

TOURISM & MORE'S "TOURISM TIDBITS"

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Protecting the Female Traveler

Since the inception of modern tourism women have played a significant role in the development of the world's largest composite industry. The tourism industry is proud of the fact that as one of the world's newest industries, women have played a profound role in tourism success. One only needs to attend almost any tourism or travel industry conference and to quickly note that women not only form a significant proportion of those in attendance, but also often are in the majority. Women hold top CEO positions throughout the industry to the point that no one in the travel and tourism industry gives a second choice to a person's gender. In the world of travel agencies, the great majority are women and at least in the United States women are often not merely travel agents but also the agencies' owners.

That is not to say that women have not been exploited in such roles as sexual professionals. Furthermore, women in at least some of the developing world often do not have the same gender-bias free opportunities as they do in the more developed nations. Gender equality, however is not equally distributed. Thus, while in some countries women have not moved beyond menial tasks in other nations such as Guatemala, Belize, and Tanzania women have made significant progress and are on par with their sisters in the more developed world.

In many nations around the world women hold cabinet level positions in tourism and head their nation's tourism industry. Women not only play a significant role in the tourism and travel industry but as more and more women have entered into the workforce, women have an important segment of the traveling public. **The term "single woman traveler" does not refer to a woman's marital status but rather to the fact that she is traveling alone, be that trip for reasons of pleasure or business.** Because women are now such an important part of the tourism and travel industry, they demand and receive specific travel amenities. Successful travel and tourism businesses, for example, take into account specific female security needs. Here are some ideas to consider for improving the security of your tourism entity or community for the "single " female traveler.

The world is not always fair to women. Although blatantly sexist and unfair in many parts of the world, a woman traveling by herself is considered to be "fair game." The first rule of thumb then is to know the culture to which you are traveling. If the culture tolerates "sexual harassment" then do everything possible to avoid single travel. Even in highly sensitized countries women should use extra precautions.

-Know your security strengths and weaknesses. Never begin to think of any form of security without first doing a clear analysis. Go through your locale and develop lists of what might be a special danger to female guests. While many women are good at spotting danger, it is not their responsibility to know each and every danger spot; instead it is the host community or business that needs to pay extra attention to female security needs.

-Educate your staff and then educate some more! Your security is only as good as the people who work not only in security but on the front lines. Take the time to speak with all front line personnel about women's security issues. Make sure they are sensitive to the special needs of women traveling alone and know how to give good and correct advice.

-Use social networks. Seek out networks that serve the traveling woman. Many of these networks can provide up to the minute advice. A quick search of the web provides a wealth of information regarding women's travel networks. When educating your staff and/or yourself about women's travel safety consider some of the following points:

*At hotels, whenever possible help female guests to avoid a first-floor rooms. These are the rooms that are easiest for a potential attacker to gain access. Instead seek the third or fourth floor, and in sight of the elevator.

*Always carry a flashlight. It is amazing how a flashlight may scare off a potential assailant.

* If your car breaks down do not stay in it alone. You are safer on foot than locked in a car that cannot move. If you are in a car you have become a virtual prisoner of someone coming along. Being outside on foot is not pleasant but does allow for mobility

* A woman should never walk alone on poorly lit paths, close to bushes or in places where you cannot be seen, this rule of security is as valid in the day as it is in the night.

* Remember that while all women may be subjected to rape drugs this is especially true of any woman traveling in a country that is not her own. Be careful of whom you drink with, what you drink and into whose vehicle you enter.

* Make sure that someone knows who you are and never forget that there are those who see a single woman as a prime candidate for sexual assault.

* When traveling abroad, even for purposes of business, dress according to the dictates of the host culture. While it is not fair to victimize a woman due to the way she may choose to dress, the fact is that in some cultures a woman is blamed for being assaulted simply due to the dress code that she chooses to follow

* Watch your purse at all times. Purse-snatchers and other crimes of distraction artists often seek out single women travelers and assume that women are easier targets than are men. Often purse-snatchers prefer crowded areas. Always stay alert in places like bus stations and during street celebrations, where you are likely to be jostled -- thieves use these circumstances to grab your purses, handbags and briefcases from women travelers.

* If someone does snatch your purse, let it go. If it is not a matter of life or death, then you are probably better off simply losing the item. If it is a matter of life and death, scream, run and hit the attacker where it will hurt the most.

The bottom line: while all travelers need to practice safe and secure travel habits and no matter who the person is there is always risk, single women travelers have a higher rate of possibly becoming victims. To avoid this problem always use an extra dose of common sense.