ForeWord Reviews

Wanderlust and Lipstick: The Essential Guide for Women Traveling Solo

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Media images of vacations tend to depict happy couples hiking, swimming, or biking with a scenic vista in the background. Some scenes sport children looking blissful or a rugged man tackling a mountain or hitting the ski slopes. Rarely are there images of women alone, navigating unfamiliar streets or eating solo at a sidewalk cafe. And that's a shame, believes this author.

Women tend to have reservations about traveling on their own, Whitman observes. These anxieties range from fears about personal security and health risks to guilt about leaving a partner and kids to fend for themselves. But traveling alone can be a joyous experience, particularly for women, she notes, because it allows them to find a sense of self-reliance, adventure, and freedom.

In her guidebook, Whitman offers a range of useful tips about packing, ticket purchases, tipping, and all the usual fodder that make up travel tomes. But blended with the practical advice is deeper, more compelling guidance designed to persuade women that traveling alone isn't selfish, dangerous, or expensive. It's difficult, Whitman acknowledges, and she travels with relentless gusto, like a well-versed travel agent who's sipped the local wine, slept on hostel beds, and camped in the middle of the Australian outback.

Whitman has the experience to back up her claims, and before she launches into her recommendations, she relates her tale of a first solo trip—from Seattle to Panama by motorcycle. The journey was challenging, but instilled in her a sense of wanderlust that's kept her globe-hopping ever since, logging hundreds of thousands of solo miles as both a backpacker and businesswoman.

Once she realized that she could travel alone happily, Whitman began persuading other women to get out of their homes and into the great unknown. Her previous travel writings and photographs have won the Joe Christian award and been published in *BMW Magazine* and *Maiden Voyage Magazine*, she is a travel blogger for the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, and teaches workshops and publishes a website for women traveling solo.

Perhaps the most useful sections are the first three chapters, including "Why Travel Solo?" and "Getting Beyond the Excuses." With her brisk, persuasive tone, Whitman could

convince an agoraphobe to consider a trek to the pyramids or the Great Wall of China. Although she outlines many reasons that table-for-one journeys are enriching—from setting one's own agenda for the day to being more approachable to strangers looking to strike up a conversation—Whitman is careful to show that she understands the potential trepidation, and its causes. In addressing these fears, she's less a cheerleader than a wise guide, calmly smoothing anxieties as she goes.

"Yes, it does take more emotional and physical energy to travel solo," she writes. "You'll need to be hyper aware of your surroundings to overcome challenges and avoid dangerous situations, all the while being responsible for your personal possessions. These hassles pale, however, in comparison with the rewards."

Especially striking is the "Excuses" section, which lists the barriers she's heard many times: What if I get lost? What if I get bored? Isn't being alone lonely? Without being dismissive, she acknowledges the challenges, but also tries to readjust a reader's way of thinking.

"We all carry with us the anticipation of what will be most difficult to overcome during a solo journey," she says. "Much of what we anticipate is nothing more than our own fears spinning tales of disaster in our heads, while other fears are bona fide concerns." Artfully, she separates the irrational from the well-founded, and leaves readers better informed.

Beyond helping women leap over the emotional hurdles that might be stopping them, Whitman proves to be a crackerjack travel advisor as well, tackling numerous topics in a breezy, no-nonsense tone. She includes a range of considerations, from female health issues to culture shock.

By tying together the emotional with the practical, Whitman really does create an essential guide. Not only will it spark readers to plan a dream trip and get beyond any excuses, but also it gives them useful tools for working out the details, such as dressing for different cultural norms, ensuring personal safety in hotel rooms, and getting over language barriers.

Although the media might be saturated with those images of frolicking couples and vacationing families, it's time to change the current perception, Whitman argues convincingly. Hopefully, this handy, jauntily written guide will launch women out into the world, one dream trip at a time.

Elizabeth Millard