

## FEARS AND FACTS:

# Holidaying on your own

Worried about heading off alone? **John Malathronas** shares some home truths

**FEAR: I'll be lonely – and people will think I'm weird.**

**FACT:** It's simply not that unusual to travel alone these days. In a recent survey of 521 travel agents\*, 59 per cent reported an increase in solo-traveller bookings (73 per cent of which were women). In any case, it's far easier to meet people on the fly than you think: relax, smile, make eye contact, ask directions. People are generally happier to approach solo travellers than couples or groups, so you'll probably find you meet far more people than you ever do on a trip with friends. Other advantages? You stand a good chance of getting last-minute tickets to the hottest plays and concerts as there's nearly always a single seat that doesn't sell. Still worried? Try an escorted singles tour...

**FEAR: Singles holidays are just for Club 18-30 types or pensioners.**

**FACT:** Young professionals make up a significant chunk of the single-traveller market. In the same survey (see above), 37 per cent of travel agents said their single travellers were mostly from the 35-55 age group, while 44 per cent said the average age of clients booking solo trips was 55+. In fact, some companies gear their packages specifically towards single professionals: Cox & Kings (coxandkings.co.uk), for example, has a Single Travellers programme that offers trips to destinations ranging from China to Peru. And Solos (solosholidays.co.uk) has yoga, walking and city breaks for singles, and divides its tours by age groups: 20-45, 30-59 and 45+. If you really can't face the prospect of a holiday targeted at 'singles', you'll find special-interest trips such as architectural tours nearly always have a healthy percentage of lone rangers.

**FEAR: I'll have to pay a pricey supplement or share a room with a terrible chatterbox.**

**FACT:** Apart from on standard package holidays in the sun, single supplements are on the way out. Voyages Jules Verne (vjv.com) doesn't apply them to its small-group escorted cultural tours, while archaeological specialist Andante (andantetravels.co.uk) has managed



to keep them low: expect to pay £140 on a seven-night Pyrenees Cave Art tour costing £1,950pp. Adventure company Explore (explore.co.uk) will pair you with someone from the same sex to share a room, so there's no single supplement.

If you book independently, check out hotels that cater primarily to business travellers because they tend to have a few single rooms, which are often cheaper. Munich's Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski (kempinski.com) has single rooms from £162, and doubles from £217, both room only. Look, too, for hotels in historic properties or townhouses as their different-sized rooms often mean that some are only suitable for solo stays. For instance, Rome's Hotel Europa (hoteleuroparoma.com), a Neo-Classical mansion, has single rooms from £41, room only, while doubles start at £65.

**FEAR: I've heard some places are dangerous after dark if you're on your own, so I'll be stuck in my hotel every night.**

**FACT:** In most places, you'll be fine as long as you exercise common sense. Some places are scarier than others, of course (check the

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Foreign Office's travel advice at fco.gov.uk), but if you don't want to go out on your own, you can always book an after-dark group tour: you'll invariably end up in a bar with a few others from the group afterwards (or during, if it's a bar-crawl tour). Alternatively, arrange a rendezvous with a local from globalgreeternetwork.info (volunteers who are happy to show visitors around their hometowns free of charge).

On-the-ground advice from travellers who've been there before is invariably helpful. For more tips and advice on hitting the road alone, whether you're going for two days or two months, check out the following blogs: solotravellerblog.com, everything-everywhere.com, journeywoman.com and nomadicmatt.com. ■