



### TRAVELERS Close-Up

You never know where you'll find Diana Lambdin Meyer (left), the author, travelling solo. Inset above left, Charleen Capwell in front of a fallen Obelisk at the Temple of Karnak in Luxor, from the 2006 AAA President's Journey to Egypt. Inset above center, Josephine Cross finding some relief from the strong sun while touring Egypt on the 2006 AAA President's Journey to Egypt. Inset above right, JoAnn Smith exploring the spectacular Canaima National Park on the AAA Venezuelan Rainforest Adventure.

# TRAVELING SOLO

By Diana Lambdin Meyer

For years, I've traveled with my husband or my girlfriends, but when an opportunity presented itself for me to join a cruise through the Sea of Cortez, and none of my regular companions were available, I only hesitated for a moment and thought, "Why not go alone?"

As an experienced traveler, I often see women traveling alone and admire their independence, their nerve and the unique opportunities solo travelers have. As I booked my tickets and packed my bags, I became more excited, and a little nervous. What if I didn't find anyone to talk to? What if I got sick? What if? What if?

I ended up taking the plunge and it turned out to be one of the most fabulous journeys of my life—not only in terms of the quality of the cruise, but in the confidence I gained in my ability to achieve my travel goals without a companion at my elbow.

According to research by the Travel Industry Association of America, an esti-

mated 16.4 million women packed their bags and explored the world on their own in the past three years, learning, as I did, that sometimes the solitude only emphasizes the richness of the journey. So even though we may be alone, we're not really alone in our desire to see and experience the world on our terms.

U.S., and became comfortable managing details of her solo travels while learning to be on guard for her personal safety.

"I've learned to ask at the hotel or airport to find out how much and how long a taxi ride should cost me," Smith said. "I always have just that amount in my

...an estimated 16.4 million women packed their bags and explored the world on their own in the past three years....



Seventy-one year old JoAnn Smith of East Amherst, NY, quotes Franklin Roosevelt when others question the safety factor of this five-foot, two-inch grandmother traveling alone.

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," Smith said as she was making preparations for her next solo exotic adventure.

As a retired college administrator, Smith acquired experience traveling on business in the continental

hand, ready to pay." In a hotel, she asks for a women's only floor, and if that is not available, she asks for a room closer to the elevator, rather than the far end of the hall.

Smith sees herself as an adventurer of sorts. She has already visited all seven continents, kayaked around icebergs in Antarctica, and climbed Machu Picchu in Peru.

"The self-satisfaction that I can handle this alone is exhilarating," she said.



Smith sees herself as an adventurer of sorts. She has already visited all seven continents, kayaked around icebergs in Antarctica, and climbed Machu Picchu in Peru.



## A Conversation Among Women

### Getting Started

Before you set off to tackle the summit of your dreams, you may want to ease your way into the solo travel experience with a short cruise or small group travel experience.

There are an endless number of specialty cruises and group travel opportunities that focus on hobbies, history, culture or adventure. Many of these trips are specifically designed with the solo traveler in mind (not singles looking for companionship) and create opportunities to make new friends.

The options for solo travel are almost limitless. You can have a room or table by yourself, or you can cut costs with a roommate and be confident that your similar interests will make the accommodations pleasant for both of you during the length of your journey.

Talk with your travel agent about your concerns, and he or she will be able to direct you to group travel experiences that should minimize those first-time jitters. Whether you choose to stay close to home or take that trip-of-a-lifetime, there has never before been such an amazing

opportunity to see and experience the world's great destinations. JoAnn Smith calls group travel a nice safety net and says that land tours in particular offer a variety of opportunities to do your own thing for a day or evening, or stay with the group throughout the journey.

### The Experience

Many women find tremendous freedom in traveling alone. "You can set your own schedule and pace," comments Wendy from Buffalo. "You meet people where you are staying or eating—you are not hindered by obligations to traveling companion(s)."

For those who fear that they'll have no one to talk to during their travels, Wendy has found the opposite to be true. "I think people are more likely to talk to you if you are alone than with someone else," she said.

It's the same sort of experience Charleen Capwell had on her first solo journey. She booked a four-day excursion to the Bahamas because she was afraid she would be totally alone and uncomfortable, but within 24 hours she was wishing she had booked a longer trip.

"From the hotel, I booked day trips for snorkeling and other activities," she said. "When I was in these groups, people talked to me and invited me to lunch

or dinner, and it turned out to be a really nice experience."

Capwell suggests women who are nervous about feeling lonely should sign up with a tour that keeps them very busy with lots of activities.

"The first day of the trip is the hardest, because you don't know anyone. After that, though, you will find that the world opens up to you," she said. "You will make acquaintances and usually by day three or four, I have hooked up with other people and it's easy from there."

Josephine Cross, a 60-year old Western New Yorker, enjoys the opportunity to eat alone and people watch. "The first time or two, I was a little self-conscious about being alone, but I got over it really fast," she said. "I always take a book or a newspaper, but I enjoy watching people and the freedom to eat where and what I want."

Cross, who was so excited after taking her first trip alone, said that the whole solo travel process is about attitude and how you view yourself. "I actually made it through all the airport connections without someone else to lean on," she said.

"Don't think of yourself as a lonely person traveling by yourself, but as a person who is interested in seeing new things, meeting new people, and having new experiences; because that's exactly what you are." *GP*

**travel experts**  
*Traveling Solo*

**Amherst**  
Ruby Nunez  
rnunez@nyaaa.com  
716.630.3250

**Ken-Ton**  
Alicia Frost  
afrost@nyaaa.com  
716.873.0111

**Orchard Park**  
Mary Ann Preljeva  
mpreljeva@nyaaa.com  
716.675.4900, ext. 222