

I never realized how many luxuries I have as an American until I studied abroad in Turkey. I had to adjust to the fact that I could not travel everywhere I wanted or do whatever I wanted. While women travel for many of the same reasons men do and desire the same freedoms, their safety needs, are very, very different. Female travelers are directly affected by the religious and societal beliefs of the countries they visit. As they make their way around the globe, chances are they'll be asked to adapt the way they dress or the manner in which they interact with the male population. They might even find that, in some places, it is inappropriate to be outdoors after sundown. The more that women prepare themselves for these differing attitudes, the richer and safer their traveling experiences will be.

I. Travel Smart

When I was packing for my time abroad, knowing that I would be gone for a long time, I packed everything I thought I would possibly need for every type of situation. I soon realized that this was a mistake. It's a good idea to travel light. As a woman alone, you'll be far less vulnerable and much more independent, if you're not loaded down with heavy luggage and extra bags. A small suitcase on wheels or a backpack is a good luggage choice, and try to make sure you have a least one hand free at all times. Another thing that I soon realized was that packing lots of fashionable shoes was not helpful. When you are abroad, you are most likely going to be walking a lot, so I highly recommend packing comfortable shoes.

II. Dress Sense

Give some thought to how you dress before traveling abroad. In America, you encounter few, if any, clothing restrictions, so this may be difficult to assess at first. Leave your valuables at home. If you plan to travel into developing countries and conservative societies, make every effort to dress modestly. In some places, customs based on religious and moral beliefs strongly influence the way native women dress. For you to break these rules blatantly would be considered irreverent and may even put you in jeopardy. Why not adapt your clothing to fit the customs of the host country? It becomes an interesting and educational challenge. Also, when visiting a religious site, a woman should always dress conservatively. I found it useful to carry a scarf in case I needed to cover my head. Outside North America, a one-piece swimsuit is always a safer choice than a bikini. In some countries, local women may swim entirely clothed, in accordance with their religious beliefs.

III. Avoiding Harassment

Unfortunately, the potential for sexual harassment and intimidation is a reality in the U.S. and around the world. Be prepared. Do your research before you leave: find out as much as you can about the roles of both women and men in places you plan to visit. Avoiding provocative, form-fitting clothing is the first natural step to protect yourself. A woman traveling alone may be considered fair game. If you understand this and prepare yourself mentally for any propositions, suggestive comments or catcalls, it will save you much

hardship. It is best simply to ignore them. In some male-dominated cultures, it is considered inappropriate for women to travel alone. For these and other potentially challenging destinations, you might want to travel with a companion. Two women traveling together will have an easier time. In some cultures, making eye contact with a man is a sign that you want his company. Some women solve this problem by wearing dark glasses. Be aware that you'll probably be stared at openly. In countries where you look very different from everybody else, both men and women will make no attempt to hide their curiosity. Behave confidently. When you're out, try to look as if you know exactly where you're going and what you're doing. Take your cue from the local women. As a general rule, if they don't sit in cafés alone, you shouldn't either. If they aren't wearing sleeveless dresses, neither should you. Never accept car rides or hitchhike. Crowded trains and buses are perfect opportunities for some men to touch or pinch the female passengers standing close to them. To avoid these types of advances, consider choosing reserved seating.