

Traveling SOLO

A fear of the unknown is normal, but with preparation, many find rewards outweigh risks.

> By **Alisa Clickenger**

I recently attended the Women's Sport-bike Rally in Camarillo, California, and gave a presentation on riding solo versus riding in an organized tour. It was an appropriate topic, having a wheel in each world: I travel solo around the globe and I also lead motorcycle tours for women. Several women asked about personal safety while traveling and for tips for their own adventures.

My first long distance solo trip was in 2006, after quitting a corporate job, reinventing myself and closely examining every aspect of my life. One of the biggest and most obvious issues was the fact that I wasn't riding the motorcycle I really wanted to ride: a BMW R1150 GS Adventure. I'd been drooling over this bike since its introduction in 1999.

I set about searching for a used GSA. The criteria were that it be as far away from my home in Connecticut as possible, in good condition and low miles. I found one located in California on the BMW MOA forum, mailed my money, bought a plane ticket and rode it back East over the following five weeks. It was the biggest riding goal I'd set to date, riding a motorcycle across the United States, and it literally opened up the whole world to travel on two wheels.

Both men and women frequently approach and ask if I worry while traveling alone. The answer is always no, because there are a set of solo-travel guidelines I follow, foremost being to always use my intuition. If a situation doesn't feel right, I leave or get out of the way. Staying aware



Traveling solo is a combination of inspiration, preparation and determination, which are magnified by such factors as traveling outside the U.S. or to remote areas. But rich experiences, new friendships and dazzling sights await the successful traveler, including the author, who has discovered Colorado backroads and a volcanic crater in El Salvador in her travels.



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of my surroundings is an important part of my travels as well, as is connecting with the locals to understand an area, particularly when traveling outside my own country, where it's easier to understand the cultural inflections.

"You have more responsibility as a solo traveler than with a group, starting with responsibility for your own satisfaction!" said Tamela Rich, television travel expert, Iron Butt member and award-winning author of the recently published "Hit the Road: A Woman's Guide to Solo Motorcycle Touring."

She continued, "You're also responsible for looking after your bike, paying close attention to weather and road conditions, and staying alert to social cues from people you meet along the way. Once you've done it successfully, you'll be filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment."

Rich says the best way to protect oneself is to stay out of dodgy situations in the first place. Situational awareness is your own responsibility. In her book, Rich wrote a couple of chapters on safety issues, including personal alarms, weapons and dealing with catcallers and panhandlers. She also dedicated an entire chapter to fear.

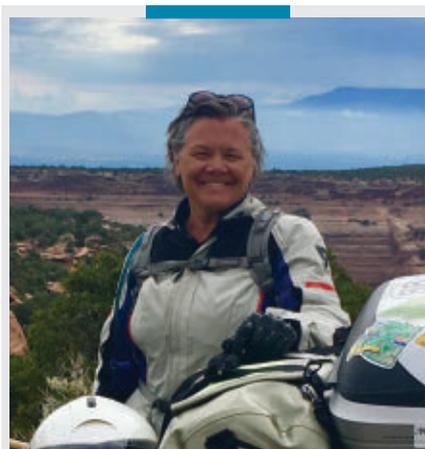
"My experience has been that carrying yourself with sober confidence is the best way to protect yourself while traveling solo," she said.

While it's hard to verify that solo travel for women is harder than it is for men (having never been a man), it's mostly about your perspective and attitude, rather than your sex. I believe that people are generally nice all over the world, so I expect to see the best in people. That doesn't mean traveling as Pollyanna any more than it means traveling with a weapon. It means when you're looking for the good in people that's generally what you'll be presented with.

Steph Jeavons set off in 2014 to circumnavigate the world solo, riding a motorcycle on all seven continents. She finished her trip on a CRF250L earlier this year.

"It is OK to be nervous and have lots of questions before you embark," she said.

"Everyone has questions. You are the sort

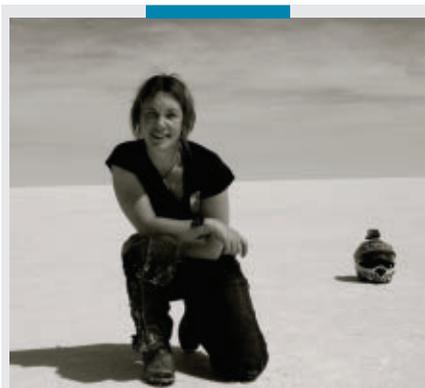


"Alone is not the same as lonely, and a solo trip doesn't mean you can't interact with anyone. Solo travel means you do what pleases you, from choosing your itinerary to changing it on the fly."

— Tamela Rich

of person who can do this, and the hardest part of your journey is starting."

Neither Rich nor Jeavons had an easy introduction to solo travel. Three months



"Don't act like a victim. If you wander around looking like a timid little mouse or you treat people with suspicion, you may find a very different world than if you go out there looking confident. Smile and be open, even if you don't feel it sometimes. Don't underestimate the effect your behavior can have on those around you."

— Steph Jeavons

after passing her Motorcycle Safety Foundation training course, Rich hit the road on a 40-day, 19-state cross-country trip.

While she's been riding since she was 21, Jeavons still had trepidations. The beginning of the trip was the most frightening; she was heading into the unknown and had let go of all of her belongings, which represented her security.

"I had no idea if I was even going to like it, once I got started," Jeavons said. "I was suspicious of people and I felt quite vulnerable. However, once you get rolling and find your rhythm, you realize that security in material things is not security at all. You also realize that people are generally good and, with positive reinforcement, I learned to trust people and be far more open to them.

"I don't think people take on challenges like riding a motorbike or setting out on an adventure for ease and comfort; if you want to do this, then you will do it. The hardest part is starting. Once you get going, you will find that overcoming your initial fears is the hardest part, then you will develop confidence in your decision-making and riding skills. There are no shortcuts. Nothing can replace just getting out there and getting on with it."

Myriad fears surfaced when it was time for me to leave on my 2009-10 solo trip through Central America and South America, even though I had been on several solo trips in America and abroad. I found myself dragging my feet in the form of focusing on tiny details, thinking up more online research and purchasing more kit that might come in handy.

A friend lovingly pointed out the hesitation to me. I was able to see it for what it was and leave, despite my fears. The hardest part is always the launch.

"For every scary moment there have been hundreds of moments of utter bliss," Rich said, "and a dozen episodes where strangers have gone out of their way to save me from an unpleasant consequence—from not being able to find a place to sleep at night, to running out of gas in the middle of nowhere, to having my wallet stolen. The world isn't the scary place that has been portrayed to us." **MCN**