in Washington, D.C., Jason also covers the National Hockey League as a reporter and television analyst. He loves hockey, hip-hop, and creative hyperbole.



9 REASONS WOMEN SHOULD TRAVEL THE WORLD MEANINGFULLY

By the GoAbroad Writing Team

1. Learn another language.

Learning a foreign language is an amazing reason to spend time abroad. As competent as your previous foreign language professor was, necessity breeds adaptation, and there's nothing like immersing yourself in another country to learn its native tongue. The practice of diving into a foreign language is never a wasted one. It teaches you about how other cultures think about the world, and might just give you some insight into the ways your own language informs your cultural and gender identity. Not to mention the longterm economic benefits of knowing a second language. Watch those future job offers come rolling in!

2. Better understand how the world treats women.

The ways women are empowered or disempowered around the world vary, and seeing first-hand how women are treated in a new country can be an eye-opening experience. This might get you thinking about better ways in which gender and identity are approached in other countries.

Maybe the issues women face in your host country are more similar to the issues you face at home—more than you realized.

Regardless of similarities or differences, you will have the opportunity to forge strong relationships with amazing women you may have never met otherwise, and there is no such thing as having too many inspirational women in your life!

3. Make amazing friends.

Speaking of inspirational people...You'll meet soooo many amazing people while traveling, like international students, volunteers, teachers, or interns who understand the crazy joy of launching oneself into life into a strange country, as well as locals that are eager to practice their English or help you with your foreign language skills while sharing their culture and country with you. You might start off as awkward strangers, but you'll leave as family, bonded by an ephemeral intersection of time and place.

4. Find out that magic is real.

Although we all know that expectations don't always equal reality, amidst the ordinariness of daily life—grocery shopping, laundry, day-to-day work, meaningful travel will present you with moments of pure magic. Dancing until sunrise with new, international friends, watching the sun set over medieval rooftops, a moment of cross-cultural connection with a complete stranger; these moments may be small, and sometimes few and far between, but they are pure magic.

5. Go deeper than the shallow tourist perspective...

Traveling as a tourist can be great, but it is a distinctly different experience to what we call meaningful travel. The latter often allows the opportunity to break past the tourist, or even expat experience, to a level of cultural immersion more akin to actually living in the country. The level of immersion will be what you make it. There will be a thousand different decisions you make everyday while traveling that will inform how far past the surface of a country and its culture you delve.

6. ...But sometimes, just be a tourist.

On the flipside of embracing cultural immersion, meaningful travel can provide women with a great launch pad for new experiences as a part-time tourist! Although your experience abroad will let you see beyond tourism in your host country, there is nothing wrong with taking full advantage of the travel opportunities living overseas will throw at you! Take that weekend trip and selfie it up.

7. Enjoy being alone.

A lot of time is spent focusing on the connections that can define your meaningful travel experience, but one of the relationships that might see the most growth during your time abroad is the one you have with yourself. It may sound cheesy, but removing yourself from the relationships and culture that define you is a great way to better understand who you are and who you want to be.

8. Learn more about "home."

You'll learn just as much about the place you left behind as the place you venture to. Spending time in another country will give you invaluable perspective into yourself, and your home country, that would have been hard to garner had you never left. Understanding your complex connection to the concept of "home" is a huge part of figuring out your place in the world.

9. Find out that you are stronger than you think you are.

Meaningful travel is a big change. It's a huge leap that takes a huge amount of courage. Making that move overseas might be the best thing you ever do for yourself; it will be concrete proof to yourself that you are a capable, confident, independent woman who can (and will) make her mark on the world.

HAPPY TRAVELS!



SOLO TRAVEL IDEAS BECAUSE YOU SHOULD EXPLORE ON YOUR OWN

By Julia Zaremba

The few, the proud: solo travelers.

Packing a bag and heading to a foreign land alone might sound terrifying at first, but veterans know that it's the best type of drug to be hooked on. Actually, here's a secret: this rare breed of travelers is not quite so rare anymore. Searches for the best solo trips have increased by over 40% in the past couple of years, and there is no indication that the trend is going to stop.

It's hardly surprising, considering all of the benefits of solo travel: flexibility, personal growth, renewal of creativity, resume boosts, financial education, increased interaction opportunities, and improved communication (to name a few!). Somewhere between learning to appreciate getting lost and developing negotiation skills, we begin to celebrate a new kind of freedom that accompanies the comfort of our own company. And then, we just can't get enough.

So, in honour of celebrating quality time with ourselves, here are some trending solo travel ideas to inspire your next trip:

1. Volunteer with something you're interested in.

The solo trip ideas that give back are the best ideas. Do good, become part of a positive organization, and get involved with the lives of others. Whether it's orphanages or animal shelters that get your heartrate up, there is a philanthropic opportunity that aligns with your interests—in practically every country in the world (and if there isn't, establish it!)

