

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BLOGGING: A WINDFALL TO FEMALE SOLO TRAVELERS WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Every journey or excursion starts with a dream. Social media and blogging are becoming even more relevant and reliable than actual advice from friends and family. Users are greatly influenced by visual platforms like Facebook and Instagram when deciding where to go and what to do. Using hashtags on social media makes it simpler to find content related to popular travel locales or themes. Modern solo travelers are a rising segment of the rapidly expanding global tourism industry, and female solo travelers have seen particularly strong and significant increase. The study will highlight the changes that these women tourists are bringing to the tourism industry in all of its aspects, including financial, cultural, safety, and social, by identifying the causes and motivations for women choosing to travel alone, as well as the challenges that come with it, and by examining the significance of women travelling alone. For the study from 2010 to 2023, secondary data from a variety of research papers, reviews of the literature, articles, travel blogs, and other relevant social media contents, such as Facebook groups, Instagram, have been examined. Women who travel alone often encounter a variety of difficulties, but the new generation of tourists is pressuring service providers to place a greater emphasis on women-friendly arrangements, ones that encourage women to travel without putting their safety in jeopardy. Major motivations for travelling alone were identified during the survey as: overcoming stress, bringing about positive change in current circumstances, escaping daily life, happiness, empowerment, self-improvement, and transformation.

Keywords: Women solo travelers, Social media, Blogging, Tourism, Opportunities, Safety and security, Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

