

## Motives of Female Travellers for Solo Travel

**Rrezarta Ejupi**

*rrezarta.ejupi9@gmail.com*

**Zorana Medarić**

*Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia*

*zorana.medaric@zrs-kp.si*

The segment of solo female travellers has been growing fast from year to year and is becoming an increasingly important tourism segment. When women travel alone, they want more than just to travel from one place to another. They are often looking for independence, personal growth, new experiences, adventure, connecting with others, and an escape from routine. The aim of this paper is to investigate the main motives for independent travel among Slovenian solo travellers through quantitative and qualitative research. Based on the literature review, the motives were divided according to three different dimensions: psychological, cultural and personal. In our analysis, we found that while all three groups of motives are important, Slovenian female independent travellers attach the greatest importance to the psychological motive, i.e. they see independent travel primarily as a time to fulfil their own needs and desires, gain confidence and independence or withdraw from everyday life.

*Keywords:* solo female travel, motives, independent travel



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### Introduction

Recent literature (Chiang & Jogartnam, 2006; Junek et al., 2006; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Pereira & Silva, 2018; Yang, 2020) suggests that solo travel is one of the fastest growing segments in the tourism market. Today, we can observe a decline in package holidays and an increase in solo travel, mainly due to the higher demand for holiday flexibility. The rise in solo travel reflects the changing demographics and lifestyles of modern society, characterised by individualism and high levels of consumerism (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Laesser et al., 2009). Independent travel by women is not a new phenomenon, as women have been travelling and exploring the world for centuries (Junek et al., 2006). Still, women's participation in tourism and leisure activities has increased significantly over the past 20 years (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). The increase in solo female travellers has

contributed significantly to the growing segment of solo travel (Yang, 2020). According to travel industry statistics, there has been a 131% increase in the number of Google searches online for 'solo travel' between 2016 and 2019 and 84% of all solo travellers are women (<https://www.condorferries.co.uk/solo-travel-statistics>).

Solo travellers are often characterised by their curiosity and desire to learn about cultures other than their own. They are often driven and excited to explore new ways of life and new experiences. Some of them prefer to stay with locals instead of booking a hotel in order to immerse themselves in the culture. Solo travel gives them the opportunity to interact with people from other cultures, religions, countries, etc. Solo travel also allows them to make their own decisions about activities and travel plans without having to compromise. Often, women travelling alone experi-

ence a sense of personal power that they did not know they had before (Osman et al., 2020).

Understanding the motives for tourism travel is crucial for various institutions planning tourism development or for tourism providers. Nowadays, competition in the tourism market is very strong, so it is necessary to follow constant changes and trends (Mahika, 2011). Therefore, the aim of this article is to examine the motives of female solo travellers as an important segment in the travel market, focusing on different dimensions of motivation.

### Literature Review

Solo female travel has become an increasingly popular phenomenon (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that since the late 1990s, an increasing number of studies have been conducted on female solo travellers in tourism, showing that female solo travellers are in search of self-affirmation, identity, and other experiences. Research also shows that women travelling alone sometimes face unwanted male attention, violence, and sexual harassment. This growing phenomenon of female solo travel has also been studied to understand travel motivations (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; Seow & Brown 2018; Osman et al., 2020). This academic work has highlighted the characteristics of female solo travel, motivation, experiences of empowerment and perceptions of risk (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007; Wilson & Little, 2008; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010; Yang et al., 2019; Seow & Brown, 2018; Osman et al., 2020).

A review of the general classifications of travel motives shows that they mostly include cultural, religious, physical, personal and psychological components (World Tourism Organisation, 1994; Pearce & Lee, 2006; Swarbooke & Horner, 2007; United Nations, 2008, Middleton et al., 2009). For example, one of the widely used classifications of travel motives is that of Swarbooke and Horner (2007), which distinguishes between psychological motives (relaxation, health, sunbathing, etc.), emotional motives (romance, nostalgia, adventure, escape, spirituality), per-

sonal motives (visiting relatives and friends, meeting new people), developmental motives (learning), status motives (fashion, exclusivity), and cultural motives (sightseeing, learning about new cultures).

