

Guide to solo travel



Sainsbury's Bank

If you're heading off on your own, whether on a solo business trip, or to parts unknown for the adventure of a lifetime, the following guide offers practical advice for safe travelling.

Rely on the same skills that you use at home – be observant, make sure your possessions are secure, and trust your instincts.

Before you travel, take the time to do some research.

Choosing your destination



Are you looking for adventure, to unwind, learn a new language, to get to know other cultures, or follow a hobby? Perhaps you have a running list of places that you've always dreamed of visiting. In some cases reasons for travel might be purely business and you'll have little or no control over the destination.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provides [up to date travel advice on their website](#), including safety and security notes, entry requirements and health and travel warnings so you can find out if there are any current problems in any of the countries on your list.

You might also want to consider language. Are you uncomfortable spending time in a place where nobody speaks your language, or would you consider this an adventurous challenge? If you're travelling alone, you might want to choose somewhere with a reliable transport system so you feel safe and secure getting around. All and more should be given consideration before you book.

If you're looking for adventure, have a look at volunteer work options. This could give you more of a support network if you're travelling alone and is an excellent way to get to know a country and its people, whilst also giving something back.

Do your research

Unless you're simply flying cross-country for a meeting, it's a good idea to do some research about your destination before you head off. There are a number of resources online that can help you familiarise yourself with local customs and information on your chosen destination. Make sure that your sources are current and reputable.

You should always familiarise yourself with local cultures and respect local traditions. Gain some knowledge about the best way to get around once you have arrived at your destination. Knowing what services like taxis should cost before you arrive can save you a great deal of money when you arrive. Is public transport safe? Should you be walking if you don't know the area?



It pays to be cautious but it's good advice not to overly panic yourself and talk yourself out of a trip. Solo travelling can be a safe and hugely rewarding experience.

Use common sense when making decisions based on your research. If you discover that an area that you thought would be interesting is dangerous, then cross it off your list.

Planning your trip

Whether you're a planning pro or planning phobic, it's time to dust off your notepad and start that list. Any trip away will involve a fair amount of logistics, from booking tickets and accommodation to planning what to pack and picking up a few essentials.

Even if your dream is to simply land and take to the road, it isn't a bad idea to book your first night of accommodation at your arrival destination, so that you at least know where you're going when you land. If you arrive late and your budget will stretch, arrange for a taxi to collect you from the airport.

Unless you're the type of person who thrives on stress, try not to leave things until the last minute. Not only will you be likely to pick up better prices on travel and accommodation, you'll be less likely to forget things.

Consider using an online comparison site to compare flight costs and look for reviews when selecting accommodation. For solo travellers, hostels can be a great place to meet fellow like-minded people but make sure you check as some hotels charge “Single Supplements”.

Check whether you will need vaccinations well in advance of your trip. The FCO offers Health information on the abovementioned website, and the [National Travel Health Network and Centre](#) provide country specific healthcare information.



Make sure that your passport is valid and will not be expiring soon. Some countries don't allow you enter if your passport is due for renewal within the next few weeks or months, even if you are due to return home before that happens. Also make sure that you have enough blank pages available for your journey.

To avoid last minute panic, arrange all the visas you need for your travels with time to spare. The FCO pages also include country-specific entry requirements.

Collect up the contact details for your credit and debit card providers, in case you lose your cards along the way. It's also a good idea to contact them before you go away to let them know where you will be – the last thing you want is for them to be blocked mid-journey because of unusual activity on your cards.

Booking your travel and accommodation



Conventional wisdom is that it can be cost effective to book your travel as far in advance as possible. Sometimes last minute deals are on offer, but airlines usually charge according to availability, with prices increasing as seats become limited.

You can book your air travel and accommodation direct online with the providers, or via a travel site where you can book a number of services at the same time. There are potential cost savings either way, though you may receive better client service if you book direct, as you will not have a third party between you and your travel supplier. However, booking everything through an ABTA registered

travel company will give you some protection if you have trouble with part of your trip. The ABTA website can give you more advice and information.