For some people, travelling means different things. While some people travel for fun or relaxation, others go in search of adventure and novel experiences. And one of the popular market segments nowadays is made up of individuals who want to travel alone, particularly women who prefer to handle all elements of their vacation alone. According to the tourism literature, a "solo traveler" is just someone who arrives in a country by themselves (Foo, 1999). Women were known to travel mostly as pilgrims for religion or to visit sacred sites. However, as the pay for women professionals has increased, there has been an increase in the number of women travelling alone, both domestically and abroad for pleasure, education, and self-understanding. Women nowadays are not willing to compromise on their independence, choices, or way of life unless given a good reason to. In recent years, the idea of a female solo traveler has emerged as an important tourism niche (Periera & Silva, 2018). Since the COVID-19 epidemic started, social distance has made travelling alone more appealing, especially post COVID-19 (Yang, E.C.L et al. 2022). On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic unintentionally has also reduced social interaction among people while simultaneously making solo travel more enticing for maintaining social distance (Sung et al., 2021). Women nowadays have learnt to live their lives as they see fit and are mounting beyond judgmental attitudes. According to McNamara & Prideaux B (2010), today every woman is a success story in her own manner. Solo female travelers are not loners; they are self-assured, brave, and courageous adventurers. They decide to travel alone in search of autonomy, personal fulfillment, adventure, individuality, and occasionally escape. The number of searches for "solo women travel" on Google rose by 59% in 2018 and by 32% in 2017. In 2019, the search increased by 230%. Due to the change in interest in the travel business, this increasing search volume is important for tour operators (Kow, 2018). A Facebook community called "Solo Female Travelers" has more than 27,000 members, including moms, sisters, aunts, professional women, and students who are interested in discovering small towns, large cities, mountains, vast deserts, beaches, wild life etc. (Kow, 2018). Earlier, women's safety concerns prevented them from flying alone. In many nations, it is still an active problem. As technology develops and women's knowledge generally rises, more and more women are travelling these days for business, pleasure, or both. Not all women are comfortable travelling by alone, but they still want to explore and enjoy themselves just as much as they do when they are with other people. And here is where social media and blogging come in extremely handy by keeping a small group of people informed of where you are with just a click. Women do feel secure. One of the most practical platforms is social media, which creates a thin barrier between virtual and physical worlds. Women today anticipate being informed about the travels of their dreams and popular spots on social media. Many women have been motivated and drawn to go to parts of the world they had never seen before with the assurance of information, connections, and the joy of sharing thanks to social media and blogging. In actuality, solo travel plays a significant role in achieving Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Travel has a long history, and in the 19th or 20th century, it was not recommended or accepted for women to travel alone. Girls and women are encouraged to be courteous and kind, and if inappropriate behavior like sexual harassment, abuse, or rape occurs, they are held accountable because of their clothing, late at night, or their solo travel. They have to compromise on every aspect, be it hygienic public restrooms, sanitary pads, or even lodging. Women used to be seen as the primary decision-makers for a family trip, but today, their roles are more varied and include individually planning for themselves as well as others. Due to this recent mindset change, solitary female travelers now have more options for general market consumption. According to Malik, (2018) women are increasingly seen participating in other forms of travel activities to further their personal development and keep up their physical well-being. Female solo travel is no longer a niche industry in the 21st century. It contributes significantly to the overall travel business on its own and has experienced tremendous growth in recent years. It is encouraging to note that Indian women are increasingly defying conventions and travelling alone, and there has been a remarkable increase in the proportion of Indian solo female travelers. India is a country that is both extremely old and very modern, highly advanced and very backward, cool and very hot, and absolutely safe (Goswami, 2020). Nowadays, women can travel alone for a variety of reasons, such as the pursuit of adventure, freedom, and a sense of personal fulfilment and individuality. Some of them may also travel for employment, business, and conference attendance; they may also take part in family gatherings, celebrations, and reunions from their time in school or college; they may also travel alone or with other ladies for leisure. More women are travelling to new places now than ever before thanks to improved connectivity, widespread internet use, smart devices, and increased social media exposure, whether they're domestic vacation spots like Mumbai, Goa, Ladakh, Bangalore, or Guwahati or international ones like Dubai, Singapore, Bangkok or London. Women who travel alone often experience negative social barriers related to safety and security, but after they get over these feelings, the journey itself becomes rewarding (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). According to the British Airways study (2018), 30% of Indian travelers want to travel in the next months, while about 47% of Indian women reported having gone alone at least twice to five times. According to ZeeBiz Web Team, the majority of solo travelers in India are between the ages of 18 and 25. Since security is one of the main worries for female solo travelers, destination managers could promote a safer travel environment, which might help them feel comfortable and at ease while on their solo adventure (Hamid, 2021). The region's stakeholders must gain a deeper grasp of these women and the kinds of activities they choose once they arrive at the destination because the overall number of lone independent women travelers is fairly significant. According to Bianchi, (2015) personal sentiments of independence, relaxation, and exploration as well as social interaction with other people were more important motivators for solitary travelers than aspects of the vacation site. The study also discovered that the biggest sources of discontent for

lone vacationers were safety and hostile service providers. According to research (Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2015), women prefer to travel alone in order to have that life-altering experience, but they also have to deal with unwanted male attention, sexual harassment and violence. The positive effects of travel experiences on wellbeing include improvements in health and wellness (Mokhtarian & Pendyala, 2018). Women travel alone more frequently than males do in many countries, and they prefer to do so regularly if they can gain worthwhile experiences (Bond, 1997). And the success of these women inspires other women to travel on their own without waiting for the ideal travel companion (Collins, 2018). According to Seow & Brown, (2018) the two primary motivations for travelling alone are independence and flexibility. It was discovered that independence was the driving force behind the intentions of the single female travelers. Escapism from the unhappy state was identified by Seow & Brown, (2018) as a further crucial factor. In their 2017 study, Durko and Stone sought to understand why women decide to travel alone or with others without their partners. The most crucial factors were shown to be female bonding, partner's personal limits, need for individuality, and getaway from daily life. According to a study by (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). on travel behavior, female lone travelers are daring, feel empowered to take risks, and aren't hesitant to partake in night time activities.