Volunteer opportunities tend to have flexible dates (ahem, ideal for the best solo trips), and most organizations offer a contract for enough time to make fellow volunteers feel like family, volunteer mission statements a mindset, and new accommodations home.

2. Go on a meditation retreat.

For the ultimate solo retreat to disconnect, detox, and center, sign up for a meditation or yoga retreat. In South America and Asia especially, spiritual retreats are pretty common to find. Plus, they usually include breathtaking scenery (maybe that's why they teach breathing techniques?) at very affordable prices. There's a reason that people have been omm-ing to Pacha Mama and finding their zen for centuries... and with today's hectic society, this opportunity to wind down is a particularly great place to start brainstorming solo travel ideas.

3. Live like a local abroad.

While it is always recommendable to embrace meaningful travel over mere tourism, add another degree to this mission by plunging in head-first into a new culture. Take a break from the city-hopping, rent a room in a residential neighbourhood for a couple of weeks, observe the locals, learn the culture, and try to blend in. Stay away from touristic spots and fellow travelers. Even if your dream solo travel destinations are on all the "Top #" lists; seek out locals and neighbourhood events instead. Rather than monuments, observe the daily life of average people. Take notes, draw sketches, partake, and see how exciting the "mundane" back home can seem abroad!

4. Pursue your passion on-location.

Why not dance bachata in the Dominican Republic or partake in a wine harvest in Chianti? Talk about great solo vacation ideas. Whatever your passion in life is, go to its global birthplace or current hotspot for maximum learning opportunities. With years of history and native culture surrounding the activity, it's easy to experience a renewal of commitment and learn from the legends. Not to mention that it's a whole lot more fun and scenic than YouTube videos or strip mall conference rooms.

5. Intern internationally.

If you're looking for solo travel ideas that boost character and score major resume points, snatching [an internship abroad](#) is the way to go. Not only are you expanding your professional network, investing time meaningfully, gaining confidence, and automatically getting invited to holiday parties, but you are also making money (or, at least, free housing and other perks), which basically translates to more travel opportunities.

6. Use social media to meet locals (it's OK, don't worry).

One of the best advantages of traveling solo is—kinda ironically—meeting new people. And while there are countless opportunities to talk to strangers on the streets and at bars, sometimes we want to be a bit more picky with our company.

Cue: social apps, such as Couchsurfing or Meetup. There's all sorts of great filters, listed events, and security checks that makes meeting someone in real life a breeze. This is great especially when looking for locals interested in similar hobbies (Want someone to go to the theatre with? To foxtrot with? To go eat a street burger with, right now?), and these new besties come with all the perks of inside knowledge.

[KEEP READING FOR MORE SOLO TRAVEL INSPIRATION](#)

TRAVELING AS A FEMINIST IN TRADITIONALLY PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES

By Jessica Lemire

I met a gorgeous Thor-like Scandinavian in Nicaragua. He spoke in a soothing voice reciting tales which bewitched those around him. Under his spell, I was transported on an odyssey of his wanderings and adventures. Recounting immersive cultural experiences, expedition, and exploration, I was enraptured by the excursion that was his life.

Begrudgingly I began to wonder why I wasn't doing this. Why wasn't I making these connections and having these experiences? He was putting himself in situations that I, after (at the time) four months on the road could only dream of.

Being a foot taller than everyone else, of course helps but the biggest difference between his travels and mine are that he is a man navigating his travels in a patriarchal society.



Self-care while traveling as a woman

According to Univision, in Latin America, approximately one woman dies every two hours from gender-based violence. As I trudged my way through the Americas, my exchanges with men (other than in market exchange) were largely through catcalling and other forms of harassment including touching, being pestered, or the polar opposite; being ignored and not acknowledged. Then there was the casual sexism and disregard for my personal autonomy.

While each situation was different (place, time, alcohol related, multiple people, etc.) to ensure my personal safety, I decided predominantly what was best for me was to hold my tongue. This was to stop the situation from escalating.

But, as a woman, you have the right to not be harassed and therefore, if harassed whatever reaction you have is valid.

Whether that's going bat-shit crazy at a stranger for grabbing your booty, going to the police to report assault, or just ignoring a man hollering mamacita as you walk past.

While traveling I had to re-train myself in navigating sexist interactions. I asked local women what to say and when I deemed it necessary, I'd use my words to paint colorful pictures of gross indignation, frustration, and reproach.

To simplify self-care while traveling, for me, this comes in the form of:

- Understanding and abiding by cultural norms (clothing, traditions, taboos, etc.)
- Avoiding walking alone at night
- Knowing where you are, where you should be, and where you should not be
- Making sure you can trust the people around you
- Learning the language and culture

Traveling in cultures that are complicit in supporting gendered violence

Let me be clear, harassment isn't a 'locals only' thing. Harassment can come from locals and foreigners alike, and the patriarchal culture that supports it is globalized.

