

BENGALURU

## Women travelling solo has taken off, and how!



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**Many clubs and firms are catering exclusively for women heading out to exotic destinations without family and friends**

The number of people bitten by wanderlust may have never been higher. But there is a section that is leaving behind more than just work and worries before setting out on an exciting journey; a growing number of women are heading out to exotic destinations without family and friends for a carefree journey with strangers.

A study by HolidayIQ, a holiday information portal, on what women want found that 72% of the respondents wanted to travel solo, while 61% wanted better access to remote destinations. This 'want' has resulted in a growing number of clubs and companies catering exclusively for women travellers in the city.

### **Increase in tours**

Malini Gowrishankar, founder of F5 Escapes, a city-based women-only travel company, said the number of tours they operate for women had increased substantially. "From operating nine small weekend tours when we started in 2013, we are now operating over 60 tours, with almost all of them getting sold out. While the early travellers of our tours were mostly single women in Bengaluru, now women with family and kids have started joining. Over the past year, we have seen demand from tier-2 and tier-3 cities such as Rajkot, Bharuch, Indore, Guwahati, Jodhpur, Port Blair, and Coimbatore – a sign that more women are taking to travelling by themselves."

On what has brought about the change, Sumitra Senapaty, founder of Women on Wanderlust (WoW) Club, one of the pioneers of women-only travel, said, "When we started in 2005, a lot of women would express interest in the concept and would ask for time to discuss with family and get back. Nine out of 10 people would never come back. The numbers have turned around now. Women are deciding for themselves and the only consideration is finance and getting leave from work." From just 25 traveller a decade back, WoW now gets 3,000 travellers a year. Also, there are a lot more women travel groups which are serving as an inspiration.

Women travellers said solo travels were an empowering experience. "We don't have to think about feeding kids, sleeping on time, or of any family related responsibilities when travelling alone. Each trip is a journey towards understanding oneself," said Preeti Kumar, a software professional and mother of two.

"The rewards of travelling solo far exceeds the concerns of safety and there is no one to clip your wings," said Aarti Shyamsunder, 38, an organisational psychologist who has been travelling solo for a few years now.

Travelling solo also allows women push themselves to do things that they would not when they are with family or friends. "A woman might not be able to do some adventure activities when travelling with family, but it is not the case when travelling alone. We are able to try out things we wouldn't otherwise and this makes the travel experience more rich and fulfilling," said Deepa V., a freelance HR trainer and a solo traveller.

### **Expanding social circle**

But the biggest reward for women travelling solo is the creation of an alternative social circle. Ms. Shyamsunder, who joined F5 Escapes on a trip to Chikkamagaluru, said she had

and her long friends. Since then, she has been on numerous solo trips and now even leads tours for F5 Escapes.

### **Safety remains a concern**

While more and more women are choosing to travel solo, safety remains a concern. Travel organisers said booking hotels in the centre of the city and avoiding late-night escapades are the best ways to stay safe.

“As long as a woman is aware of her itinerary and surroundings she can keep herself safe in most places,” said Malini Gowrishankar, founder of F5 Escapes.

But, there are places where women feel a lot more comfortable travelling. In India, women prefer travelling to places such as the northeast, Ladakh, Puducherry, and Hampi where people are a lot more welcoming and hospitable. Europe is considered one of the safest foreign destinations by women solo travellers, according to organisers.



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