Women are inspired to travel as much as they can with the aid of various travel review websites, experience sharing portals, social media, and blogs. It offers them a wider range of possibilities and knowledge than their own real-life social groupings. Because social media has given the idea of travelling alone more traction, solo travel has unquestionably grown to be an incredibly ideal phenomenon. The term "solo woman traveler" is a hot topic on the internet. Many lone female travelers write blogs where they share their stories and advice. Many open platforms for public travel blogs currently support individual travel blogs. Good examples are travelblog.org, travelpod.com, blog.realtravel.com, yourtraveljournal.com, and travelpost.com. Puhlinger & Taylor, (2008) claim that travel blogs are "the equivalent of private online diaries", consisting of "one or more individual entries tied mutually by a general theme (for example, a trip itinerary)." Travel bloggers are those who start and manage travel blogs. Blogging makes one appear more genuine because one can share their experiences on a variety of subjects, including public transportation, train rides, scenic drives, things to do alone, relishing local cuisines, food and wine to try while visiting, generosity, local markets, non-touristy activities, festivals not to miss, hiking, camping, and backpacking, off-the-beaten-path locations, dispensaries, comparing destinations, what to wear while traveling, the best time to visit, etc.

Women can do anything. They are fully capable of succeeding in their careers, caring for their families, hanging out with their friends, following their interests, and taking time for themselves (me-time). And it's a source of pride that, as illustrated in **(Figure 1)**. below who often go solo travelling and enjoy their own company Even the hospitality sector is aware that this market has the potential to generate substantial sums of money. Following the development of special travel packages for them that will yield enormous benefits for India, the

trend of lone female travelers is on the rise (Manning, 2014). Others travel alone "by default" the first time since they have no travel companions, but after that initial experience, they start travelling alone "by choice" (Terziyska, 2021).