I've had multiple instances where I have to constantly remind male 'friends' of boundaries. And others where I tell men that I already have a boyfriend—be it true or untrue. This is detrimental as it insinuates a kind of 'male ownership' over my autonomy. But, there have been multiple instances where this sentence despite my dislike towards it has saved me.

It should also be noted that I barely received catcalls and harassment when traveling with a man. Rather, sexism came in the form of being ignored in favor of speaking to my male counterpart... even when the male doesn't speak Spanish, and I do.

“...women shouldn't have to be in the presence of, or in a relationship with a man to confirm their personal safety.”

During my two years in Latin America, one the most shocking incidents to have happened to me was being harassed by a child no older than 10 years old. He did so in front of his father who proceeded to laugh rather than reprimanding him. This behavior is taught and mimicked by children, from adults who perpetuate a culture of social and sexual gendered violence.

But, women shouldn't have to be in the presence of, or in a relationship with a man to confirm their personal safety. Rape culture shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the victim for something as trivial as being in the 'wrong' place, wearing the 'wrong' clothes, drinking 'too' much or otherwise. This legitimizes the act of violence on women. And this is wrong.

Practicing cultural sensitivity

I am constantly torn in a struggle between my fierce beliefs on equality and being sensitive to cultural difference. One of the key points in intersectionality is understanding that just because you think of something as a struggle does not necessarily mean that other women within that culture may discourse an experience as a struggle.

Despite this, there is never a form of violence (physical or otherwise) that is justified. For me, cultural sensitivity means doing your best to learn the local language as well as actively working to abide by cultural norms. It doesn't mean sacrificing your physical or emotional safety at the expense of misogynists.

Learning vs teaching while traveling

I travel to learn about other cultures and ways of life. I am a strong advocate for two-way cultural exchange. Therefore, when I travel and my opinion differs to the culture that I am a guest of, I try to learn why they are the way they are and introspect that to why I am the way I am. I believe that opening the floor for discussion is the best way to introduce alternate ideologies and cultures but also understand that your own is not inherently superior.

As a woman in a Western, developed country, like Australia, I am privy to a huge web of information and resources including the internet, institutional and non-institutional education, support groups, and networks. It is important to recognize that not everyone has the privilege to access such a wide range of information and the sociopolitical support which legitimizes a point of view, like Eurocentric female empowerment.

—

Traveling for me has opened up a whole new way of recognizing my own bias and working towards a globalized, inclusive view of the world, gender, and sociopolitical structures. Through traveling I have made my own feminism intersectional and celebratory of the diverse and colorful cultural idiosyncrasies while keeping my personal safety a priority.



11 THINGS TRAVELING TO MOROCCO ALONE AS A WOMAN TAUGHT ME

By Jade Lansing + Souad Kadi

Morocco never makes the cut for “best destinations for solo female travelers” lists, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t heaps of independent ladies roaming and thriving in the North African kingdom. From the endless desert dunes of the Sahara to the Mediterranean waves lapping at the ruins of 13th century castles, few destinations grip travelers’ imaginations so powerfully. There are undeniably challenges for women traveling in Morocco alone, so we put together these solo female travel tips to help you MoRock ‘n’ Roll safely and meaningfully.

First, a quick Q&A to qualm your inhibitions about traveling alone in Morocco

Is it safe to travel to Morocco alone?

Yes, traveling Morocco alone is safe. Well, as safe as anything is these days. Of course, traveling—anywhere, with anyone, in any gender presentation—never offers the same safety guarantees as, say, riding a Disneyland roller coaster or working in a unionized industry.

Road conditions are generally safe for travel, and violent crime is much less common in Morocco than, for example, the United States. Theft does occur, and if you cannot negotiate in one of the three local languages (Arabic, French, or Tamazight), you are likely to be overcharged when shopping in the souq (market) or taking taxis around town. The "Tourist Police" is a Moroccan security force dedicated to ensuring the safety of foreign visitors, which is who you should contact if you fall victim to a crime.

Is Morocco safe for female tourists?

Chyeah, girl. However, as in other countries, catcalling and harassment are a persistent challenge, especially for young women traveling without a male friend/partner or child(ren) #thepatriarchyiseverywhere. There is no way to dress or act that prevents this behavior, though wearing more conservative attire (i.e. long-sleeves and pants) can draw less attention.

Likewise, there is no response that satisfyingly smites catcallers and awakens them to the inappropriateness of their behavior. Be aware that any verbal or physical response may be taken as an invitation to continue the interaction. In a moment of unbridled frustration, I once screamed "Go away!" at a harasser, and he responded "Hello! You want to be friends?" without a hint of irony.

Beyond these frustrating gendered interactions, Moroccans are world-renowned for their hospitality, and—on the whole—are very eager to share their culture with visitors. As a solo traveler it is not uncommon to be invited back to someone's home for tea or a meal. When in doubt, politely decline ("La shokran," "No thank you") or suggest a meeting in a public location instead.