The motives of solo female tourists vary and change over the life course (Gibson et al., 2012). Important motives include seeking physical, emotional and spiritual fulfilment, self-confidence, empowerment, a sense of power (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007) and getting out of one's comfort zone (Wilson & Little, 2008). Pereira and Silva (2018), who developed a conceptual framework that relates women's travel preferences to tourism experiences, link independent women's travel experiences to the 'desire to learn, self-development, to challenge oneself, to find a sense of identity and autonomy, to meet new people, and to experience new life and adventure moments' (p. 137). They also emphasise the desire to experience a different cultural context than the one they are used to. Chiang and Jogartnam (2006) found that it is important for solo travellers to experience a new culture, acquire new knowledge, and meet people with similar interests. Phillips (2019) highlights the learning opportunities and transformative aspect of travel through interaction with other cultures.

Based on the literature review (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Chiang & Jogartnam, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007; Wilson & Little, 2008; Bond & Falk, 2012; Pereira & Silva, 2018; Phillips, 2019; Seow & Brown, 2018; Osman et al., 2020; Yang, 2020), we focus on three dimensions of motives that are most frequently highlighted, namely psychological, cultural and personal motives:

- psychological motives (desire for adventure and adventures, escape from routine, change of environment, gaining independence and self-confidence),
- cultural motives (sightseeing, attending events, visiting museums and galleries, tasting local food, learning about local culture),
- personal motives (visiting relatives and friends, meeting new people, learning new skills, personal growth, searching for identity).

Although these motives may overlap in practice,

they are presented independently for the purposes of this article.

### Psychological Motives

At the core of independent travel is the ideology of independence, autonomy, and freedom. Through the journey the traveller creates an independent and self-sufficient sense of self (Phillips, 2019). For women, travel often represents an opportunity to enter new spaces away from familiar contexts and people. Many women choose to travel independently after life changes such as divorce, widowhood, graduation, and job loss because it allows them time to satisfy their own needs and desires by creating their own schedules and pursuing their own interests. Travelling alone enables a woman to undertake a meaningful journey in which she seeks physical, emotional and spiritual fulfilment (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007; Wilson & Little, 2008).

In women's solo travel, it is important to emphasise the aspect of empowerment and the sense of autonomy and independence. Women travel primarily because they have the right to make their own decisions, maintain control over their actions, and meet new people. Their travel experience focuses on self-confidence and independence. Solo travel helps women deal with the problems they encounter on their own. Overcoming fears and meeting challenges and obstacles while travelling leads to greater personal growth, self-confidence and a sense of power (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007).

### Cultural Motives

Another important aspect of female solo travel is discovering and exploring other cultures and learning about their ways of life. This includes sightseeing and attending events, as well as tasting local gastronomy. Women travel not only to see different places, but also to gain new knowledge and experiences. They also want to learn different ways of thinking about the world. Experiencing culture is often one of the main motives for travelling alone, as it provides the opportunity to have independent experiences (Chiang & Joganam, 2006). This motive is also often linked to issues of identity. The way female travellers see themselves is

an important motive for cultural solo travel as the relationship between the traveller and the host culture is crucial and also related to their self-identity (Bond & Falk, 2012). The independent traveller wants to escape from everyday life with her travels and seeks new cultural frameworks that are different from those she is used to (Crompton in Pereira & Silva, 2018).

### Personal Motives

One of the characteristics of female travellers is the desire to meet other people and interact with other travellers and locals. On such trips, it is easier to meet new people and make friends as you are far away from the possible pressures you face in your home environment. This helps women to develop confidence and social skills. For women, independent travel is therefore also a means of personal growth and searching for identity. Apart from enhancing self-confidence and independence, women also improve their social skills on such trips. These acquired skills are transferred to other areas of their daily lives, both at home and at work (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007; Phillips, 2019).

