

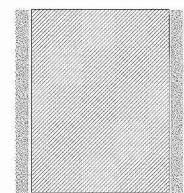
WORD OF MOUTH

SINGLE MINDED

TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF SOLO TRAVEL

BY MAGGIE SHIPSTEAD

The thing is, you can just go. You don't need permission. You don't need to ask anyone what they want to do, or eat, or see. The only schedule and budget that matter are yours. The only moods that need to be indulged, negotiated, bolstered? Yours. Sometimes it's a difficult question: What do I want? We're used to compromises, to accommodating others. But ask yourself. If the answer is "I don't know," that's not a problem—it's an opportunity. Driving alone in New Zealand, I passed a sign for glider rides. I don't know. Might be scary. I drove on for 10 minutes, turned around. Then I was in the tiny cockpit of a sleek, engineless plane, a pilot behind me, no sound but the wind, nothing between us and the sky but a plexiglass canopy. We circled over a braided river. The pilot's voice came through, tinny in my headset: "Want to take the stick?" I took it, felt the balance of wings on air. Often I miss the comfort of having someone familiar to talk to, the relief of not being responsible for everything. Freedom has its burdens. I feel more conspicuous alone: spotlighted on an empty stage, vulnerable without context as part of a couple or friendship or family. I can be a chicken about dining alone in restaurants, and ate in convenience stores in Norway and Iceland. In Bali, an airport porter demanded a tip. Bleary and flustered, I gave him a bill. "Another," he said. "The pink one." Later I realized I'd given him \$50, but there was no one to blame but myself. I've stood alone on a hilltop under a total solar eclipse, and beside a frozen lake under the aurora borealis. There are people who I wish had experienced these things too, but if I'd waited for them, I wouldn't have done any of it. We're told memories are best when they're shared, but I'm saying it's okay to gobble down the world like a delicious midnight snack, all for you; our memories are only ever our own, anyway. I'm saying: Take a trip.



BEBEK TEBA SARI, A NEW LOCAVORE-FOCUSED RESTAURANT ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF UBUD, BALI

PHOTOGRAPH: TIA LACSON

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WORD OF MOUTH

GOING SOLO IN...CHARLESTON

MELINDA STEVENS, EDITOR IN CHIEF

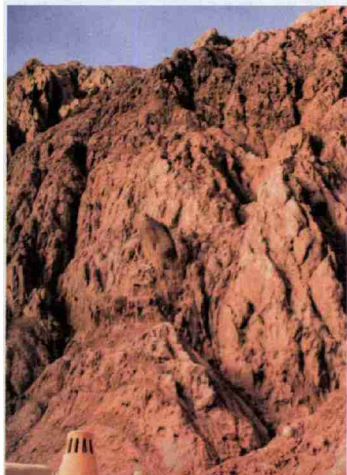
“There was a store I kept passing on my wanderings round town. Worthwhile it was called, and I would peek through its windows curiously. There were beautiful wood-paneled shelves full of handmade jugs and mugs, intellectual-looking Japanese clothing, cut on the bias. When I eventually made it in—our mutual timings finally synchronized—I ended up buying a huge, beautiful, corn-colored hand-stitched quilt, but also a funny little light in the shape of a croissant that would glow when you touched it. That summed up Charleston, South Carolina, for me: well-made, thoughtful, sophisticated, not without a certain humor. It is a city for wandering alone, for getting lost, its neighborhoods revealing themselves like stage screens in the theater. The colors of its clapboard buildings and their shutters, unfolded like book covers, open to a bright new day. A sea-salty tang on the air from the water, the tropical palms...you’re reminded all the time just how south—how practically Caribbean—you really are. Everyone says hello, with a smile, a ready laugh. It might have something to do with the fact that everyone is out on the street, eating something delicious in the sunshine on a rickety sidewalk, a glass of wine the size of a cantaloupe in their hands.”



GOING SOLO IN...ARGENTINA

MEGAN SPURRELL, COMMUNITY EDITOR

“I did a solo trip through northern Argentina’s quiet Jujuy province, with stops in the wine capital Salta and tiny towns like Purmamarca. It felt safe, plus the helpfulness of people in small towns meant a request for directions was usually met with someone personally walking me wherever I needed to go (as they waved to everyone we passed). Being far outside a big city, totally alone, also made for an introspective trip—I could spend two hours sitting on the Plaza 9 de Julio in Salta, a glass of regional Torrontés in one hand and my oft-neglected notebook in the other, or walking the dusty few blocks that made up the town of Tilcara, to ultimately settle beside the Pucará de Tilcara ruins with a book and nobody to entertain but myself.”



GOING SOLO IN...TOKYO

CORINA QUINN, DIRECTOR, CITY GUIDES

“Japan’s capital is a great place to travel to without company—which might seem odd, given the language barrier. But it’s so large and so efficient, and—importantly—a lot of the cultural experiences are accommodating to people on their own. Dining alone in France, for example, is tough; walk into a brasserie anywhere and half the staff will surround you, concerned. ‘*Pour une seulement?*’ Just for one? But in Tokyo you can roll up to a sushi spot or ramen counter (basically, most restaurants except the special Michelin-starred or reservation-only ones) and see that half the people are also dining solo. There are women-only train cars, and there’s such a premium placed on service and attentiveness that you don’t feel singled out, but spoiled instead.”

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