Will I die of loneliness traveling alone?

Not likely. Traveling alone may invoke images of a single pair of footsteps through the lonely wilderness, but that's not usually what it looks like. When you share the world with seven billion humans, you're never really alone—unless you're Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild*.

The beauty of traveling solo is that you are the only navigator of your ship. Craving some company? Strike up a conversation in a cafe, join a group travel program, or look for local meetups. Ready for some peace and quiet again? Venture off on your own to a less-trafficked region.

Morocco is a particularly social country, so solo travelers never have to look far to find company. On the flip side, expansive desert and open countryside cover the vast majority of Morocco. If you're looking for isolation, seek and ye shall find.

Things backpacking Morocco solo has taught us

Home to the world's oldest library (founded by a woman!), goats that climb trees, and North Africa's tallest mountain, among other things, Morocco is traveler's paradise. Which is why we think everybody should have the chance to explore it. Morocco makes a particularly stellar solo destination, so we've compiled these solo female travel tips to make it more accessible to adventurers of every anatomy.

All anecdotes herein are based on a true story—our own adventures smashing (really more like prodding with conviction) the patriarchy across Morocco.

1. Haters gonna hate.

Once you decide to set out on your own to anywhere in the world, you will almost invariably encounter nay-saying family and friends. We all have that distant relative who watches the news, and is therefore qualified to make sweeping generalizations about your safety "abroad". "Is it safe to travel to Morocco alone?" they might ask. "Is Morocco safe for female tourists?" (Refer to the handy FAQ above for go-to responses to these inquiries.)

Your loved ones are inclined to panic if you plan to travel alone, especially for the first time, and some may even be downright unsupportive.

They might be worried that you will get lost, feel alone, or get sick suddenly. They may even call you a fool, because the decision to travel alone seems so absurd to them.

However, if women had let doubt and nay-sayers win, we might still not be able to vote or own property. That's not to say throw caution to the wind and look for a war-zone to start the feminist travel revolution.

DO research before you travel alone in Morocco, and take precautions to minimize danger.

DON'T make travel decisions or assess your capabilities as an independent lady based on that one auntie who thinks you should stay home.

2. Plan up a storm, but don't be afraid to embrace the unexpected along the way.

Morocco is a mixed bag of cultures and landscapes, and you're going to want to discover every part of it. If you are a nature lover, head north to see Chefchaouen and Asilah, or take the road down south to catch the waves in Agadir and Essaouira. For a taste of urban life, Marrakech is sure to overwhelm and delight, and also serves as a great launching point to the Sahara Desert.

Assuming you don't have unlimited time, planning is critical to making the most of your time traveling alone in Morocco. Make a list of the destinations you're dying to see (and local delicacies you're dying to eat, of course!), and try plotting them on a map to optimize your route.

3. Readiness will come along the road.

If parenthood doesn't have prereqs, why should travel? If you're not sure you're ready to tackle Morocco alone, that's okay. Readiness is not a prereq for meaningful, safe, and FUN solo female travel. Do your research; book a ticket; pack your bags, and hit the road. You'll grow in ways you couldn't have imagined back home to rise to the unexpected challenges that arise along the way.

4. Solo travel is the cure for self-doubt.

Do you know how to ride a camel? (Hint: Not on the top of the hump.) Can you whip up a tasty tagine? How will you procure a bus ticket to your intended destination with pure charades sign language? Will you be able to purchase souvenirs without getting ripped off?

From afar, these tasks seem daunting, perhaps even scary. There's no freshman seminar on Solo Female Travel in Africa 101 or Responding to Unwanted Flirtation 203. The YouTube videos on camel riding techniques seem woefully lacking, and your favorite foodie blogger probably oversimplified how to make couscous properly. But that's the joy of travel – you're constantly growing and learning and challenging yourself with new experiences.

5. Sometimes, you have to choose sanity over honesty as a woman traveling alone.

While traveling alone in Morocco, especially as a woman, expect multiple daily inquisitions regarding your marital status (and other personal affairs that may feel invasive). If you are unmarried, and plan to be honest about this, expect responses that involve some combination of:

- Direct marriage proposals, or occasionally more tempered expressions of interest,
- Suggestions of local eligible bachelors,
- Surprise that you have not yet been scooped off of the dating marketing,
- Interest in your future childbearing abilities, and
- Concern for your safety and wellbeing.

If these conversations become tiring, try out alternative responses, or try diverting the conversation to a topic that both parties are interested in. Honesty is the best policy, but not if it gives you a complex about doin' your own thang. As women traveling alone, asserting what parts of ourselves we do and do NOT want to share is a crucial form of self-care.

[READ THE FULL LIST HERE](#)



CASSIE DEPECOL, FASTEST (AND 1ST!) WOMAN TO VISIT EVERY COUNTRY

By the GoAbroad Writing Team

Megan Lee and Erin Oppenheim of GoAbroad.com were lucky enough to score an interview with Cassie DePecol, the first and fastest woman to travel to all 196 sovereign nations.

