

▣ Advice for Eating Alone

Probably the most mentioned issue articulated by women considering solo travel is a fear of eating alone. And I can totally identify. I am sure even Madonna, Meryl Streep and The Queen if asked would admit to hating dining alone. We all have this misguided idea everyone is looking at us and therefore feel conspicuous, when really if we analysed it would soon realise those around us really are not at all interested in the fifty year old broad with highlighted hair, wearing sensible shoes eating by herself. People are too concerned with their own little worlds to consider us. Remember this truth when nervous about anything.

▣ Advice for being the Older Women Traveler

Many women have an image of the lone female traveller as a twenty something skinny suntanned backpacker, with open toed sandals, numerous tattoos, minimal underwear and sun bleached hair and can see no relationship between this Aphrodite and their post menopausal being. The few mainstream guide books which consider solo travel and women contribute to this image by addressing issues such as coping with menstruation on the road and unwanted sexual predation, while at the same time failing to discuss the need for frequent bathroom breaks and therapeutic insoles, hence alienating again the older cohort. If you go at your own pace, schedule rest time, wear sensible footwear and adjust any itinerary according to personal health and fitness needs, nothing should stop you.

▣ Embrace the Benefits of a Menopausal Being

Before menopause whenever I booked a trip the first thing I calculated would not be the cost, the emotional impact on my children, the clothes I needed, but instead I would assess the

probability I would be having my period when away. For this avid female traveller the joy of not packing tampons is akin to gaining an engagement ring from George Clooney. And it was not until the monthly unannounced bleeding stopped did I realize what a pain menstruation is to the travelling woman. Menstruation can be embarrassing not only for those in this state, but for those around. Let me share. During one of my first trips to North America I found myself in the washroom at the back of a Greyhound bus in New Jersey. I was sitting on the toilet and balancing a wrapped tampon on my knee when suddenly the bus jerked and the cylindrical device fell to the floor and rolled under the locked washroom door and into the corridor of the bus, where it continued to roll around for my entire three hour journey, and maybe beyond. The journey was tense. Just when I thought this wad of cellophane wrapped cotton had made its last appearance and thankfully been wedged under a seat, or become stuck in an air vent, it would re-appear, content to entertain the bored passengers as it danced around the moving vehicle. Of course I, and my fellow passengers tried to ignore it but, as luck would have it, a six year old boy whose stupid mother had failed to bring anything to entertain her son on this journey did insist on asking in a loud voice if he could go and pick up the white tube. When denied the opportunity the child then gave an articulate full account of the tampons location, velocity and direction. This three hour journey took a lifetime to complete. Is it any wonder I love my post-menopausal, non-bleeding body?

Washroom Advice

Now let me discuss probably the most important subject in this book and one most guide books skim over or fail to address. Where to pee and poo. When I was younger this was not such a big issue – I could go for ages without the need of a washroom. Two kids and age means this option is no longer available. Travel Rule Number 1: if you find a nice clean loo use it, even if you may not feel as if you want to, you never know when the next opportunity will present itself. This is particularly true for European cities and early on in the vacation when familiarity with the new city has yet to be established. In my life I have probably wasted a week of valuable holiday time wandering around cities in search of clean washrooms. On

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Excerpts from *Time To Take Flight*

a positive note these excursions have undoubtedly introduced me to some interesting places not in Fodor's guidebook, most recently in a washroom in an old established hotel in Santa Fe where I had to stop myself taking a 'selfie' the tiling was so good.