

Traveling solo opens up a world of opportunity

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<http://www.thedailyaztec.com/features/travel-adventure/traveling-solo-opens-up-a-world-of-opportunity-1.1877932>
 Traveling solo opens up a world of opportunity Ditch your comfort zone and discover a foreign country by yourself By Jared Whitlock, Staff Writer Print this article addthis_pub = 'gwensreply'; addthis_logo = 'http://mockups.collegepublisher.com/cmn_white.jpg'; addthis_logo_color = '666666'; addthis_options = 'favorites, email, digg, delicious, facebook, myspace, google, newsvine, technorati, twitter, more'; addthis_brand = 'College Media Network'; addthis_offset_top = -16; Share this article Published: Tuesday, September 15, 2009 Updated: Tuesday, September 15, 2009 MCT Campus Traveling alone guarantees a liberating trip. Perfect for soul-searching or fully discovering new places, traveling without accompaniment can make for a rewarding and unforgettable experience. However, before ditching all contact, make sure to be fully prepared for and knowledgeable about the planned destination's culture and surroundings. Once all the research is completed, grab a bag and get ready for the experience of a lifetime.

For many students, the ideal vacation means enjoying foreign lands with family, friends or a large group, which can be a lesson in compromise. To avoid the pitfalls of group schedules and budget negotiations, consider traveling alone. But note the pros and cons of traveling solo, and keep these tips in mind when embarking across the country.

Traveling alone is liberating. A hectic schedule is the natural result of group traveling because each person's interests must be taken into account. However, the pace of solo travel is slower. The solo traveler is free to explore and immerse him or herself in the surrounding area. Go wherever, whenever. Travel is more enjoyable without having to worry about others' expectations.

Arriving in a foreign place alone is initially lonely, but the excitement of the new environment spurs a mindset that's open to new experiences. When traveling with others, travelers often stick to the group, but once alone, a traveler is forced to socialize with and befriend unfamiliar faces. Fortunately, others are generally receptive and curious about solo travelers. Ultimately, the solo traveler has a better understanding of the local culture he or she would have otherwise missed out on. If mingling with locals is difficult, try staying at a hostel to meet like-minded people.

Although traveling alone is an enlightening experience, remember that solo travel carries a stigma that's likely to elicit a checklist of worries from close family members: It's dangerous, lonely and a lot of responsibility. These are valid concerns, so reassure worried family members by researching potential travel locations to ease their anxiety.

Research the local culture with Web sites such as www.lonelyplanet.com and www.tripadvisor.com to discover what the acceptable behavior, traditions and dress standards are in the area. Make sure to practice speaking the native language so communication is more fluid. Also, get familiar with the nearest hostels, restaurants and best destinations to map out an effective game plan.

If on a budget, check out Web sites that cater to the independent traveler such as www.hospitalityclub.org and www.couchsurfing.org. Try making accommodations before leaving, so family members can be notified in case of an emergency.

One of the downsides to solo travel is greater vulnerability to theft or attacks. Security takes on a new level of importance, but there's no need to be paranoid if necessary precautions are taken. Pack as lightly as possible and leave any jewelry or valuables at home. Also, let others know about the solo excursion, but don't be overtly obvious about it. And making friends is great, but don't become dependent on others for help or any information.

Leaving a comfort zone without a reference point or anyone to rely on is intimidating. However, these are the times the solo traveler can learn the most about him or herself.