The stipulations?

She had to take scheduled transit ONLY and had to document the bejeezits out of her transportation.

Beyond her goal to earn the title of Guinness World Record Holder, DePecol also heavily incorporated a mission of women's rights and education. On Expedition 196, in between long layovers, missed connections, instant noodles, and the other not-so-glam sides of constant travel, **Cassie DePecol was able to create a movement.**

What made you do it?

I've always just kind of had a passion, since high school, to go to every country in the world. And it wasn't until a few months before my 25th birthday where I was like, okay I have to do this, you know. I was out babysitting in LA and I was like, man, I really want to pursue that dream I've always had of traveling the world, but like... can I do it? Should I do it? When's the right time? And I'm like... okay, now more than ever, I have to just go for it. So that's when I started planning the exhibition. I think I've just had this burning desire to see everything and go everywhere and do everything.

When did you know you were destined to travel?

Ever since I was in high school, whenever I got to leave my home state, a little town in Connecticut, I'd be like—"Guys, I'm going to New York or I'm going to Massachusetts!" And they'd say "Why is that such a big deal?" I'm like—you know, I'm leaving my state. It's SUCH a big deal! [laughs]

I guess it's not a big deal, but to me, stepping out of that boundary was a huge deal to me. So that's when I really realized that I wanted to travel. I never grew up traveling. My mom's Canadian, so we had only been to Toronto and that's it. When I was 18, I was like looking at colleges, I decided to go to Elon University Global College and study abroad my first year in Costa Rica. From there, I was like—Alright, I'm destined to keep traveling the rest of my life.

Tell us more about your study abroad experience...

I was staying with a host family in a little town/city called Heredia in Costa Rica. I stayed with them til I left and transferred to a different college actually in Vermont. I lived with a host family in Heredia, went to school there, and we took some trips to San Jose and all over Costa Rica.

What does your family/hometown/community think of your expedition?

My hometown is very small—maybe like 2000 people total in my town—but initially when I went to go take off (back in December 2014), they were really supportive. There was tons of media in the local newspapers, and I was like "Yes, this is so great!"

Everyone was so receptive, I'd be sitting at like CVS waiting for a prescription for my contacts and I'd bump into a little old lady and she'd be like, "I saw you in the newspaper, it's really great!" "It's so sweet!" I'm so glad it reached so many people. Everyone's been really supportive and proud that I'm from Connecticut. I'm from Litchfield county and everyone's like "Go Connecticut!"

It seems your mission evolved from a focus on humanitarianism and the global family to advocating more for solo female travel. How did your mission change over the course of your trip?

Initially, I was going to support women's rights and then, I was like, you know what, I didn't major in women's rights, I'm not 100% gungho about it—I thought, walking into Saudi Arabia like "I'm supporting women's rights" might not go over well in some countries. I decided to focus on peace through sustainable tourism. I have been working in the sustainable hospitality field since the age of 21 and it is something I'm really passionate about.

But as my expedition went on, I realized there were so many young women who were coming up to me, especially after the conversations I was giving at universities, saying "I didn't think I could do this sort of thing, you've really inspired me..."

[WATCH THE FULL INTERVIEW](#)

4 TIPS TO BE THE BEST FEMINIST ALLY WHILE TRAVELING

By Jason Schroeder

Early American feminist, Emily Hahn, known for her favorite saying, “Nobody said not to go,” lived in both Italy and England in the 1920’s, before working for the Red Cross in the Belgian Congo, and continuing onward across East Africa by foot in the 1930’s. In addition to being an engineer in early life, and the author of 52 books within 72 years, she also taught English in Shanghai for three years. Unfortunately, even with adventurous female icons like Hahn, travel abroad for women has become a case of “Everyone said not to go.”

These days, women are hounded with countless articles and social media posts on topics like “how female travelers can stay safe abroad” and “why women shouldn’t travel alone.” While concerns for women’s safety are very important, they paint a very negative picture of the world where women and travel are concerned. As a male traveler, I consciously have far fewer concerns of my own safety while abroad than women who travel typically do.



My concerns, given my location, usually involve getting lost or robbed. Women, however, oftentimes have these concerns, in addition to concerns for their overall safety. This is all thanks to the numerous aforementioned media articles—articles which people like Hahn have debunked.

In reality, travel can be daunting for anyone, even within their home country. And the fact that your rights can change by country, as equality among demographics is held at dramatically different tiers, only adds to the discomfort. **But, what can male travelers do to be the best feminist allies possible while traveling?** Drawing from my experiences abroad, I have a few simple steps to best help our female peers feel more at ease while abroad.