### Methods

The aim of the study was to obtain data on the motives of independent female travellers. The data was obtained through quantitative and qualitative research – a questionnaire and interviews. The survey was conducted online from May 5 to August 5, 2020 using the 1KA online survey tool. The survey was shared through the social network Facebook; more specifically, the survey was posted to six travel groups. 239 female respondents were included in the sample. For each question, only valid responses were considered for analysis.

The questionnaire for the survey was based on the literature read. It consists of five demographic questions and three sets of statements about the motives of independent travel. Respondents had to express their agreement or disagreement with the statements using a Likert scale (level 1 to 5).

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight travellers to get a more detailed

picture of travel motives. The respondents were obtained with the help of a questionnaire. Those who were willing to participate in the interview provided their contact details (email address). All interviews were conducted remotely via video connection (Facebook Messenger, Skype and Facetime). Ethical guidelines were followed: participants were informed of the aim of the project and were assured that confidentiality would be maintained. The topics of the interviews included history of solo travels, preparation for the travel, routine on a typical solo travel, main motives for the solo travel, safety issues, and positive and negative aspects of solo travel. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted an average of 35 minutes, while their transcription took twice as long. The interviews were transcribed and analysed according to the rules for analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.

## Results

Table 1 shows the age of respondents. The average age of our respondents is 30.1 years. As many as 49% of respondents belong to the age group between 22 and 28 years. 16% of all respondents belong to the age group between 29 and 35 years. Only 12% of respondents are under the age of 22, while 22% of respondents are over the age of 35. The youngest respondent is 18 years old and the oldest is 68 years old.

Table 2 (p. 181) shows the normal duration of a solo trip, how often they travel. Most respondents, 42%, travel alone for two weeks, while 37% of respondents travel between two weeks and one month. Of the respondents, 10% travel between one month and three months and only 1% of the respondents travel for more than half a year. Respondents who travel for less than two weeks were excluded from further analysis. The

majority of respondents take an independent trip once every two years or once a year (78% overall). 15% of all respondents go on an independent trip two to three times a year, while only 6% of respondents travel more than three times a year. The most frequently chosen accommodation, with as many as 47% of all responses, is a hostel. Other frequently chosen accommodations are apartments at 17% and hotels at 16%. The fewest travellers use motels, only 2%.

In our research, three dimensions of motives in particular proved to be important, which are presented in this paper: psychological, cultural and personal. The sentences measuring different dimensions of motives were clustered into three groups forming three indexes that were verified for internal validity with Cronbach's alpha and an average for the index as a whole was calculated as well.

Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement with the statements by circling a number from 1 to 5 for each statement, representing the level of importance in their decision to take the last independent trip. This means 1 – I disagree completely, 2 – I disagree, 3 – I am neutral, 4 – I agree, 5 – I completely agree.

Table 3 (p. 181) shows the agreement of respondents with claims about psychological motives. 82% of respondents agreed with the statement that solo travel is a time to pursue your own needs and desires. Slightly less, 81%, agreed or fully agreed that a change of environment is important to them when travelling alone, while 79% of respondents agreed or fully agreed that they prefer to travel due to disconnecting or departure from everyday life. 66% of them expressed that they feel more confident and independent when travelling solo.