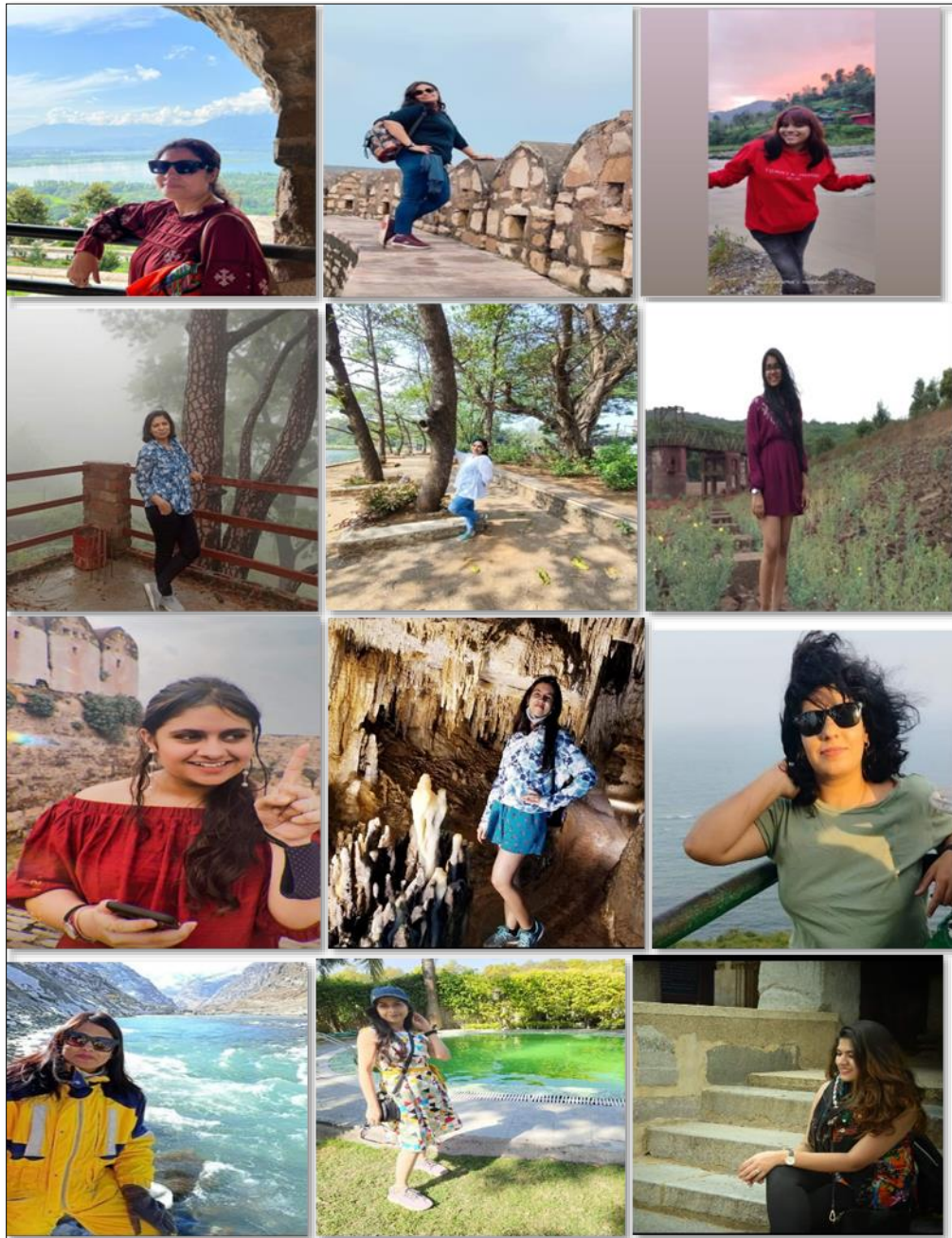


Figure 1. Female fearless solo traveler from various regions (Source: Researchers).

Despite all the cautions and few negative media coverages, India is actually a very good travel destination for women travelling alone in various ways. The major reason to visit India is that it is a unique location with enchanted cuisine, flavors that defy logic, vibrant fairs and festivals, heritage and culture,

yoga, Ayurveda and wellness, warm hospitality, safaris through nature, and much more.

Objectives

The purpose of the study is to analyse the significance of women travelling alone, the changes that these women tourists are bringing to the tourism industry in all of its facets, the difficulties that solo Indian women travelers encounter, and how to overcome these difficulties.

Research Methodology

The research that underpins the paper is descriptive. Secondary data was obtained from a range of research papers, journals, books, newspaper articles, and publications from 2010 to 2023 in order to accomplish the aforementioned goal. The information was also gathered from travel blogs written by a female solo traveler who frequently travelled on their own.

Blogging and Social Media as an Information Source

The term "social media" refers to a product of communication technology that fundamentally transforms the manner in which people communicate online into an interactive dialogue that takes place on a different platform (Trning,2015). Travelers these days like to find out information via social media, which includes blogs, online communities, social networks, and websites where people can share documents like YouTube and Flickr (Gretzel, 2006; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). Social media is also referred to as new media because to its superiority and innovation (Palupi, & Slavov,2020). According to Page, R. et al. (2018), new media has five key characteristics: openness, contribution, discussion, connection, and community. One of the professional efforts that social media encourages are travel blogs. A blog is a website that features the personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions of its author. It frequently includes photographs, audio, and video, as well as links to other blogs. Online blogs and social networking sites generally have constantly updated web pages, where posts are ordered chronologically with the most recent ones appearing first. A travel blogger, usually referred to as a travel writer or just a "blogger" is a person who travels the globe gathering information for writing about their travel experiences. These bloggers are the modern-day journalists. Therefore, social media in the form of traveler's blogs plays a significant role in promoting tourism in addition to serving as a medium for the formation of social identity. According to Solo Traveler 2021, searches for the term "Solo Women Travel" rose by 203% in 2019 compared to 2018. The number of posts categorized "Solo Female Travel" on Pinterest increased by 350%, according to Solo Traveler 2021. These solo females travel bloggers share vital information about the destination, particularly for female travelers, including famous fairs and festivals, packing lists, foodie tales, some restricted tales for meaningful travel, supportable living, self-discovery, learning about traditions, cultures, history and adventure activities, as well as safety and security for solo female travelers with the things to avoid at that specific location. Undoubtedly daring and the best at shattering all of the long-held prejudices are today's women. They have undoubtedly demonstrated their value, whether it be on the cricket

pitch, in the boxing ring or on the movie set! Few female travel bloggers of India are (Anushka, 9th March 2022 Retrieved from www. Grabon.in):