1. Know your stance

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of being a feminist is to be up-to-date and informed on feminist issues, as well as to be unwavering in your stance on each issue. You are more than likely already informed and have your own opinion on these issues within your own country, but it can also be useful to be familiar with common feminist issues all around the world, so that, should you encounter these issues, you are ready to tackle them head-on.

2. Know your host-country’s stance

While trip planning, one thing that I’ve found to be both important and useful is to research the social and political norms of the countries you will be visiting. This will help to not only assist in reducing culture shock, but it will also teach you about each particular country’s stance on equality among different groups. In most cases, visiting Western cultures is welcoming and comes with little fear. Many of the world’s most popular tourist destinations include countries located in Europe, Oceania, and North America—regions which make-up some of the best countries in which to be a woman, based on social, political, and financial worth. In these areas, there is not much to worry about in terms of solo female travel.

There is room for concern, however, when travelers branch off to other regions like Latin America, parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, where women’s places in society are held at a much lower tier. In most Middle Eastern countries, for example, women are still commonly held with the expectation that they will work solely as housewives and mothers, with only 20% of women participating in the workforce. Similarly, Latin America is plagued by their dominantly *Machismo* culture. Defined as “exaggerated masculinity,” *Machismo* culture says that women are expected not to hold a job, and to tend to their homes and children. *Machismo* culture also looks at women as objects, as they are frequently catcalled in public and ridiculed for their choices of clothing.

3. Be clear

Standing up for what you believe in while outside of your own country can be trying. A scenario where you have confronted a man whom you do not know for his catcalling behavior could become dangerous. Another, where you have spoken out against a culturally accepted women’s rights law could be considered disrespectful to your host country, if said in the wrong environment. It is paramount, however, to let your voice be heard on feminist issues when it is deemed both safe and respectful. This could involve taking part in women’s marches, or voicing your opinions to a local with whom you are comfortable.

4. Be there & Listen

Finally, being there for your female travel buddies is one of the best things that you can do for them while globetrotting. This is a pretty broad statement that can be as simple as listening to the concerns and needs of your travel partner, or giving them someone to walk with when they have somewhere to go. Upon asking some of my past travel companions what I was able to do to make them feel comfortable while abroad for a semester in Chile, one stated “Just your presence made me feel safer, because when I was alone, I was catcalled. When I would walk to school or elsewhere with you or another male friend, I was never catcalled.”

In a world so different from your own, there is nothing that you can do to make yourself or your friends feel completely at ease. However, letting your female friends know that you are there for them if they need someone to talk to about their thoughts and issues while abroad, or to accompany them on a walk to the supermarket, could help make them feel much safer. It’s as easy as that!



SMALL WAYS TO ENCOURAGE FEMINISM & EQUALITY ABROAD

By Jason Rogers

The by-the-book definition of feminism is, “the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.” Drink that in, and mull it over for a while. It sure doesn't seem too controversial, does it?

Good! It shouldn't, and if you're nodding along right now, congratulations: you're a feminist.

And since you are a feminist—say it out loud, it feels good, doesn't it?—that belief in the equality of all human beings doesn't simply stop when you travel. To the contrary, travel tends to amplify the recognition of the value in all people. Women lead vibrant, inspirational, powerful lives all over the planet, and the urge to celebrate that reality is a powerful one. It can make you want to roar.

But the honest, gut-shot fact of the matter is that feminism still has a long way to go in many cultures before resembling the version we're accustomed to here in the west.

As as a traveler, you've learned that all cultures are wonderfully, beautifully different. There is no “right,” and there is no “normal,” right? So how do you honor your own feminist convictions when you find yourself in a culture with strictly defined gender roles? **How do you balance being true to yourself, and being respectful to your hosts?**

We are VERY glad you asked.

Ask “Well, why?”

It's a question children ask until their parents are blue in the face: Why? And this little three letter question may be your most powerful tool to encourage feminism abroad.

Culture has a lot of inertia. It is built layer upon layer over hundreds or thousands of years, until it simply becomes “the way things are done.” And sometimes, those layers are built of puzzling gender roles.

Greece is a nation of fiercely proud women, with some deeply entrenched traditional gender roles that are not always undertaken by choice. While visiting her family in Adendron, Julia Limnios noticed her male cousins sitting around complaining that their female cousins were taking too long in ironing the boys' shirts, delaying their big night out. The girls, as was their “role,” were ironing all the shirts, boys' and girls', while the boys stood around idly.

Julia made a friendly suggestion to the boys: why not iron the shirts themselves? If what they want is to get out the door and to the party, the fastest way to accomplish that is to do their own ironing. At first the boys laughed, but Julia persisted. Why not? They would get their wish faster, after all.

Two years later, Julia returned, and guess what? The boys had learned to iron, and the girls were focused on their own evening preparations.

A gentle, honest “why” is the greatest weapon of the feminist abroad. Wield it proudly, and watch inequality wither before your mighty logic!

