

Home / Travel

PREMIUM

The psychological benefits of solo travel, according to the experts



By Jessica Wynne Lockhart

7 Aug, 2023 03:00 PM ⌚ 5 mins to read



Learning to navigate unfamiliar terrain: solo travel fosters self-confidence and resilience. Photo / 123rf

In 2017, when Chelsea Tobin boarded a plane to spend just under [a month in Europe](#), the jitters were real.

“It was very outside of my comfort zone,” she says. “I’ve lived in [Auckland](#) my whole life and I was the first person in my immediate family to go to Europe, so it was quite a big deal.”

Her destination wasn’t the only thing that made it a defining trip — Tobin had also decided to [travel solo](#).

“I love the freedom that comes with just making the choices of where you want to stay, where you want to go. You’re not trying to compromise with another person,” says Tobin.

There’s no argument; travelling alone is the ultimate act of independence. You can choose where you want to go, on what timeline and within what budget. But research is also increasingly demonstrating that it can have even bigger payoffs. Regardless of whether you’re booking a months-long overseas experience or [a weekend getaway](#) by yourself, it can be a powerful tool for personal growth. Here’s why:

NOW PLAYING • Trip Notes: Hayley Holt on solo travel, and meeting new friends through Bumble

Trip Notes: Hayley Holt on solo travel, and meeting new friends through Bumble ...

Solo travel isn’t synonymous with loneliness. Instead, it teaches you to relish in the joys of solitude

Psychologist Nicola Cann — who writes for The Travel Psychologist, a website that explores the psychological benefits and challenges of [travel](#) — believes the pandemic may be partially to thank for the growth in the popularity of solo travel. For many, it was the first time they may have experienced true solitude and learned that it’s not something to fear.

“Solitude is something we don’t get enough of in our day-to-day lives,” says Cann, who frequently travels solo. “When you travel alone, you’re stepping away from your usual obligations and social expectations and the clutter of everyday life.”

Solo travel allows you to shed your day-to-day responsibilities and roles — whether that’s as a parent, a partner, or a friend. It also creates a space where you can set and stick to your

personal intentions for the day. Most importantly, it's a rare opportunity to put yourself first, focusing solely on your needs and preferences.

Solo travel forces you to become more engaged in your destination

Solo travellers not only have the benefit of choosing how and when they want to engage socially — they may also have greater opportunities for [cross-cultural exchange](#). That's because when those pangs of loneliness do hit, you can't just fall back on familiar social networks for comfort — you'll have to actively seek out companionship.

“When you're travelling alone, you're more likely to make connections with other people, which allows you to immerse yourself in your destination,” says Cann.

She recommends that travellers start small with incidental interactions, such as having a chat with a barista when they order a [coffee](#). Research indicates this will not only boost your happiness and well-being but your sense of belonging. Then, explore other ways to meet locals and travellers, such as participating in a volunteer activity, staying at [a hostel or a homestay](#), or joining a social group, such as those found on [Meetup.com](#).

“If I need some proper social interaction, then I'll book an organised activity like a [walking tour](#), food tour or cooking class, or I'll join a multi-day group tour where I have time to make deeper connections,” says Alexx Hayward, a Kiwi travel blogger (@findingalex) who has travelled to 50 countries as a solo traveller. “I genuinely never get to the stage where I feel lonely.”

Solo travel can result in a stronger sense of self

According to Elaine Yang, a researcher at the Griffith Institute for Tourism in [Australia](#) — whose work frequently focuses on solo travel — the main driver for many solo travellers is the desire for self-actualisation and transformative experiences.

“It's about challenging yourself to discover the different parts within yourself or to construct or reconstruct your identities,” says Yang.

It doesn't matter whether you're travelling alone by circumstance or by choice, you'll still derive the key benefits of going solo. Learning to navigate new spaces and communicate across languages and cultures builds confidence and creates a sense of empowerment.

"It's inevitable that things will go wrong but dealing with it by yourself with no one else to rely on builds so much resilience and further reinforces your ability to deal with future problems," says Hayward.

For this reason, Cann also says that it's important to reflect when you return home about what you've learned about yourself and how it can translate into your day-to-day life.

