



One Is Not the Loneliest Number

Why we should challenge ourselves to travel alone



By Pamela Holt
•Illustration
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AS I BROWSED greeting cards one day in my local store, I arrived at the numbered ones and noticed that every birthday card starting with “50” referred to “over the hill” and “old.” I was turning 50 soon and those phrases are certainly not me. I feel young and vibrant—I’m just getting started.

When I turned 40, I traveled solo to Peru, where I walked for three days through the Salkantay Pass to Machu Picchu; flew deep into the Amazon to live with locals; and journeyed to Ecuador to explore the Galápagos Islands. If I could do that at 40 imagine what I could do now, at 50, with ten glorious years of gained experience, insight and independence. It feels liberating, and secretly a little powerful, to turn 50—it has cachet, street cred and the right to be a little sassy.

I started planning my 50th birthday, which needed to be celebrated with another solo adventure. Family and friends didn’t understand: Why would I want to be alone for my birthday? “For your 50th?!” The part they missed is that I am never alone when I travel solo—in fact, I meet more people when I travel on my own. I smile, connect and talk with people who are also traveling alone and meet couples and families who want to share their travel stories. I even encounter locals who find it fascinating that I am traveling alone as a woman. I have an Indian friend, Eva, who traveled solo to Eastern Europe. After a few days in a small village she was approached and asked what she was doing in their town without a husband.

It was incomprehensible to them that she might want to explore the world on her own. (She recounts this story in episode three of my new television series, *Me, Myself & the World*.)

My woman friends asked if I was going through an *Eat Pray Love* moment when I said that my seven-country solo trip would begin in Bali. A woman wanting to travel solo does not need to spark an existential crisis. Believe it or not,

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some of us like to explore, get our feet a little dirty, and experience new foods, new cultures and new experiences. We no longer need to wait to be invited or ask permission.

In Bali, I stayed at an incredible Airbnb with an outdoor tub in the middle of a rice field. I then moved on to Vietnam, where I explored the country from top to bottom by train, car and plane; traversed Cambodia to explore the incredible ruins of Angkor Wat and enjoy the French-Indochinese cuisine; hopped over to Thailand for

some quick shopping in Bangkok; and landed in Bhutan, the 80th country I’d visited, to celebrate my 50th birthday. There, I reveled in eight glorious days of touring one of the most isolated and least developed countries in the world (and one of the kindest nations of people I’d ever met). I taught the hotel chef how to cook a box of Kraft Mac & Cheese (my favorite) and shared it with all the hotel staff and tour hosts. As a surprise, the hosts, LD and Tashi, baked a whipped-cream birthday cake for me. Considering we were about ten hours by car from the nearest Western hotel, this brought so much joy to my heart. And needless to say, this was the first time any of them had tasted macaroni and cheese, or cake! I wrapped up my adventures with a quick visit to Bangladesh (country 81) and a stopover in Hong Kong on my way home.

It was somewhere during this seven-and-half-week journey that I realized I needed to use my love of travel to inspire others to travel solo, too. For all of you thinking of it, take the leap. I promise the net will appear.

Pamela Holt is a travel expert and television host who has journeyed to 81 counties and counting. She combines her passions for travel and filmmaking on her show, Me, Myself & the World, now streaming on GoTraveler. Born in California and raised in Hawaii, Holt has been traveling by herself since she was 19 years old. Her show offers viewers wisdom and travel tips.