



Traveling on your own



Before you read

1. Do you like traveling? What's the best thing about traveling? The worst?
2. Who do you usually travel with?
3. Have you ever traveled alone? If not, would you like to? If so, how was it?
4. You are going to read an interview with a woman who has traveled alone most of her life. Make a list of questions you would like to ask her if you were the interviewer.

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5. Read the interview. How many questions from your list were answered?

Q&A With Beth Whitman, a Woman's Perspective on Solo Travel

http://frugaltraveler.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/frugal-travel-a-womans-perspective/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

Beth Whitman took a semester off from college to drive around the United States. Living on a budget, this New Jersey native stayed in \$10 youth hostels, met people from all over the world — and got hooked on travel. Over the next two decades or so, Ms. Whitman visited Southeast Asia, Australia, India and Central America (to name just a few) and started writing the Wanderlust and Lipstick guides, a series for solo female travelers. Now 43 and married, she's built Wanderlust and Lipstick





into a travel company geared toward women, with a Web site and tours to India, Bhutan and beyond.

What are some of the challenges that women traveling solo and on a budget have to face?

Gosh, I think that there's a mind-set that most women grow up with, that you have to have all of your shoes, and you have to have all of your nice clothes, and you have to stay in an expensive place to be safe. And so those are factors that require a lot of luggage, so you might think you need a couple of bags to travel around with, and if you're traveling on your own, it's hard to maneuver all that stuff.

I have one 22-inch piece of luggage that goes with me as a carry-on, and I can travel for a month on that. I can travel for a year on that.

Are there advantages to being a woman traveler?

Absolutely! I think women are definitely more approachable. And it doesn't have to be in a sexual way, for sure. But I just think that we're not as much of a threat as a male traveling on his own, and so local people are more likely to take us in, to have conversations — and again, this is just in a really friendly way, because that's the way that most of the world operates. And so, I think that's the biggest benefit, people will reach out and invite us to dinner and help us find the taxi stand or the bus stand.

How about as a woman traveling on a budget?

One thing I might add is that we tend to bargain-hunt when we're at home: we're clipping coupons, we're looking for sale items, we're shopping around on the Internet for the best prices. Don't let that habit die when you travel just because you're quote-unquote "on vacation."

In a lot of countries, bargaining is part of the process when you go to a market, and it's the way that you meet local people. Why just pay outright when the seller is expecting to have some sort of interaction?

Were there ever times when you wished, "Oh God, I wish I was a man in this situation?"

Oh, wow, I've never wished that. No offense! That's never crossed my mind. I've never felt ill-treated or — I've never had that feeling before. No. Just flat-out no.

What kind of reactions do you get when you're leading these women-only tours?

When I was in Bhutan in April, I had a group of 14 women, so I was the 15th, and then we had two women guides. So here we are, 17 women in a bus, traveling around, walking into hotels and these restaurants, and we were a sight! The locals were just really taken



aback, and they said they've never seen that before. It was really great. Bhutan is so remote, and so few people go there to begin with, and then to have this big group of 17 women traipsing around the streets and shopping and going into the temples was just great.

Are there any countries that are particularly good for female travelers?

I often get asked about best countries to travel as a woman — and places to avoid — and actually I shy away from answering that question, because what's going to be better for me, or not as good for me, is completely different for someone else.

I'm 5 feet 2 with blond hair, and I stick out like a sore thumb in Asia — I'm tall and fat! But someone else with darker hair and features isn't going to stick out as much, and the same goes for places like the Middle East. I've got a friend who's traveled all through the Middle East, and she just loves it. But for me, it would be a really difficult place.

What about hitchhiking? My readers are always asking whether it's safe for women.

We have a sixth sense — like everybody's got a sixth sense, right? — but we tend to listen to it more than men do. I really believe that.

One of the things that come up often is that when a woman is in a situation that's a little bit scary, she says, "I knew something was wrong, but I didn't want to offend him" or "I didn't know how to get out of the situation." Look, there's going to be some countries that just aren't going to be appropriate for hitchhiking. Do a bit of research — go to the Lonely Planet forums. If someone stops and you don't feel right about it, don't get in the car. That's just the bottom line.

Does traveling on a bigger budget make you safer?

No, not necessarily. I don't actually believe that that's the case. I think it's the preparation in advance and learning those safety techniques.

But there are special deals for women travelers at some hotels. They might have a floor that's for women only. I've traveled on business and I've stayed in hotels where they cater to women travelers, so I get a little bit of extra special attention at check-in.

Are those expensive?

This was — moderately priced. I think it was a Holiday Inn up in Toronto.

Was it worth it for the extra attention?

Yeah, I kind of liked it!



Language work

Read the interview and find the expressions in the text that mean the following:

1. Traveling by getting free rides in someone else's vehicle. _____
2. Get addicted to something. _____
3. Living with a limited amount of money. _____
4. Looking for good deals or prices. _____
5. To stand out, to draw attention. _____
6. To walk or go without having a destination or reaching a goal.

7. The deciding or the most important factor. _____
8. To provide or supply what amuses, is desired, or gives pleasure, comfort.

Rewrite the sentences below according to the information from the text.

1. Beth Whitman has been traveling for ten years.
_____.
2. Beth Whitman usually carries a lot of luggage with her.
_____.
3. She advises that bargaining is rude in many countries.
_____.
4. She believes that price and safety are directly related.
_____.

Discuss the following questions with your classmates:

1. Do you think traveling alone is just as easy for women as it is for men? Why/ why not?
2. What points made by Beth do you agree with? Which ones don't you agree with?
3. What do you think is the most important thing to do when you're traveling alone?