This is an edited extract from *Go Your Own Way* By Ben Groundwater published by Hardie Grant Travel RRP $29.99

**How to Stay Safe**

**There is no way to make travel completely safe**

Nor would you want it to be. A great journey will inevitably involve a few risks, a few leaps into the unknown. That trip I took to Bangladesh is permanently burned in my memory as one of the most eye-opening I’ve ever been on, one I’ll be thinking and telling stories about for the rest of my life, but it certainly involved its share of risks. I didn’t always feel safe there (and rightly so, as it turned out). Travel sometimes involves rolling the dice and dealing with whatever comes up, and that’s all part of the fun.There are, however, plenty of measures you can take to minimise those risks, to ensure you’re equipped to deal with whatever the world throws at you on your big adventure. Solo travellers generally have to be more aware of their safety than people travelling in pairs or a group simply because you’re more of a target when you’re alone. Sad but true. It’s natural that the scammers and touts and pickpockets of the world will aim for lone travellers,

for those people with no support crew, which simply means you need to take more precautions.

This is particularly true, unfortunately, for female travellers. Though in a perfect world women would be able to travel solo as freely as men, that’s sadly not the case, and women going it alone will have to put more thought into their safety than their male colleagues. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t go, or that you should be afraid to go. It simply means travelling with more concern for where you’re going and who you can trust when you get there.

Many of the points in the following list apply to all travellers, but they’re especially important for women who’ve decided to take the plunge and see the world on their own. You can pick up some extra tips by reading the fantastic blogs by solo female travellers out there, like those from Kiersten Rich (www.theblondeabroad.com), Dani Heinrich (www.globetrottergirls. com) and Liz Carlson (www. youngadventuress.com).

All travellers, however, should remember this one short caveat: don’t be afraid. The world, on the whole, is a safe and welcoming place. Take these few precautions, and there’s a very good chance that everything will be just fine.

SCAN YOUR PASSPORT AND EMAIL IT TO YOURSELFBefore setting off, scan the photo page of your passport, as well as

your driver’s licence and any other important documents, and email them to yourself, as well as to a close friend or relative. If you lose any of these documents, they’ll be a whole lot easier to replace if you have the details handy.

TELL SOMEONE WHERE YOU’RE GOING. CHECK IN REGULARLY

This is a handy trick for solo travellers. Keep someone at home informed of your plans – share an itinerary before you leave, and also keep them up to date with any changes to where you’re going and when you’re likely to get there. Check in regularly to let them know that you’re making it to these points safely.

TRY TO ARRIVE AT NEW DESTINATIONS DURING THE DAY

Though sometimes you won’t have a choice, it’s best not to arrive in a new city or country in the middle of the night, when you’re forced to find your bearings under the cloak of darkness. Instead, time your transfers to get you to a new place around mid-afternoon, just in time for check-in.

WEAR OLD CLOTHES

Most solo travellers will instinctively realise that wearing chunky, obvious jewellery is a bad idea, but how about the rest of your outfit? It’s tempting to look good when you’re travelling; however, if you wear new, expensive clothes you’re just going to draw attention to yourself. Instead, go for older gear in drab colours. Don’t wear travel-specific clothing – branded hiking gear and the like – that will mark you out immediately as a visitor, but rather go with the everyday clothes you would wear at home. And if you need to carry expensive items like a camera or a laptop, do so in a tatty old bag that doesn’t look as though it would be transporting anything valuable.

CARRY YOUR MONEY IN FRONT OF YOU; CARRY SMALL CHANGEThe chance of being the victim of petty crime in most countries is relatively low, but it still pays to be smart with your cash. Don’t carry more than you’ll need for the day; always put money

in the front pocket of your jeans or trousers, rather than the back; and carry small change in a separate place to your larger bills, allowing you to pay for everyday items without pulling out a full wad for everyone to see.

DON’T STARE AT MAPS

In this age of smartphones equipped with various mapping apps, there’s really no need to carry a hard-copy map and mark yourself out as a tourist by stopping to check it in public places. Instead, just check your phone; or, if you don’t want to show off that piece

of expensive gadgetry, sit down at

a cafe and grab a drink before taking out your map or guidebook to peruse.

DON’T USE A MONEY BELT

This is my golden rule of safe travel. Money belts – the thin, bum-bag-like satchels that travellers are supposed to use to ‘hide’ their cash and important documents – are very easy for an experienced thief to spot bulging from below your waistband. If anything, these belts just show people you have something to steal. Better to simply leave anything important at the hostel, or at home.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

You will be approached a lot, as a solo traveller. You will be approached by touts and swindlers, by con artists and others with nefarious intent; however, those people will be in the extreme minority. You will also be approached on your journey by a huge number

of locals and other travellers who have nothing but goodwill and a generous spirit. Often the trick to spotting the difference between these two types is experience – knowledge of the local scams, of the classic tricks – but it’s also worth listening to your gut. If a situation feels wrong to you, if you’re getting a bad feeling about the person you’re with or the place that you’re in, then get out. It’s far better to be on the safe side here.

DON’T MAKE EYE CONTACTIt saddens me to have to write this, because I believe in interacting with as many locals as possible when

you travel and being as open and as interested as you can be. However,

if you’re in a place where you’re

being approached a lot, where you’re constantly having to make that

call between safe and potentially dangerous, it can be a lot easier

to just keep your head down and

not allow people that initial ‘in’ by making eye contact with you.

ASK AROUND ABOUT CLASSIC SCAMSIn most cities there will be a standard set of scams that tourists fall for on an almost daily basis. ‘I just want to practise my English.’ ‘Would you like to see my cousin’s jewellery store?’

‘I’m an art student …’ And so on. Ask someone at your hostel for the local classics to watch out for.

DON’T GET TOO DRUNK

You lose your inhibitions when you’re drunk. You also make terrible decisions. If you’re travelling by yourself, go out for a few drinks, by all means, but try not to let it get out of hand.

GET A GROUP TOGETHER TO GO OUT AT NIGHTIn some cities it will be perfectly safe for you to go out at night on your own. That’s great, it’s part of the adventure. It’s worth asking the staff at your hostel, though, if they think it’s a good idea.

If not, try to gather a group of like-minded souls from around the dorm rooms to join you on your night out. Failing that, many hostels organise nightly outings in cities where it may not seem safe to go solo.

GET SOMEONE TO CALL YOU A TAXI, OR USE UBER Leaving a bar or restaurant or hotel late at night? Rather than flagging down

a random taxi from the street, have someone from that bar or restaurant or hotel call you a taxi. This ensures the job has been logged into a system and the driver is someone accountable and legit. Alternatively, if Uber is operating in the city you’re visiting, it might be safer and more reliable than the local taxi service.

GET INSURANCE

This is crucial. Don’t leave home without buying travel insurance. You can take all of the precautions in the world, but you can’t plan for bad luck. Insurance will cover you and get you out of some serious jams.