

The lady's side of solo travel

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Travelling has transformed in dimensions. While the methods and mediums of travel have not changed, there have been implicit and direct changes overall through technology and global connectivity.

Sheema Hossain pointed out the ease of photo sharing from anywhere, and said, "I think Instagram has really changed the way we see travel, and pictures posted by popular Instagram-ers travelling alone has encouraged more women to do so on a global scale."

Regarding the increased number of women travellers, not only in groups, but for those who are going on their own, things have seen better light as the years pass by.

On this, Reema Islam said, "People have changed little, but immigration is much less of a hassle, as more women travel now, for work, or otherwise. Even a few years ago, when I was travelling alone to Nepal, the Bangladesh immigration stopped me for questioning, but that does not happen as often anymore. In many countries, solo women have easier access to hiring cars or getting a place on their own, places where, initially, this was frowned upon. However, while travelling, depending on where you are, attitudes from the local people have not changed much at all. They still treat you with a bit of caution, or are wary of a lady who is on her own, and will either try to be helpful, or stay away. But in most cases, the advantage is that it is much easier to accommodate one person. The downside is that women do need to be always on their guard".

Ayesha Rahman Chowdhury agreed on the increased number of women travellers as well, but also mentions opportunities that have grown out of this unique situation.

"Over the years, it has become much easier to travel alone for women. But there are still some concerns regarding safety, and we still have to be extra conscious about our surroundings and local notions. Business opportunists have tapped into this niche of the tourism industry, making it more acceptable and possible for women to navigate local areas and places around the globe on their own."

While going through numerous stories and admiring the endeavours of others, many young women have yet to undertake

their first journey alone. Going to a certain place within the country, or outside of the continent for work or studies is one thing, but just for the sake of travelling is another. The dilemma of safety concerns, more often than not, overcomes the iron clad will to visit a place.

Sarika Siraj, however, weighs in on the reality of this, and offers her first tip for

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the soon-to-be solo traveller, saying, "Never be afraid!"

"It is true that travelling solo as a girl involves some risks, but so does walking on the streets of Dhaka. You could suddenly die in an accident, but that does not stop you from going outside. So, why would you stay home, pondering on the question of assault? For me, it has never been a reason to stop myself from doing what I want to do. Being afraid, and staying inside feeds the oppressors more than anything else. It is by being afraid that we let injustice win. So, be fearless and do what you want to do. Trust your intuitions."

Ayesha Rahman Chowdhury commented on the issue of safety, saying, "As a tip, I would suggest staying connected and finding reliable contacts wherever you may travel, within Bangladesh or overseas.



Finding properly reviewed places to stay is another thing. Often, people overlook these criteria in order to reserve a cheaper accommodation, but it's now much easier to find affordable options which are also safe and comfortable, especially with options such as AirBnb and Couchsurfing."

The seasoned travellers too focus on safety. Shahnaz Parveen emphasised on the importance of proper researching, not only on the destination, but several logistical issues as well, including arrival times and travel routes.

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"I would also avoid travelling by night or picking flights that land in the evening or at midnight. The best solution is to travel by day and reach a good stopover by sundown, if not the main destination. And make the best use of translation apps and international SIM cards," she added.

Finances are a matter if you are travelling, whether it is at home or abroad. But there is a tendency to overlook finer matters like personal interests. On this, Sheema Hossain added, "Travel is expensive. It is amazing for building character

and a sense of self sufficiency, but it is also a luxury, and should be treated as such. Don't feel pressured into spending on a trip you can't afford just because your friends travel a lot. If it is something close to your heart, I recommend planning and saving well ahead."

Coming to Reema Islam, she advised to "...have a proper plan of action. Even if you go somewhere without a plan, be prepared, and come off as someone that knows what she is doing, or at least have a general idea of what you want to do and how to do it. It's great to be friendly and a smile gets you through any situation. But just to be safe, stick to travelling with either groups of people you meet along the way, or more than one person if you can. It helps with the costs as well."

Travelling, at its core, is an enriching experience. It should not be treated as a competition, but rather, embraced as part of becoming one with the ever shrinking world. It is less about the Instagram posts that cheapen the memories, and more about the journey and the new vistas. For the traveller in your soul, take that leap for once; don't throw too much caution out to the wind though! Go on happy journeys and come back with quirky stories that will live on.

By Iris Farina
Photo: Shahnaz Parveen, Reema Islam, Sheema Hossain, Sarika Siraj



Sarika Siraj