Table 4 (p. 182) shows the agreement of respondents with claims about cultural motives. Respondents mainly agreed with the statements related to the cultural motives. A total of 83% of respondents agree or completely agree that they like to get to know the culture and way of life of other people during their travels. Slightly fewer, 82%, agree or completely agree that they enjoy seeing the sights at their destination. 81% of all respondents agree or completely agree with the statement about tasting local food, while

Table 1 Age of respondents

Q1 How old are you?	Valid	239
	Number of units	283
	Average	30.10
	Standard deviation	10.25
	Minimum	18
	Maximum	68

Table 2 Average Duration of a Solo Trip and How Often They Travel Solo

Questions	Answers	(1)	(2)	(3)
Q2 Normal duration of your solo trip?	Less than two weeks	11	5	5
	Two weeks	101	42	47
	More than two weeks to one month	89	37	84
	More than one month to three months	24	10	95
	More than three months to half a year	9	4	98
	More than half a year	3	1	100
	More than one year	1	0	100
	Total	238	100	
Q3 How often do you travel solo?	Once in two years	91	39	39
	Once in a year	90	39	78
	2 to 3 times a year	35	15	94
	More than 3 times a year	15	6	100
	Total	231	100	

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) frequency, (2) percentage, (3) cumulative percentage.

Table 3 Psychological motives

Sub-questions		Answers					Total	(1)	(2)	(3)
		1	2	3	4	5				
Q3a I prefer to travel solo because of disconnecting, withdrawal from everyday life.	<i>n</i>	4	10	33	107	69	223	223	4.0	0.90
	%	2	4	15	48	31	100			
Q3b The change of environment is important to me on my solo journey.	<i>n</i>	3	6	32	108	75	224	224	4.1	0.84
	%	1	3	14	48	33	100			
Q3c When I travel alone, I feel more confident and independent.	<i>n</i>	5	16	56	94	50	221	221	3.8	0.96
	%	2	7	25	43	23	100			
Q3d Travelling alone is a time to fulfil my own desires and needs.	<i>n</i>	3	6	30	92	89	220	220	4.2	0.86
	%	1	3	14	42	40	100			

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of units, (2) average, (3) standard deviation. Cronbach's alpha = 0.809, index average = 4.0.

69% of respondents agree or completely agree with the statement about attending cultural and entertainment events. Just over half of all respondents (53%) agree/completely agree with the statement about visiting museums and galleries.

Table 5 (p. 182) shows the agreement of respondents with claims about personal motives. The statement about broadening horizons, exploring and learning new things on the road receives the highest level of agreement (86%), with 73% of all respondents agree-

ing or completely agreeing with the statement that they enjoy meeting new people while travelling, while 59% of respondents go on a trip in search of identity and personal growth.

Respondents stressed the importance of disconnecting and retreating from everyday life, as it gives them time for themselves and their thoughts. When asked about the change of environment and disconnecting from everyday life, our respondents expressed very high agreement and importance by saying:

Table 4 Cultural motives

Sub-questions		Answers						(1)	(2)	(3)
		1	2	3	4	5	Total			
Q4a I like to visit museums and galleries on my travels.	<i>n</i>	12	27	68	92	26	225	225	3.4	1.02
	%	5	12	30	41	12	100			
Q4b I like to try local food on the trip.	<i>n</i>	3	10	31	83	98	225	225	4.2	0.92
	%	1	4	14	37	44	100			
Q4c I love getting to know the culture and way of life of other people and nations.	<i>n</i>	3	8	28	89	96	224	224	4.2	0.89
	%	1	4	13	40	43	100			
Q4d I like to see the sights at the destination.	<i>n</i>	3	11	26	109	76	225	225	4.1	0.87
	%	1	5	12	48	34	100			
Q4e I like to take part in cultural and entertainment events on my travels.	<i>n</i>	2	16	51	113	43	225	225	3.8	0.86
	%	1	7	23	50	19	100			

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of units, (2) average, (3) standard deviation. Cronbach's alpha = 0.809, average = 3.9.