- The most renowned travel influencer in India, Archana Singh (Travel See Write), is also a public speaker, marketing strategist, and photographer. More than 60 nations have so far been visited by her.
- **Radhika sharma (Radhika Nomllers):** he lives in an exciting and adventurous world. She has travelled to several well-known tourist destinations in India and overseas, whether they were the breathtaking Kashmiri hills or the tranquil Pondicherry.
- **Ami Bhat (Thrilling Travel):** A travel writer, photographer, blogger, social media influencer, and author, Ami Bhat is known for her restless energy. She records the long weekends at the start of the year and prepares for the Heritage locations appropriately. She thinks that having fun does not need going very far. Instead, she asserts that exploring one's own home can occasionally be freeing. She also routinely updates the blogs with her flawless trip experiences, which accounts for her popularity.
- **Renuka Walter:** one of the tops "female solo travelers in India," is a multi-award-winning independent publisher at Voyager for Life and a digital content developer. Renuka follows her heart, and via her motivating travel narratives, one may experience locations with a lot more knowledge.
- **Arti Shah (My Yatra Diary):** One of the most seasoned travel writers, Arti has been living out her aspirations to travel and conquer the globe. With her captivating posts, she has encouraged millions of people to follow the spiritual path. She has received numerous accolades and prizes for her photography and writing abilities in addition to her travel blogging.

Travelling can also be a fantastic source of income. Numerous female travel bloggers have the chance to turn their love of exploring new places into a successful company as they share their knowledge, advice, and expertise with other travelers. The ability to work for yourself gives you more flexibility to manage other life duties as strollers and diapers become standard home items. Blogs not only provide a strong platform for a woman's voice to be heard.

Importance of solo travel for women

One can get over many concerns by travelling alone. The female explorers of the universe are likely to be travelling alone in this era of female emancipation. Sharing personal accounts of solo travel on social media or in blogs can encourage other women to embark on their own adventures and reduce stigma. Travelling alone doesn't mean one is all alone; in fact, the contrary is true. Instead, it is expected that one will encounter individuals from all areas of life. Regardless of age, going on a solo trip is "me time", putting oneself first. The voices of female solo travelers are heard on social media and in blogs, and travel businesses are now creating packages with them in mind. For the majority of these women, solo travel also serves as a way to spread awareness of environmental issues, promote eco-tourism, and develop their personal brands by

appearing on television and in print media (The Hindu Business Line, May 31, 2021). Travelling becomes an ever-changing road for shattering preconceptions in many sectors of life in India, where women are frequently told what they can and cannot accomplish. Women are travelling the world, from businesswomen to stay-at-home moms, discovering little towns, big cities, and even deep oceans. This is the ideal way for them to start their journeys of self-discovery and authorization (Raj. S. March 2020, Financial Express). Being own boss throughout the entire trip, empowerment, improved decision-making, autonomy from social expectations, self-discovery, experience to various cultures, the chance to recognize one's own strengths and weaknesses, full freedom, liberation, avoidance of work stress and spiritual fulfilment are some of the advantages or importance of solo travel for women in particular. As a result, there are a number of reasons-psychological, cultural, and personal-to travel alone, according to researchers and based on the literature review:

- Psychological motives (escape from routine work, change of environment, gaining independence)
- Cultural motives (sightseeing, visiting museums and galleries, tasting local food, learning about local culture)
- Personal motives (meeting new people, learning new skills, searching for identity)

Challenges as a solo women traveler

We live in a nation where parents play a significant role in decision-making, and for female travelers, it can be challenging to ask their families for permission because they perceive solo travel as a threat to their safety and because parents are constantly concerned about problems encountered while travelling to a foreign country. When it comes to travelling alone, women are at a disadvantage. "If something goes wrong with girls, it's their own fault because they brought their own problems by travelling alone," is a common judging statement. Even though travelling alone can be pleasant, it can also create significant difficulties, especially for female travelers.

