



HOW TO TACKLE SOLO FEMALE TRAVEL IN INDIA LIKE A PRO

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Somewhere during the past decade, travelling to India on pilgrimage became the pinnacle of solo female adventures. It might be a sign that our generation feels a little disillusioned by life and Western culture, so we go abroad seeking eye-popping moments in spiritual lands.

Or it might just be the enlightened glow of Julia Roberts in *Eat Pray Love* that had us all inspired to the max. Whatever the case; this awe-inspiring trend is not slowing down. Travelling to India alone as a woman is both exhilarating and daunting in equal measure. Here, we map out a few points to consider whilst stuffing your silver jewels and aum scarves into your well-travelled bag.

Get your journey started with [some ideas](#) here...

Give some serious thought to your starting point

If you're flying into India from a far off land, chances are you'll be tossed in the midst of a manic metropolis like Delhi or Chennai. Whilst you may be eager to get out and kick off the adventure asap, you may find it better to fly on to somewhere less overwhelming where you can get your bearings and slowly adjust to your new setting. This is not to say you need to bypass the big cities altogether, but saving them for a later date when you're an India travel pro (and perhaps even have a few travel companions by your side) could save getting off on the wrong foot.

Don't be afraid to use public transport

You may have heard a few unnerving stories about travelling around India on public transport. And the ones in circulation are particularly harrowing for women planning on travelling alone. Although you should always travel cautiously, it's important to keep these stories in perspective. For most tourists, travelling on public transport in India proves to be a welcoming and safe experience, often a highlight of the trip. You may find yourself being offered help, guidance and free samosas without even having to ask. If you're still concerned, you can be extra vigilant by riding in the sleeper carriage which tends to be settled and relaxed, particularly when compared to the general carriage which sees a lot of passenger

movement on and off the train. Also look for buses and trains that depart during the day to save being at the station in the evening.

Don't try to tackle a geographic area that's bigger than your time limit can handle

India moves to a unique rhythm of organised chaos, and settling into that rhythm can be hard work. To save yourself from a state of complete frazzle, it's best to pick a geographic area that suits the time limit you've put on your Indian adventure. If you have just a couple of weeks up your sleeve, you may wish to stick to one state; perhaps it's Rajasthan with a sneaky side trip to the Taj. Those keen to start by sipping coconuts on a beach in Kerala and finish by sailing a houseboat around a Himalayan lake in Jammu and Kashmir (seeing everything in between, of course) should clear about 6-months and prepare for a life-changing and wonderfully disorderly adventure.



Image via @emelinaah

Understand cultural differences that may impact your interactions

Scrap all the notions you have about personal space, dealing with strangers and Western ideas of good manners. In fact, just scrap all your notions about life entirely and waltz into India with an open mind and willingness to adapt. If within the first 3 minutes of meeting someone, you find yourself being quizzed on your father's occupation or what you had for breakfast,

this is not necessarily a prying interrogation that could lead to a serious stalking situation. It's usually just a genuine curiosity. If a rickshaw driver invites you to his family home for an afternoon snack and hot tea, you're more likely to find yourself being shown family albums and school certificates than being robbed blind and left regretful. Unwarranted Facebook friend requests and sweaty hustles in disobedient queues - it's all part of the fun.

Follow the rules, particularly at religious sites

Even if it's a scorching 39 degrees. Even if you're in Goa where sunbathing topless seems tolerated. Even if you've heard stories that suggest the rules can be broken. Behave! Dress appropriately; ask instead of assuming; don't take that sneaky photo, and don't ignore that no shoe sign. Just behave. A big part of India's charm lies in its deep-rooted spiritual devotion, and when in another country you need to respect this.

Seek spiritual guidance wisely and with flexibility

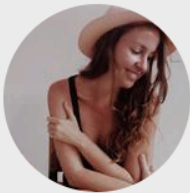
Tales of wise Hindu gurus and magician like Ayurvedic doctors are not hard to stumble across amongst India's texts. And to uncover this more mystical side of the country you need to travel with a healthy dose of openness, leaving any rigid scepticism at home. Forgetting your street-smarts and wearing a cloak of naivety, however, can leave you vulnerable to encounters that are dubious at best, horrific at worse. Do your research, consult those who've been before, and always trust your gut instinct.



Image via @cassiebroa

Leave behind all of your headstrong ideas about how the trip should pan out

It's not uncommon for solo female travellers to venture to India with a very vivid picture painted of how their trip should look. Ashrams, bouts of silence, vegetarianism, gurus found, Yoga daily, abstinence from everything that soaks the playtime hours of their life at home. Though this is both admirable and achievable, it's also important to remain realistic and flexible. Travelling in India can be testing. If by week four you need to check yourself into a swanky boutique hotel in Bombay and sip a few martinis on a rooftop terrace, that's okay. You have not failed, and the rest of the world has no right to judge your spiritual resilience.



SAMANTHA CHALKER

Samantha Chalker is an Australian travel writer most commonly found swinging from the palm trees of India or Indonesia. On cloudy days you'll find her sucking Wi-Fi from vegan cafes, experimenting with plant dyes, hunting down traditional artisan treasures, and trying to get good at [Instagram](#).

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