

Kovacs: Want more fun? Travel alone

To put it bluntly, last semester was awful. I was a neurotic little ball of stress accompanied by newfound perfectionism. By December, I craved an escape.

So I bought a flight to England and landed alone. I was quite literally running away, if only for a week. No emails, texts, or calls. My personal heaven of a hiatus.

People joked about coming with me. I prodded them along and would have welcomed them if they were honestly able to join me. Quite selfishly, however, I truly wanted to be the only one landing at Heathrow Airport.

I am a person who thrives on solitude; my sanity depends on it.

I have traveled alone before, though, granted, not nearly enough to save my mother from a week of worry. Seriously, she texted me every day asking for a picture of my face so she knew I was alive. Love you, Mom.

Throughout my solo travel, though, I have discovered that traveling alone is the greatest thing people can do for themselves. Even if you aren't a crazily introverted person such as myself, there is so much to gain.

First, solo travel creates fiercely independent people. The minute people realized I was traveling alone, I received a look of admiration and respect: eyebrows raised, slight head nod.

Being comfortable and confident in your own company is the start of a beautiful friendship. I was able to handle less-than-ideal situations being thrown at me left and right. I

discovered that getting my credit card blocked while alone in a foreign land, my Airbnb accommodation canceled, a chipped tooth or even the fact of the trains on strike could not possibly overcome my determination to enjoy my travel. Successfully navigating through the chaos made me more certain of my independence.

Being alone while traveling also forced me to meet other people. It's one thing to go to abroad with friends, but it's a whole different experience to go to abroad with the intention of making friends.

In England, I had to go to restaurants and bars alone. Within five minutes of walking into any bar, I met people who welcomed me into their clique for a night of unpredictable entertainment, forcing me to shed a layer of introversion.

Even at the airport, I met people. I remain convinced that the most interesting people you will meet will be sitting at the same gate as you in any given airport. If it's "all about who you know," get to know the person sitting next to you on the plane. This is where future connections are made.

So if you so badly want to travel, you might just have to do it alone. Don't get me wrong: Traveling with friends and family is great. In fact, someday I'll write an article about why you should travel internationally with family.

But it just so happens that if you wait for someone to go with you, you probably aren't going.

I'm well aware that if I want to see the sun rise in Durban, set in Chang Mai and reemerge over a British pebble beach, I won't be able to go if I wait for someone to hold my hand. And that's okay, because I know I can handle it alone.

Maybe it's a bit grand to go halfway across the world to achieve my ideal solitude and assert my independence, but it was exactly what I needed and might be what you need too.

So to the guy in class who told me traveling alone is “weird,” allow me to first roll my eyes so hard it hurts, then explain that traveling alone is the best thing I ever did for myself. I crossed the border back into the U.S., feeling like the rejuvenated, confident badass I am.

Morgan Kovacs is a third-year English major and the IC's news editor.