Women also want to enjoy going out at night for parties, taking a nighttime stroll, sitting in a restaurant, or even going beachside. Because they simply cannot risk their lives, most girls avoid. Due to the expectations placed on solitary female travelers in India, there is a "unofficial curfew time" that must always be observed (Rajni N. 2020). Being a woman and travelling alone can be intimidating and stressful. The reaction of friends, relatives, and coworkers is really the largest hardship of travelling alone. Aside from personal factors, India is a difficult place to visit for a wide range of reasons, including as the country's high population density, harsh weather, poor infrastructure, sluggish transportation, convoluted governmental procedures, corruption, con artists, criminal activity, and culture shock. Travelling alone is still difficult in India. Long-distance solo travel in any form of public transportation is fraught with anxiety about being judged, robbed, teased, or even raped. The concept of solo travel is incomprehensible here. If a woman is single and has no obligations to her family, they will respond like:

- “How can you relish your travel solo?” Or
- “How will you pass your time throughout the travel?”

The thought of travelling alone while married and raising a family is the greatest sin but a married person can commit. This is the usual response of individuals like:

- “Travelling without the partner or kids? How can you afford that?” Or
- “Don’t they say anything for solo travel?”
- “Are your in-laws ready?”

The Indians are renowned for their kindness and hospitality, or "Atithi Devo Bhava." The family should always take the required safety precautions and pay attention to their surroundings, though. Additionally, it is advised to avoid nighttime solo travel and to dress modestly. Still, many locations, particularly rural or small towns, are introverted. Despite the fact that there are numerous websites dedicated to travel that just cater to women. However, a solitary female traveler still faces a few difficulties or hurdles, like:

- **Safety considerations:** Women travelers may experience increased safety worries because of cultural norms and gender-based violence, which is typically a top worry for lone travelers. Women travelers may need to take additional security measures, such as avoiding remote regions and being alert of their surroundings, to protect their safety.
- **Accommodations:** It can be difficult for single travelers, especially women, to find secure and comfortable lodging. In fact, certain inns and guesthouses could be reluctant to welcome female visitors or might charge more for a single room. To select a respectable place to stay, some advance study may be required.
- **Cultural norms and expectations:** Because India have a rich cultural legacy, there are numerous traditional gender roles and expectations that could affect the experience of a solo female traveler. Women may encounter some opposition or skepticism from locals who are unaccustomed to seeing women travelling alone because they are frequently expected to be accompanied by male family members or a male companion.
- **Language barriers:** India is a large country with numerous states and a variety of regional and local languages and dialects. If a solo female traveler does not speak the local language, communication may be difficult, especially in remote locations where Hindi and English may not be frequently spoken.
- Travelling alone might be difficult in terms of transportation, particularly if unfamiliar with the customs and modes of transit there. Given how packed cabs and buses may be, some women might find it difficult to utilize them alone.
- Women who travel have to compromise in many areas, including disinfected public restrooms and sanitary pads.
- In a few locations, it is suggested to dress locally to avoid harassment.

- When going alone, it is impossible to fully appreciate the stunning vistas. However, it can be difficult to always find someone who can take images at these locations. It can be much harder if the woman is an introvert.
- Because it's difficult to trust everyone, the hardest part of travelling alone for women is having to act as their own security guard and carry their valuables at all times.
- Constant worry about being judged, robbed, teased, or even raped.

Nightlife: Definitely not!

Although things are changing (modernizing) extremely quickly, India's society is still dominated by men and remains traditional (particularly in rural regions). India has an uneven population with many more men than women, which contributes to the country's strong sense of male dominance.

OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES

Being a woman travelling alone can be difficult, but with little preparation and safety measures, it can also be a positive and enjoyable experience. The following advice can assist solitary female travelers overcome their difficulties:

- Be mindful of the surroundings at all times. Be on guard. Never put full trust in anyone. Take time and always trust the gut feeling. If unsure of anything, never move forward.
- Share the itinerary with at least one person who can assist in an emergency after preparing and finalizing it.
- Taking a group trip or lodging in a hostel can be excellent ways to meet and make friends with other travelers. Having a companion can increase sense of security and self-assurance during city tour.
- Use of technology to determine the hotel's precise location in advance, its distance from the station or airport, and how to get there.
- Examine the information on the destination using reviews and advice posted on Facebook sites for linked travel-related apps like Booking.com, TripAdvisor, blogs, etc.
- Learn a few local terms: Knowing a few fundamental words and phrases in the area's dialect will help to get around the city and interact with residents. Additionally, it might demonstrate the efforts to respect their culture.
- Daytime travel is always preferred.
- Select a hotel in the metropolis as opposed to a remote, outlying area. Because staying in the city center is safer than staying on the outskirts and offers the chance to experience and explore the city more thoroughly.
- The taxi driver claiming that the hotel the traveler prefers is closed is one of the scams in India. If this occurs and the driver offers to take to another one (for

which the driver receives commission), simply decline and hire another driver to take to the prior hotel.

- To minimize unwanted attention, dress formally and modestly. Avoid wearing pricey jewelry or apparel, and make every effort to fit in with the community.
- Get a pepper spray or knife handy.
- Keep 100 on speed dial.
- Everyone enjoys going out to parties, but not everyone drinks to the point of being unable to walk. Always have fun in moderation and be aware of the surroundings.
- Master the skill of self-defense.
- Invest in travel insurance so as to lessen the impact of a theft.
- Before leaving on trip, read blogs about the typical scams or conduct internet research via Facebook.
- Don a phoney wedding band.
- When visiting abroad, try to have the embassy's phone number or at least the local police department's number. Get a more secure lock. Most of these thefts and assaults are committed by hotel staff members. Go online and buy an air BnB safety lock.
- If feel endangered, don't be hesitant to yell for help.

Women travelling alone can overcome the difficulties of doing so and have a safe and pleasurable vacation by following these guidelines. Few businesses, including those listed below, can set up excellent solo excursions for ladies both inside and outside of India (Shenoy S. 2021).

Women on Wanderlust (The WOW Club)

The WOW Club, or Women on Wanderlust is a Bengaluru based travel venture that was founded by Sumitra Senapaty in 2005.

Girls on The Go (GOTG)

Girls on the Go (GOTG) founded by a corporate lawyer, Piya Bose in 2008 helps women explore exotic destinations and fulfil their adventures.

Jugni

Nitesh Chauhan and Rohit Khattar, two young entrepreneurs founded Jugni to help women travel independently, so they can achieve their fullest potential. Women, with Jugni you can go for both solo and group trips with 14 people in a group.

Ladakhi Women Travel Company

It's truly an empowering feeling to stay in homestays run by women, trek up mountains with women guides and porters. Founded by one of Ladakh's renowned female guide, Thinlas Chorol, this travel company ensures dream trip to Ladakh is fulfilled in style.

CONCLUSION

A few well publicized sexual assault incidents from recent years serve as an indication of what could go wrong for female solo travelers. However, one shouldn't let this to deter them from travelling. Depending on the place, be cautious while travelling alone or about going out alone at night. When travelling alone, it's critical to be informed, aware of cultural norms and expectations, and proactive about the safety. Some of the more well-known benefits of travelling alone include the chance to get out of the comfort zone, meet new people and learn more about yourself. Additionally, it relieves stress and has positive effects on health and wellness. At the national and international level, women who travel alone now make up a growing portion of the travel market. The researchers concluded that destination managers should support solo female travelers and create a safer environment because security is a top priority for Indian women who come from a male-dominated society where they are viewed as 'weaker'. As a result, solo female travelers in India face numerous challenges at every stage of their journey.

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