



Women Find Safety, Friendship in Group Travel

Safety -- especially when traveling abroad -- is a key concern for women, even in today's liberated world. In a 2007 telephone survey conducted for the US Tour Operators Association nearly 45% of women polled cited safety as one of the key motivators for choosing a tour or vacation package.

As an example, Angela Pittman, a 53 year old retired teacher from Winston Salem who was traveling on her own in Thailand recounts almost being kidnapped by a cab driver several years ago on her way to the airport for her return flight home. Her quick thinking saved her, but since then, the travel veteran who has visited more than 40 countries, vowed she would travel abroad with a group.

"I've been through some hairy experiences," Pittman says. "I'm a single female and I'm very independent. I've learned that it's worth it to go on a tour. For one thing, you have a local contact there. It's good to have someone to call."

Diana A, from Minnesota and also in her 50s, agrees. "It's the safety factor," she says. "You have the tour director to take care of things."

Advice for Fitting in and Making Lasting Friendships

Women traveling alone too have found it easy to make lasting friendships on tour. Caroline Adams, a 45-year old pilot from the Virgin Islands, has met lifelong friends on tour and now shares travel tips with these friends. "On the first night, talk and see who is together and who is with who. Network and figure out where you might fit best for the remainder of the trip," she advises.

Carol Marasovich, 56, from Darien, Illinois, stays in touch with a core of 7 people she met on a heli-hiking tour of the Canadian Rockies. "If there is an open table or open seating I just jump in. That's how we started talking," she says of the friends she made on tour with whom she now plans yearly reunions.

Options for Women

"Today there are many tour opportunities for women traveling solo," says Bob Whitley, USTOA president. "In fact, some of our member companies report that anywhere from 20% - 40% of participants on a given tour can be single, most often women.

In one of our recent member polls, 60% of our USTOA tour operator responding members said they offer single shares, where they match up solo travelers. In many cases, if a suitable roommate can't be found, the single supplement is waived. Even if some women want the privacy of their own accommodations they often prefer the security and camaraderie of touring with a group, whether it's small-group walking tours, or a larger motorcoach tour. "Another and more relatively new phenomenon is women-only tours, which often concentrate on a specific activity such as a culinary or outdoor adventure." says Bob Whitley, USTOA president.

For more information on USTOA and USTOA member companies – who have met the travel industry’s highest requirements – visit www.ustoa.com or www.ustoa.travel.

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