

THE JOY OF FLYING Solo

The risks are obvious, but the rewards may surprise you. Do the research, assemble your gear, then take the plunge.

> By **Alisa Clickenger**

Solo travel may sound challenging; venturing out into the unknown on your own. Questions loom, with no one else off of whom to bounce ideas. It can feel impossible, especially if you are interested in traveling abroad and don't speak the local language. While certainly an acquired taste, solo travel can be one of the most rewarding life experiences, for many reasons.

You won't have the interpersonal comforts surrounding motorcyclists traveling coupled or in groups. You will be interacting with the world directly, which means you'll be able to be truly immersed in the local way of life. Locals are also a lot more likely to approach and befriend a lone rider, which makes for a richer cultural experience.

Solo travel also facilitates personal growth. At times, you will need to rise to immediate challenges, to keep the trip moving along. A relatively simple thing like finding a place to stay can often be difficult. Lodging always makes me step outside my comfort zone. However, at the end of every trip, you will emerge stronger, more confident and more experienced.

>Monkey Mind

When planning a solo motorcycle trip, chances are several "what-if" scenarios will run through your mind. What if the bike breaks down somewhere remote? What if you get injured? It's impossible to foresee every eventuality. Even the most meticulous planners cannot know every future variable.

Anything can happen, but a good way to get fears and anxieties under



Want to off-road up to the Continental Divide? There's no one to argue against it when you travel alone. Pack what you need and hit the road.

control is to run with them. When the mind conjures up horrific scenarios, play along. Imagine the worst possible scenario, then consider what you would do in that situation.

If stranded somewhere remote, would you camp and seek assistance in the morning, or leave your bike and walk

for help? Role playing jump-starts the mind into solution-finding, instead of harboring uncertainty and anxiety. It helps maintain focus.

Every motorcyclist has had to find solutions to various problems at some point. Have basic contingency plans in place, but remember that you are an

adventurous, capable person, and can almost always figure things out along the way.

>Staying Safe

Solo travel presents a different set of safety challenges, especially for women. There is no one to watch your bike when entering a building or using the restroom, to keep you company when camping in the wild, or to help fix your motorcycle when it breaks down.

Risk doesn't mean you should stay at home. Get some panniers that lock, or something like PacSafe to keep soft luggage safe while the bike is unattended. Something as simple as a small disc lock can be a great deterrent to opportunist bike thieves. When leaving your motorcycle alone for longer than 10 minutes, make sure to remove any electronics, tank bags and other valuables.

There are two options when camping solo. Pick a remote spot where nobody knows you're there, or camp in an organized campsite, surrounded by people, and therefore less vulnerable. Befriend any campground administrators or park rangers, as they will gladly offer an extra set of eyes when asked.

Breakdowns usually happen at the most inopportune moments, like when it's dark, when it's raining, or when riding in remote areas. Learn how to maintain your bike. Basics like lubricating and adjusting the chain and changing engine oil are mandatory. Overcoming common breakdowns like flat tires and dead batteries are also important. If the trouble is beyond your understanding, simply get help. There is no shame in admitting you can't fix something.

Finally, and most importantly, always trust your gut instincts. If a person or situation feels dubious, do not second-guess yourself. Get on your bike and put some distance between you and whatever is creating bad vibes. It's better



Group tours often include fine dining, but if you'd rather save that money for an extra week on the road, there are options.

to be wrong and safe than trusting and in trouble.

>Budgeting Smartly

Traveling alone is usually more expensive than riding with others. Sharing rooms and meal costs are some typical benefits for couples and groups. However, there are still some strategies to reduce costs. One is booking accommodations in advance, especially using airbnb.com, booking.com, hoteltonight.com or agoda.com.

Booking a few days in a row usually provides a better deal. When shipping motorcycles, try to share a container with others. For organized tours, safaris or hikes, find out if you can join an existing group at a discount. Try to find out where locals go for their groceries, as local markets are usually much cheaper than touristy places.

Choosing to camp more often, service your own motorcycle, and prepare your own meals helps to minimize expenses and can extend a journey. However, frugality depends on the type of traveler and your own priorities. As a woman fre-

quently traveling alone, I do a lot of wild camping in the U.S.; overseas, I prefer to sleep in a hotel or Airbnb, with doors that lock.

>Managing Solitude

Aside from the physical skills needed, mindset is the most important part of enjoying any journey. Quiet helmet time provides cherished moments, but what if extended solitude isn't something you're used to?

It's natural to feel lonely from time to time. Try to focus on the journey instead. Be present and practice gratitude. It is an incredible privilege to travel the world on two wheels. Make sure you are getting the best out of it.

When in need of companionship, there are ways to link up with other travelers for specific stretches. Both horizonsunlimited.com and advrider.com forums are great places to look for travel partners headed in the same direction. There are also usually

local forums for motorcyclists, such as the Wild Dog Adventure Riding forum in South Africa (wilddog.za.net). Many motorcycle brands have enthusiast clubs to network with, around the world. Social media can also be helpful, and geotags (geographical identification metadata in media) can identify other motorcycle travelers nearby.

If the going alone gets tough, take a little break. Fly in a friend, rent a second motorcycle, and go adventure together, or fly home for a while. It's perfectly normal to want to see loved ones after being on the road for an extended time.

It is your journey, and you decide how to take it. Solo travel is all about freedom and flexibility. There are no trophies or prizes waiting at the end. Instead of trying to copy someone else's journey, remember that your own needs and priorities may differ, especially as a solo rider. What matters most is listening to yourself, experiencing the world on your own terms, and thoroughly enjoying the journey. It may even change your life. **MCN**