

3 trends shaping the solo travel experience

The travel landscape has seen a significant shift over the past two years. Travellers have realigned expectations of their travel experiences; and they are more particular about where they want to go, when they want to go, and how they want to explore a destination.



Source: Supplied

One of the biggest drivers of this shift is the effects that the global lockdowns have had on individuals. Extended confinements, curbed social interactions, and heavy restrictions on travel have left travellers burning to get out and explore their favourite - and new - destinations. And they're not willing to wait about for anyone else before they get out and experience their world, their way.

This has resulted in a surge of interest in solo travel, which feeds travellers' realigned expectations. When you're travelling solo, you can build your entire experience 100% around where you want to go and what you want to do. The flexibility and freedom are very attractive, and also give individuals the space and opportunity for personal growth through the experiences they choose to enjoy.

Digital nomad society a driver of solo travel

The acceleration of the remote work culture has given rise to the emergence of digital nomads - individuals who travel the world and earn their living in the destinations they are visiting.

This has opened new and exciting doors in the travel space, for both travellers and the travel service industry. Lovers of travel are not as bound by having the money or time available to travel - saving up for months or even years to have enough of a 'travel nest egg' to visit and experience the destinations they desire. Depending on the type of work they do, of course, individuals can now earn a living and travel the world at the same time.

This flexibility of movement makes hotels very practical for the digital nomad who is visiting a city to experience some 'bucket list' things while needing to seamlessly continue with their work. Many hotels have developed a live-work-play offering providing digital nomads with accommodation along with the full functionality of an office, as well as access to information on travel experiences that they wish to add to their own itineraries - all in one place.

The digital nomad flux also opens up additional opportunities for both large and small travel and tourism service providers, who have a burgeoning market of solo travellers and the spend that they bring to tourism economies.

Accommodation providers could see massive growth in demand for short-term as well as medium-term accommodation. Post-Covid-19 travellers have acknowledged their desires and need to travel and at the same time having been kept in isolation for so long people want to socialise.

There has also been an uptick in solo travellers who manage to combine a business and leisure trip in one.

This could also be an immensely valuable opportunity for destinations that may not traditionally be thought of as ideal for solo travellers, such as the Kruger National Park.

"Bush lodges and safari destinations are the ideal 'working escape' for a business executive, who needs to get away from the constant demands on his or her attention at the office. It's quiet and peaceful in these out-of-city destinations, giving execs the time and space, they need to focus when working, while also allowing them to wind down on a game drive or take in the rest and relaxation that one generally feels when out in nature," says Anton Gillis, CEO of Kruger Gate Hotel.

Co-working facilities could also see profitable growth, as solo travellers seek suitable working spaces for short periods of time. And businesses that offer tourism experiences could see significant growth in this single-traveller income stream.

Boomers jump on solo travel train

Millennials are automatically thought of as the epicentre of this burst of growth in the solo travel trend. But Boomers seem to be taking up the solo travel momentum too, and there is a notable surge in Boomers travelling solo as well.

While Millennials represent the larger portion of the solo travel pool, mature globetrotters are closing the gap. Boomers had equivalent experiences during lockdown periods, so are in the same position as Millennials with regards to their views on travel, and maximising their life experiences.

"Baby Boomers are either looking towards retirement or are already in this life stage. For the portion of the population that has invested in retirement savings, this means that they will have both time and income to put towards travelling to the places they've always wanted to visit," suggests Tony Mallam MD of upnup, one of Africa's first passive micro-saving and investing platform.

Women accelerate solo travel

While solo travel as a whole is seeing ballooning interest, an increasing number of sources are indicating that women are

important drivers of this trend.

The flexibility of the remote work culture, women being financially independent, and the desire and confidence of women to travel where and when they want to, have dropped the constraints holding them back.

"Women are more empowered now than ever before. They are using this sense of empowerment to embrace life and experience different countries and cultures around the world. There is no reliance on anyone - just themselves - and women are taking their travels into their own hands, to experience the best that the world has to offer," comments Nicol Carelse, guest relations manager at Radisson Blu Hotel Waterfront.

Three tips on how to maximise solo travel adventures

Saving can amplify travel experiences

While working their way (literally) through the cities and experiences digital nomads wish to enjoy, it's a very smart idea to save up along the way. "By doing this, the working traveller has more cash available to amplify the number of things they can experience in a city," suggests Mallam.

Plan your itinerary smartly

Planning where you're going to stay and what you're going to do ahead of time can take a lot of stress and pressure off a solo traveller. "When 'the world is your oyster and every choice is purely yours it can become quite daunting to choose what to do, where to go, and where to stay," says Tshepo Matlou, Head of marketing and communications at online booking platform, Jurni.

Spend time researching the area you'll be staying in, and find out about any fun activities close by or events taking place while you're there. Forward-planning takes the guesswork out of figuring out how to get around so that you will really be able to maximise your experience once you're at your destination."

Find the best deals

When you're travelling solo, all of the expenses are on you. So you're going to want to save wherever possible. Finding the best prices and deals on flights, hotels, and even car rentals if you need wheels to get you around, is made really easy by using a travel search engine like Cheapflights, which compares prices and deals for you so you can choose what works best for you and your budget.

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