Table 5 Personal motives

Sub-questions		Answers						(1)	(2)	(3)
		1	2	3	4	5	Total			
Q5a On the journey, I like to meet new people.	<i>n</i>	7	11	43	96	68	225	225	3.9	0.98
	%	3	5	19	43	30	100			
Q5b On the journey, I want to broaden my horizons, explore and discover new things.	<i>n</i>	3	5	24	89	104	225	225	4.3	0.84
	%	1	2	11	40	46	100			
Q5c I go on a journey in search of my identity and personal growth.	<i>n</i>	11	19	64	96	35	225	225	3.6	1.01
	%	5	8	28	43	16	100			

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of units, (2) average, (3) standard deviation. Cronbach's alpha = 0.719, average = 3.9.

It's definitely very important. Like I said before, when you go out of your everyday life somehow and see other people's way of life, you realise what's important to you in life and what's not. Through travel, I learned to appreciate the simplest things. [Nina, 34 years old]

Travels thus provide a form of escapism and an opportunity to relax in a different environment:

Detachment is very important to me. When I'm on a trip, I don't think about all the problems I have at home, or all the things I can do. On the journey, I take time for myself to relax and forget about worries. [Eva, 24 years old]

Interviewees also stressed the importance of the sense of empowerment and self-confidence that comes from solo travel.

The women rely on themselves to organise trips or solve problems, which in turn changes their self-perceptions.

In addition to the self-confidence I gained, I also became more resourceful and independent. I don't have to rely on anyone like myself to do something or solve a problem. Now I am more confident in myself that I can do something. [Travels] give freedom and [are] full of new experiences. They teach me a lot about myself and the world in general. [Alenka, 27 years old]

Independent travel gives me more self-confidence to be able to plan and travel without special parental accompaniment as we did when we were children. They change [sic] my whole thinking about myself, the people around me, the cultures and the world. [Maša, 20 years old]

Competencies, such as independence, that the travellers acquired on their journeys were often transferred into their daily lives. The transformative aspect of travel was often emphasised by respondents. This is evident from quotes such as the following:

You get extra confidence to go anywhere alone. In the past I didn't go to the cinema alone, now I'll go alone, it's not a problem for me because I got used to it abroad. [Nina, 35 years old]

I definitely gain a lot of self-confidence, I see that I can step out of my comfort zone and I am able to get myself out of a stressful or difficult situation. I have become more independent and patient, because there is no one else to help you and make things easier. And that's good because you see that you're resourceful enough and can adapt to different situations. [Tara, 28 years old]

The findings are consistent with Wilson and Little (2005), who believe that travellers in general are looking for experiences that provide them with an escape and freedom from their comfort zone. According to Wilson and Harris (2006) and Wilson and Little (2008), challenges have a positive effect on the traveller, as overcoming these challenges while travelling leads to a strong sense of empowerment and a boost in self-confidence. In particular, independent travel greatly helped our travellers to increase their confidence and resourcefulness. It has also made the travellers more confident in themselves and their abilities. Overcoming fears, challenges and obstacles while travelling leads to more personal development, self-confidence and a sense of strength. These acquired skills are transferred to other areas of daily life, both at home and at work (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Harris & Wilson, 2007), highlighting the transformative power of solo travel (Phillips, 2019).

Our interviewees showed an interest in the culture of the destinations they visited. They emphasised the importance of learning about the local people, their culture, and their specialties. Learning about the local country, culture, history, and people, as well as participating in cultural activities, are important elements of solo travel:

Even before I go on a trip, I learn about the history of the country and their culture. But I think you really get to know a destination only when you actually visit it and get to know the people and meet their way of life. I met locals everywhere, while visiting attractions, while taking public transport, and especially in the evening while visiting some bars. [Sara, 24 years old]

On the trip, I like to experience things that are typical for the destination I am visiting. I like to try the activities they offer and explore their culture. I also spend a lot of time with the locals to get an in-depth picture of the state of this country and not just what the media is portraying. [Nina, 35 years old]

Attending various cultural events also allows them to gain a better insight into the destination:

I love attending events that help me understand the culture of the destination I attend. When I was in Turkey, I attended an event in a city where some kind of competition took place, where men competed in different categories. There was also a lot of dancing and singing at the event. [Maša, 20 years old]

An important part of visiting and getting to know the destination is also getting to know the techno scene of the destination. Sometimes my main motive for visiting is a festival, around which I then organise other activities. [Sara, 24 years old]

According to Chiang and Jogartnam (2006), an important aspect of female solo travel is the exploration of other cultures. An important reason why women

choose to travel independently is the relationship between travel and experience. Their goal is not to travel alone, but to gain skills and new experiences (Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2008). Attending events on the trip proved to be an important aspect of understanding different cultures.