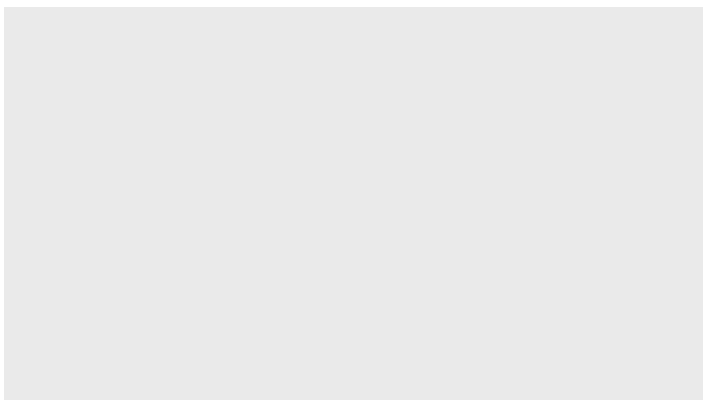
"It's not just a fleeting experience," she says. "It's something to savour."

Tobin, who has been grounded since the onset of the pandemic, is starting to think about her next trip. The destination is still to be determined; she's currently weighing up between [Southeast Asia](#) and the [US](#). But one thing is clear — that decision is hers and hers alone.

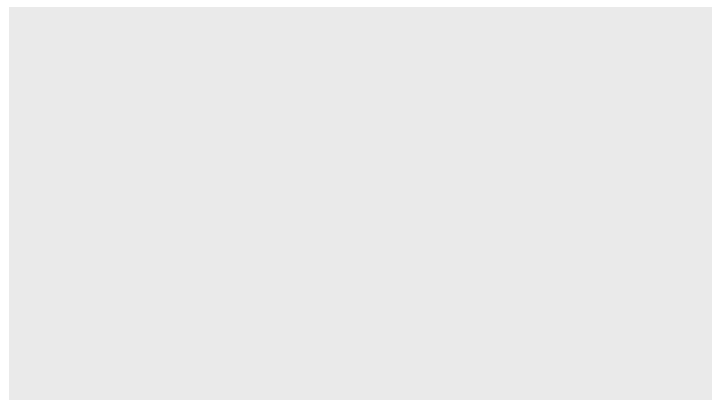
"For me, a lot of personal growth has come from solo travel and stepping outside my comfort zone," says Tobin.

Do you have a question or story about travelling solo? Email travel@nzherald.co.nz with 'Solo Travel' in the subject line

Latest from Travel



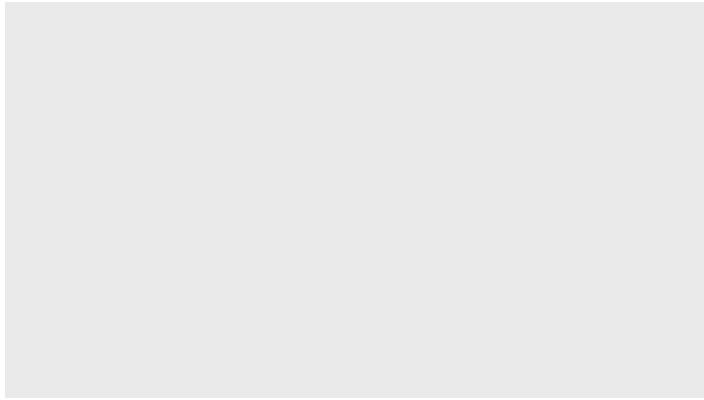
Cruise ship drifts into ocean after being torn from dock by strong winds



How a Gen Z digital nomad balances technology with enjoying travel

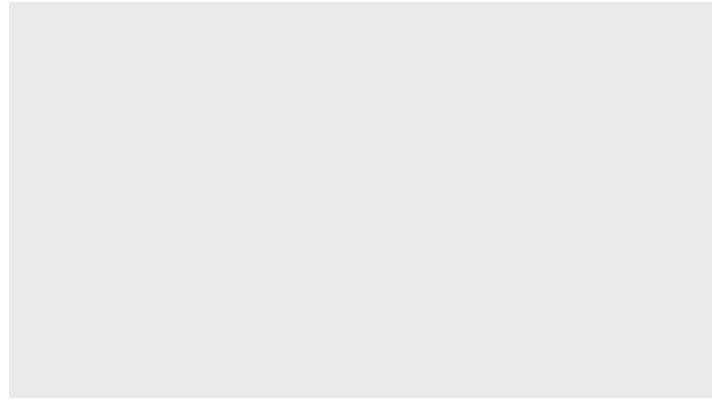
▶ 07 Aug 06:10 PM

07 Aug 05:26 PM



Three women attacked by vicious otter at popular US tourist spot

07 Aug 04:50 PM



SPONSORED

Experience an ultra-luxury Silversea cruise on their newest ship Silver Nova, coming to New Zealand for its debut season in 2024