Set examples, encourage questions

People are curious; it's one of the best things about us! People are also nosy; it's one of the worst things about us. You can use these lovely little facts to help spread feminism abroad in sneaky-fun ways.

By patronizing feminist creators and making their works part of your style, you welcome conversations about feminism simply by welcoming conversations at all. That top you're wearing, where'd you get it? Oh, what's Birdsong? That book in your hands on the bus that everyone can see, what is it? Oh, “Purple Hibiscus” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie? What's that about?

And just like that, you've opened up a conversation about feminism that is organic, casual, and comfortable. You're not espousing your beliefs (wink wink), you're simply discussing fine literature and the author's thesis.

This distinction might sound silly, but is majorly important to some people. And it works.

Personally embrace feminists, and you will lead others to embrace feminism.

Give respect, get respect

Look, inequality sucks. It just does, and there's no way around it. But the one thing guaranteed to never change people's minds is disrespect and hostility.

Cultural norms often have complex roots that are intertwined with so many different myriad aspects of society that we as travelers cannot hope to fully understand them. And all my fellow open-minded travelers, let us raise our right hands and recite our oath: The response to different cultures is never disrespect.

You may find dress codes, curfews, and chaperones offensive, but you are not the arbiter of morality in their society. Further, you are not assumed to have the same level of respect for or familiarity with their culture as a traveler, and attempts to change it may be perceived as ignorant attacks, rather than earnest concerns.

Demonstrate respect for your hosts by demonstrating respect for their culture. Adhere to their norms, even as you disagree with them. This respect will not go unnoticed, and it will be reciprocated.

Then, as respected friends who merely disagree, can you begin to wage your winning war of logic.

Respect goes both ways, and demonstrating intellectual respect for your hosts will earn their respect in return.

Share everything you can

The whole point of cultural exchange is that second part: exchange. People who get involved with hosting international students, either as host families, guides, faculty, or just by frequenting the places where foreigners often hang out, tend to desire this dialogue with the outside world. They want to see another culture: eat its food, listen to its music, watch its movies, read its books. So share your feminist media!

Make a new friend? Share all your favorite “subversive” TV shows, songs, stories, or whatever! This goes along with “setting examples,” but if you meet someone who is curious about your personal way of living, fire away! The things you love, that encourage you towards feminism, may well have the same powerful effect on your new friends.

Share your feminist media with friends—they might just love it!

Feminism comes in all shapes

Intersectional feminism, folks. It's the name of the don't-be-a-hypocrite game. You know what feminism doesn't have to look like everywhere in the world, for every feminist in the world? Your idea of it.

Sarah Hussein is an American from a Pakistani family, and though she is a feminist, she recognizes the many permutations of that word, especially as geopolitics begin to get involved.

“My female cousins don't like Americans telling them what to do,” Sarah says. “They've chosen their lives, even embracing things like arranged marriages as duties that they take pride in performing.”

This can be difficult for westerners to accept, but feminism demands agency and choice for all women, free of preconceived notions about what their roles should be as decided by others.



And would you look at that? Even we as feminists can be guilty of ascribing roles.

True intersectional feminism— the type you will discover abroad—is as diverse as the world itself, and women everywhere choose different paths.

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The crusade for feminism abroad is largely a personal one, driven by your own words and actions. Human beings fundamentally want to connect with each other; this is the core belief of world travelers. While not all cultures share the same beliefs about gender roles and the independence of the sexes, you can still be a beacon of light for equality. You can be a champion for feminism while still remaining respectful of your hosts and their culture. In fact, the most effective way to achieve the former is to accomplish the latter. So go on: go out there, go be a feminist, and go abroad!

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10 THINGS WOMEN WHO TRAVEL ARE TIRED OF HEARING

By Rebecca Murphy

It's no secret that women are strong, beautiful, and overall just plain awesome creatures. Despite this, us ladies don't always get the respect and treatment that we deserve, especially when it comes to women who actively display their strength and independence. Never does sexism become more blatant than when you are planning for, or in the midst of, an amazing experience and people loudly and unnecessarily try to bring you down for gender-based reasons.

No matter where you go abroad, it is going to be apparent to some degree that there is a stigma against female travelers because of the overall stigma against female independence. So, in honor of International Women's Day, we compiled this article to tell the world the things that strong female travelers are officially done hearing.

1. "Are you sure you want to go there?"

Chances are if you've done your research and booked a plane ticket to a specific location, it probably means you're sure you want to go there. People love to jump on fear-based bandwagons and will make you feel terrible for your decision to go to a certain place (especially if it is somewhere more off-the-beaten-path), but just because people hear snippets from the media about how one area is more dangerous or poor or whatever than another area doesn't mean that you can't go there. The harsh reality is that women are usually at risk of people trying to hurt or take advantage of them, so you shouldn't have to avoid a certain area just because of a few unpleasant soundbites.

2. "Wear a fake wedding ring!"

