

Women Only Holidays



Why (and where) would women travel together? Just women - no men. A trip could be as simple as a weekend getaway with girlfriends to pick up a new handbag in the city. Or the desire could come from a deeper motivation... to learn, explore, experience, eat, share, exercise, anything, without having to take care of anyone but yourself, joined by women who would never question why that's important to you.



Travel companies that specialize in women-only travel understand. Many have developed programs that appeal to everyone, regardless of age or physical fitness, bringing together women who choose to spend a few days of their life living and traveling against the grain - stress-free.

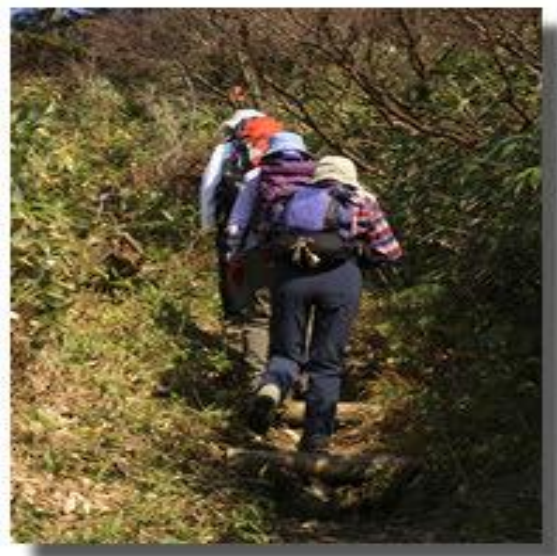
Women-only vacations tend to be unique, thoughtful, and purposeful. Most women would have to compromise at best if they tried to drag a husband or son or any other man on a week's vacation filled with yoga, healthy food, afternoon tea, and moments for meditation.

While this kind of travel may sound contrived at first, it really can offer an experience you may never have otherwise. Bring your mother, sister, friend, or go by yourself and enjoy a small group setting, without the all-too-real safety risks of being a woman traveling alone. Women of all ages and interests travel together - and for all reasons. Recent college grads looking for a quick trip before entering the real world (file this one away - a women-only package tour also makes a great graduation gift), photography buffs, women who are trying to get in shape, women who want to learn to whitewater

raft, women who are trying to lose weight, or renew their faith.

While some tours are centered on specific themes, others simply allow travelers to experience whatever comes their way, in a setting and with a group designed to support vitality and relaxation. Even an introvert can enjoy a group itinerary, given adequate time and space to wander and roam. More independent and adventurous types can easily find trips packed with activities that match their personalities, and less adventurous types who want to take on a new challenge can relax in a group that helps you build confidence through accomplishment, sans the competition.

Because of this, traditional "guy" activities are also common trip themes. You can finally learn, through professional instruction (usually by women), how to ride a horse, deep sea fish, kayak, or mountain bike. When you get back, you can practice your new skills... when you finally, officially know what you are doing. Tour



operators are typically prepared for all skill levels from novice to adept, and the all-female environment provides a comfortable ambience to learn or enhance a new activity.

Shopping, yoga, hiking, rafting, horseback riding, culinary training, humanitarian work - you can do practically anything with a group of women and a reputable tour operator who takes care of all the details. The hardest part of a trip might be simply figuring out what you want to do - what would light you up and make every dollar you spend and every day away from work or family or home... worth it.

Talk to a good travel consultant about your budget, all the places you want to see and the experiences you want to have, and together you can narrow down the choices to find the perfect trip. Luckily, travel agents are familiar with tour operators and can make this process quick and painless, pointing you to an appropriate company with a good reputation for quality and value. If you want to take a daughter or niece along, check with your travel consultant early on to find a tour company that allows minors.



As a relevant aside, a "tour" may provoke an image of a big slow bus, but these days a tour, and using a tour operator, is a very different experience. In addition to planning the entire trip and providing you with a network of other women, a good tour company will also hand-pick hotels, restaurants, and activities perfect for this kind of intimate travel. Because of their relationships with destinations and guides, you often pay far less for a package than you would booking the components separately.

If you want a group of women to join you, remember that even adventure tours often have reduced rates for companions who would be just as happy relaxing and roaming the wilderness independently - just ask. On that note, if you have enough women committed to a trip, or if you are willing to break from a time-tested itinerary, you can ask the tour company to customize any aspect of the trip, from the type of food you eat to where you visit and how you get there, and they can usually accommodate.

For those who book the trip solo, you can waive a standard single supplement if you agree to share a room. Since it's an all-women trip, your odds for being matched, and matched to someone with fairly predictable tastes, are better than ever.

One thing to note about many women's tours is that because of their specialized itineraries and traveler grouping, they often require you to book and give a cancellation notice far in advance.

Before you go, your travel consultant will make sure to assist you with any passport or visa documentation that's needed, in addition to passing along packing lists if your trip requires special clothing or equipment. Your agent will also cover travel and health insurance with you, and other costs that may not seem obvious, like tips (drivers, guides, porters, and maids all have varying tip rates, based on where you travel) and taxes. You should have a good idea of exactly how much the trip will cost, leaving you to determine how much spending money you can budget.



Finally, if your trip includes a long flight, start your pampering early by packing appropriately. Create a little kit for the plane

that includes lip balm, a dry washcloth in a baggie (you can pour hot water into the bag at the end of the flight and take the cloth out for a warm refresher), a small toothbrush and toothpaste, a travel size bottle of your favorite hand lotion, a sleep mask, earplugs, a pair of socks, eyedrops, and water. If you are traveling with friends, consider making extra kits as a thoughtful gift.

Also remember candles and essential oils for your hotel room and bath, and don't forget a journal, if you want to use one. Journal or not, you may want to purchase disposable cameras and video cameras from a drugstore, so you won't have to worry about keeping track of expensive equipment. When you return, you can request a DVD and CD of the video and images that you can transfer to your computer.

You really won't have to do much else, other than look forward to the experience. While you are there, you can relax. Travel helps everyone, men and women alike, explore and experience the world we all share and recognize the limitations we often place on our bodies and minds. A women-only trip can provide the rest, motivation, excitement, and introspection you don't easily find in daily life, leaving you energized and refreshed. Contact your travel agent today and find out how simple it can be.