



SAFETY FIRST

As women become more confident about traveling alone, it's easy for them to get lulled into a false sense of security. Safety expert Phyllis Stoller, founder of the Women's Travel Club (www.womenstravelclub.com), says these seven practical tips are important to keep in mind.

BE VIGILANT Pay attention when you're going through customs, passport control, and security. And if you have a question about a procedure, don't hesitate to speak up. "Women want to be liked," Stoller notes. "By the time we get off the plane, we're already playing hostess."

STAY IN SMALLER HOTELS Staff at hotels with fewer than 100 rooms are more likely to notice and keep track of solo female guests, and in intimate venues it's less likely that you'll be followed through the lobby and into the elevator. Conversely, large hotels are a great place to duck into if you feel you're being followed, or if you need a taxi and want to be sure you're getting a licensed vehicle, not a gypsy cab.

AVOID CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS Know how eye contact, smiling, bare legs, or entering a bar alone may be construed in your destination by reading the Lonely Planet sections "Dangers & Annoyances" and "Women Travelers"

ahead of time. To be safe, dress conservatively. "Men can wear a T-shirt and shorts anywhere," Stoller says. "Women can't."

BOOK HOTELS THAT USE ELECTRONIC KEYS Traditional keys have the room number printed on them, making it easy for a burglar to break into your room with an old one. Electronic cards are replaced after each guest, and if you lose yours, it can be deactivated at the front desk.

DON'T USE THE 'PLEASE SERVICE' CARD Hanging this card on your door lets the world know you've gone out. Stoller recommends calling housekeeping instead.

REGISTER WITH THE U.S. CONSULATE Stoller's rule of thumb: If a country requires a visa, register with the consulate. Letting your official representative know where you're staying (and for how long) provides a record that may prove critical if something goes wrong.

DON'T BE CARELESS WITH YOUR BELONGINGS—EVEN AT 30,000 FEET Purses, passports, and travel documents are just as likely to disappear in an airplane cabin as they are on the ground. Take these items with you when you go to the restroom; at the very least, don't leave them out on your seat.

—ANDREA BENNETT

T+L TIP *If you're headed to an off-the-beaten-path destination where security is an issue, pack Magellan's small **DOOR STOP ALARM** (800/962-4943; www.magellans.com; \$12.85). Not only will it keep others from opening your door, it'll make a piercing noise should anybody try.*

Bookshelf

Here, four of our favorite new books, by and about women.

• Holly Morris quit her day job for five years of "estro-charged globe-trotting." In *Adventure Divas* (Villard; \$24), she recounts her travels—from a boar hunt in a Borneo jungle to a trek across the Sahara.

• Rachel DeWoskin's rollicking *Foreign Babes in Beijing* (Norton; \$24.95) takes its title from the Chinese soap opera that DeWoskin starred in after moving to Beijing in 1994. Her account of a recent college grad unexpectedly turned leading lady is also a portrait of a city in the midst of upheaval.

• In *The Coldest Winter* (Henry Holt; \$18) Paula Fox, the memoirist, writes of leaving New York City in 1946 to work in battered postwar Europe. Her delicately rendered reminiscences depict a young woman finding her bearings and, with them, her voice.

• In 2003, Joan Didion's husband, John Gregory Dunne, and their daughter were felled by sudden illness—one fatally, the other very nearly. *The Year of Magical Thinking* (Knopf; \$23.95) is Didion's lyrical meditation on her life as a wife and mother in New York and California. —AMY FARLEY