Statements like this are incredibly damaging. What this says to the woman in question is "your worth is determined by belonging to someone else and people won't leave you alone unless it is clear that you are taken." It's not enough that perhaps you have your own feelings and desires and simply might not be attracted to the person expressing interest in you...you need to have something symbolizing that you belong to someone else. Would you give a male traveler the same advice? No, because a man wouldn't have to prove that he is not interested, whereas a woman does.

This also implies that you never would want someone's attention and you should keep to yourself when traveling. There is nothing wrong with having fun while traveling (kind of the whole point of traveling, right?), so if you want to grab a drink and flirt with some locals, then do it!

3. "You're going to get yourself killed."

Killed. Quite a bold statement to make. Injured? Sure. Broke? Probably. But killed? You need to get out more. What is it about a woman traveling that automatically means she is going to get herself into trouble? Women who travel still have common sense, and they are most definitely still aware of basic safety tips for traveling abroad.

"Meaningful travel is all about immersing yourself in a different culture, and there is no better way to kill your integration options than by going into the experience already closed-off."

4. "Look at you, always having to make a statement."

The only statement someone makes by traveling to another country is that they are brave and open-minded. You're not exactly flying the flag of equality every time you purchase a plane ticket, you're just going about your business as any man would do. Travelers travel for themselves, not to prove a point to someone or "make a statement."

5. "You couldn't find a guy to go with you?"

There are several things wrong with this question. First, it's heteronormative and suggests that all women are straight, which—surprise!—they're not. Second, it implies that men are somehow better or stronger, and therefore the obvious travel companion. Third, what's wrong with wanting to travel solo or going with a group of fellow ladies? Even if you are dating someone, it doesn't necessarily mean that your significant other should come with you. **Once again, travelers travel for themselves, not for anyone else.**

6. “Why don’t you settle down and save this money for your future family?”

Not only does this blatantly say that there is only one way to settle down, but it also suggests that having a life of adventure is inherently wrong.

You can’t “settle down” and live a life of excitement? Why are the two mutually exclusive? Just because you someday want to have a family doesn’t mean that you can’t also explore different parts of the world or that you need to save all your money for the children you may or may not have 10 years down the road. Perhaps you will learn something during your travels that will help make you into a better parent or partner. Shouldn’t we celebrate that instead of punishing it?

In addition, this statement also implies that the woman in question is absolutely going to have a family. There is nothing wrong with a woman who wants to fly solo (literally and figuratively), so stop shaming women who don’t fit the “mold.” Men who travel are never made to feel like their potential future family comes before themselves, and women shouldn’t either.

7. “Can’t you just party here?”

This question is really insulting. For some reason, many people interpret “I’m traveling to xxx” as “I’m going to get drunk on a beach,” or something similar. Women don’t just go on relaxing all-inclusive vacations, they also travel meaningfully. When a woman says she is going somewhere, it could be to volunteer in an orphanage or learn a new language, not just party. Even if you are going just to party and relax, you don’t have to justify your reasons for travel to anyone.



8. “You haven’t outgrown this phase yet?”

If someone makes the conscious decision again and again to book a ticket somewhere and go, it probably means that it’s not a phase but rather an actual part of the person’s life. There are good reasons behind why every woman should make meaningful travel a priority, and shaming someone for continuously pushing themselves to learn more is not okay.

9. “What does so-and-so think?”

Asking what your significant other or parent or anyone else thinks about your decision to travel is really just rude. It doesn’t matter what other people think because it’s your life and up to you to decide your definition of happiness. Any friend or partner worth being with will support your desire to experience new things, and everyone else is just projecting their own insecurities and ignorance.

10. “Good luck fitting all of your clothes and jewelry in your backpack!”

First of all, not all women are obsessed with material things, so chill. And check those gender stereotypes at the freaking door. Despite what some people think, it is possible for women to survive off of just a few different outfits. This statement also demonstrates a severe lack of knowledge about space bags, which magically enable women to pack practically their entire closets.

So, even if you are a fashion-forward lady, it won’t be hard to fit a few extra statement necklaces and cute sandals into your backpack. Give a girl a more difficult challenge, please.

If you’re a woman who has heard any of the above statements, we encourage you to keep doing your thing and not let ignorant and judgmental comments derail you. Don’t be afraid to stand up for yourself and your experiences, point out the unfairness of the comment, and help society continue evolving.

If you are someone who has said any of the above statements, we encourage you to take a step back and reflect.

What motivated you to say such a thing and what were you really trying to accomplish? No one is perfect and everyone says things out of ignorance, so use this as an opportunity to learn about women’s struggles for equality and really grow from it, because women can go abroad, too!

The next time you start erring on the side of ignorance while talking to the women in your life—or if you hear someone making ignorant statements about the capability of women in travel—**SAY SOMETHING.** You don’t have to be rude, but you don’t have to be silent either.

Women in travel are no less an explorer (or person) than a man is!



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