When you're searching for a flight, be sure to check your cabin and hold luggage allowance. Don't forget to factor in any additional charges like luggage and seat allocation fees when doing your price comparison.

Insurance – make sure you're covered

[Travel insurance policies](#) differ from provider to provider. Make sure you're covered for your specific type of travel before you go and that all your needs will be met. For example:

- Does your insurance cover you for one or many trips? It often doesn't cost that much more for multi-trip annual cover, so this could be worth considering if you will be travelling more than once in the next year.
- Is your luggage sufficiently covered for both loss and theft? What is the valuables limit?

- Does the cover extend to the geographic location(s) you are visiting? Does it cover any activities you plan to take part in during your trip?
- If you have specific medical needs, are these covered? Always ensure you inform your insurance provider of any medical issues prior to travelling.

Check for any restrictions in the policy and speak to somebody at the insurance company if you have any doubts. Also familiarise yourself with how to claim, and keep any necessary contact details readily to hand.

Business travel

Solo business travel is now a regular occurrence for many and whilst you may feel more confident on these types of trips, it's always worth being prepared and planning ahead.



Pack light – how light will obviously depend on how long you'll be away and the type of meetings and events you'll be attending.

As you're travelling for business, your appearance will be important, so roll or wrap your clothes in plastic or tissue paper when you pack them (your approach will depend on the fabrics). There are also a number of clever packing aids on the market to help you keep your clothes compact and wrinkle free.

If you're due to be away for some time and need to check in hold luggage, take a change or two of clothing in your hand luggage just in case your hold luggage goes astray. There are some fantastic Tardis-like garment bags available that meet hand luggage restrictions.

If you don't have one already, you may want to invest in a briefcase or laptop bag to carry your electronic equipment. This can help make your laptop secure and easily accessible when you go through security.

As with any type of travel, make sure that you dress in a way that is culturally sensitive and do some research into local customs if you are doing business with a culture that is unfamiliar to you.

Review the hotel your company has booked for you. If you have any reservations about it at all, discuss it with the relevant department at your work. If you arrive at the hotel and don't feel comfortable or safe, then do not hesitate to move. If you do move hotels, make sure you advise your colleagues and family or friends. Trust your instincts and make sure you feel confident and relaxed in your surroundings.

Packing – the essentials

The number one rule of travel, whether solo or otherwise: Pack light. Even if you pack ten changes of clothes, it's entirely likely that you'll end up re-wearing the ones closest to the top of your bag. Pack clothes with mixing and matching in mind, and restrict yourself to only a couple of pairs of comfortable shoes that are relevant to the purpose of your journey.



Select the kind of luggage that best suits the purpose of your travel – backpacks for adventure travel, garment bags for business travel and light-weight but sturdy 'wheelie bags' for more casual travel.

If you can manage it, travel with cabin cases to completely avoid the chance of lost or delayed luggage. Secure your bags with small locks (and keep the keys somewhere safe and memorable). If your luggage is lost or delayed due to [flight disruption](#), our helpful guide offers information on how to deal with it

When checking in hold luggage, make sure that you have readable tags that include contact details and the address of your next destination.

Ensure you have all the travel documentation that you need. Pack passports and visas along with reservation confirmations, medical certificates and other important documents together and keep them somewhere secure and easily accessible. Make copies of all important documents and leave them with somebody you trust. You may also wish to scan them and email them to yourself so that they're readily available in electronic format.

Pack a small basic first aid kit with things like pain relief tablets, insect repellent, plasters and sunscreen. If you are taking medication with you, carry it in its original packaging to make the content clear to customs officials.

Consider an e-book reader or download some books onto your smartphone as an alternative to trekking about with heavy books.

Learning the language



It will make life easier and help you feel more confident if you take the time to learn at least a few phrases in the language of the country you are visiting. Not only are the locals likely to be kindly disposed towards you for taking the trouble, but gaining some familiarity with the language can help you feel more at home.