Respondents also expressed a strong desire to learn new things. They described how they broadened their horizons in different ways by attending classes, workshops, and events.

I like to look at everything and try everything little by little. Above all, I want to broaden my horizons, to learn something new. Try something new, experience, see as much as possible, try local specialities, meet new people and have time to observe the surroundings. I give a lot more to experiences and memories than to something material. I like to enrich my soul. [Alenka, 27 years old]

I always avoid hotels and tourist attractions and prefer to get to know more remote areas where you see real life and where there are local people. I attend some events, music events are always a way to get to know people and culture. Another thing, of course, is street food. I also like to visit some historical or art museums, so you get to know the place you are in very well. [Tara, 28 years old]

Getting to know people is something fundamental to their travels. They also explained where and how they meet new people.

Yes, that's one of my main motives for independent travel. So far, I have met many of them at the destination where I spent the night, the owners of accommodation or other independent travellers. [Tara, 28 years old]

One of the main motives for my travels is meeting people. They are easiest to meet in a hostel where you meet other independent travellers. If you are somewhere for a long time, you can go to a language course or other workshops and get

to know them there. Couchsurfing is also great for getting to know each other. [Alenka, 27 years old]

This is in line with previous research. Namely, Pereira and Silva (2018) believe that travellers are highly motivated to learn and expand their knowledge through travel experiences. Additionally, as Wilson and Harris (2006) say, one of the characteristics of travellers is also the desire to interact, meet other people and build relationships.

### Conclusion

Understanding travel motivations is one of the most important priorities in tourism today. In our study of independent female travellers, motives were classified into three different categories: psychological, cultural and personal. Independent travellers, as an important tourism segment, seek more than just travel, namely the desire for independence, learning, challenges, meeting new people, new experiences, personal growth and the search for identity (Pereira & Silva, 2018).

Based on the analysis, we found that, in line with the previous research, the three selected groups of motives (cultural, personal and psychological) are all relevant for Slovenian female independent travellers. Still, they attach the greatest importance to the psychological motives, that is, they see independent travel primarily as a time to fulfil their own needs and desires and the way to gain confidence and independence. The change of environment and the aspect of disconnecting or getting out of the daily routine are also important for them.

In relation to cultural motives, they like to learn about new cultures and ways of life, try local gastronomy and attend various events during their travels. Personal motives such as broadening their horizons, discovering and learning new things during their travels and meeting new people are also very important.

By providing the experiences of a unique segment of Slovenian women, our study contributes to the current literature on solo travel by women and deserves the attention of suppliers interested in segmenting the market for independent women's travel. Based on



these findings, destination marketing teams can attract independent travellers by promoting psychological, cultural, and personal motives. Promotional campaigns could emphasise the motive to escape routine, the motive to change environments, the motive to have new experiences, the motive to engage in cultural activities, and the motive to acquire new skills.

Interpretation of the data may be limited by several factors. Our sample included only travellers from Slovenia, so our results cannot be generalised to all women travelling alone. In addition, due to selective sampling, the results cannot be generalised to all solo female travellers from Slovenia. Moreover, most of our travellers were travelling for short periods of time and therefore differ from travellers who choose to travel for longer periods of time. For further research, we suggest expanding the sample to include solo travellers who travel for longer periods of time. It would also be useful to include travellers from different countries.

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