

## Solo does not mean lonely

Travelling alone is exciting but can create a fear of being lonely. Financial demands aside – which any solo traveller will understand - what are the difficulties encountered once you step on board? Will you feel excluded? Will you be able to enjoy the cruise in the same way that a couple can? Is it easy to meet likeminded people? As a solo cruise ship traveller, I understand the worries that most people hold. Ships do run activities aimed at the independent passenger. Whilst many feel safe in these events, I hate every minute of the forced, slightly unnatural and ‘under the spotlight’ luncheon. Just because we are all travelling alone, does not mean we have anything in common. So, how do you meet other passengers with similar interests and values to you?

### Evening Dining

It’s easy to dine in the Ocean-View/Lido buffet for the entire cruise. It certainly is the most straightforward option, as you can choose your dinner, sit quietly in the corner and return to your room, all in just 15 minutes. However, I love food and dinner conversations too much. Most cruise ships have two dining choices: open (any time) or set (usually early or late). Solo travellers mostly choose set dining, as they feel secure sitting with the same company every night. Yet, this restricts the number of conversations encountered. Open time dining allows you to sit with different people. One of the longest walks of your life can be the first night approach to the host or hostess, who assigns your table. Surrounded by queues of couples and big groups, you might feel a little isolated, but, inevitably the staff member will greet you with a huge smile. This relationship will become one of the most important on the ship. Always ask for a sharing table of approximately 6 – more and you might feel lost, less and you could feel as though you are gate crashing a date. After dinner, remember to comment on your table, as the host/hostess will remember you the next night – one of the many perks of travelling alone.

### Activities

Many cruises run activities at set times every day. Look for the pre-dinner event, such as a 7pm quiz. Although it can be frightening trying to find a team, most are incredibly welcoming. Usually, the same people will attend the event night after night and once the activity has ended, all will head towards the dining room: you will end up sharing a table with these people that you recognise.

### Routines

Despite the short length of time that you are cruising, most people find a routine. Take, for example, the sunbeds. If you sit on the same deck chair, on the same floor, every single day, you will find that the same people will surround you every single day. It begins with a smile and a ‘Good Morning’, but, eventually, you will find yourself talking and searching for each other. Yet, this also means that if you change your habits, by attending breakfast in the dining room, or eating dinner an hour later, you will encounter even more people.

### Classes

Zumba and Pilates might be an extra financial cost, but meeting when you look your worst, whilst sweating and dressed in the most casual of clothing, will break barriers immediately. Soon, you will find that the next stop is the café, as you are both desperate for a drink after the strenuous workout.

### Dancing

You are desperate to dance, but it definitely isn’t as easy as just walking onto the dancefloor alone. The DJ can be your answer, as they observe everything. They will inform you what time the groups

of friends arrive to begin dancing. Sit at the bar long enough, and someone will approach you, chat to you and ask you to dance.

#### Shore Excursions

Ships run trips at each port. Yes, the trips can be expensive; however, choosing your excursions carefully will result in you meeting people with similar interests. Being open to conversation is key: try not to place your bag on the spare seat beside you; fold your arms and look down to your lap. As you walk onto that coach, hold your head high and smile at those you pass. They will begin talking to you.

Undoubtedly, most people will take a huge interest in you and they will welcome you with open arms. You will become a famous face on the ship. Most people will be incredibly kind, although be warned that some might be bold enough to ask imposing questions: 'Why are you travelling alone? Do you get lonely? Haven't you got anyone else to travel with?', and my ultimate favourite of 'How can you afford to travel alone?' Yet, my answer is always the same: 'Solo travelling means that I do what I want, when I want, without compromise. I meet wonderful people, but I can also be alone.' Mostly people then view you with respect, admiration and slight envy – the thought of not sharing such a small cabin is mighty appealing. Remember that you don't need to justify or explain your reasons for solo travelling, you should simply respect yourself for doing it and demand the same of the others around you.