If you're staying for any length of time, you may want to learn more than a few phrases, so consider taking a course before you leave home or when you get to your destination. There are plenty of internet resources to get you started. Have some fun prior to your trip and see if you can find a friend or family member who will be happy for you to practice with. And certainly carry a phrasebook, whether paper or digital, and don't be afraid to use it!

Be culturally sensitive

Being culturally sensitive doesn't simply mean dressing in a manner sympathetic to your surroundings. Pay attention to the body language of those around you for signals as to what is acceptable. How do people greet each other? Do they eat and drink in public?

The following websites offer a good first stop to help you explore country-specific culture and etiquette:

- [Culture Crossing](#)
- [Kwintessential](#)

Accommodation

It goes without saying that some places in the world are safer than others. If you find yourself in an area where you feel a bit uneasy, you need to make sure you feel happily secure when it's time for rest. Here are a few quick tips:

- Choose accommodation in a central and well-lit area of town.
- If you are uncomfortable with the room you are offered, request an alternative.
- Request a room that isn't on the ground floor, or a room where the window can't be accessed from the street.
- Carry a door stop / wedge along with you – not all rooms have deadbolts.
- If your room has a deadbolt, use it.
- Use the 'do not disturb' sign when you're out so that it appears that you're in your room.
- Call reception to have your room cleaned rather than leaving the 'please clean' sign out so that you're not announcing you're out of your room.

Handling money

Don't carry too much cash with you at once, and keep it in at least two safe locations so that you have easily accessible funds should one of your locations be compromised. A money belt or pouch could also be a good idea when visiting a known pick-pocketing area, or anywhere that will be at all crowded.

Other travel money options could save you carrying large amounts of cash including credit cards, cash passports (pre-paid money cards) and travellers' cheques.

For more information and tips on how to handle your money abroad, have a look at our ['Keeping your money safe abroad'](#) guide.

Safety tips

While none of us like to think about being at risk while travelling, just as it is at home, it is best to err on the side of caution, especially when venturing into unfamiliar areas.

- The number one rule is to listen to your instincts – if a place or set of people feels unsafe, leave.
- Be discreet in what you wear. You don't necessarily need to dress like the locals (which may not be appreciated in some areas), but you should be culturally aware when deciding how to dress.
- Stay in touch with friends and family while you travel so you have people who are aware of where you are and when. Always notify them of your itinerary before you leave.
- If you want to you could carry a safety whistle or an alarm with you.
- Remain clear headed and be aware of your surroundings.
- Leave your precious things at home to avoid tempting criminals.

What if something goes wrong?

Be confident that you can deal with whatever your trip throws at you and make sure you are prepared and well-armed with the information you need should anything unfortunate happen.

Keep important documents like insurance papers and telephone numbers to services like your credit card provider readily to hand.

The FCO offers useful [guidance for British nationals who are abroad](#), including what to do if your passport is stolen, you have to visit a hospital or you need financial help.

If something happens to your flight home and you become stranded abroad you can find lots of information on what to do in our [guide to cancelled flights](#).

Most importantly

Be prepared, be relaxed and enjoy your adventure.

Bon voyage!

For more [travel related tips and information](#), visit our tools and guides section.

Links:

- 1) <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>
- 2) <http://www.nathnac.org/>
- 3) http://www.sainsburysbank.co.uk/insuring/ins_travelinsurance_trv_skip.shtml
- 4) <http://www.sainsburysbank.co.uk/library/default/resources/dealing-with-flight-disruption.pdf>
- 5) <http://www.culturecrossing.net/>
- 6) <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>
- 7) <http://www.sainsburysbank.co.uk/library/default/resources/keeping-your-money-safe-abroad.pdf>
- 8) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-british-nationals-abroad-a-guide>
- 9) <http://www.sainsburysbank.co.uk/insuring/travel/cancelled-flights.shtml>
- 10) http://www.sainsburysbank.co.uk/travel/ins_travelmoney_tmo_skip.shtml#tab-tools-guides

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