

Women Travelers Go It Alone

“Where are the men?” This was clearly the unspoken thought of many who watched the five of us toss the ropes and maneuver our Barge through the locks on the Canal du Midi in Southern France. We were the only crew of women on the canal and when on the last day we steered our way through the famous seven locks at Beziers, the crowds that come to watch this spectacle gave us a round of applause for our efforts.



The Canal Du Midi was idyllic, a popular trip on the calendar of Australian company Bushwise Women. The five of us from New Zealand and Australia floated gently along the Canal stopping at villages to buy fresh produce, taste the wine, and visit ancient sites along the way. It was simply – France, in all its glory.

It was to be a sabbatical of sorts – I had come to the end of one chapter in my life and it felt like time to dream new dreams – it was time to travel. I had scoffed at Liz Gilbert’s book *Eat Pray Love*: “we don’t need to go on some grand expensive tour to find ourselves, we can find ourselves anywhere.” But I did go on the grand tour, and Liz’s book *Eat Pray Love* became my constant companion and guide on the four-month trip, as did the women I traveled with and met along the way.

In New Zealand, we have several tour operators who cater especially for women travelers and as I am not a confident traveler, especially on my own, joining a small group of women seemed a great place to start. The Tour Calendar on the Women Travel NZ website showed a few tours that fitted my timetable and plans. I was soon booked in to Bike and Barge the Canal du Midi with Bushwise Women along with a two-week Morocco Odyssey with Venus Adventures.

Morocco was something else – this trip took me right out of my comfort zone and it was worth it. In a country like this a great guide is a must – especially for women traveling alone. Julie Paterson our guide from Venus Adventures for Women made it safe for us to dive in and explore this ancient country. We entered into another world and we were given the tour of a lifetime – from shopping for carpets to riding a camel into the Sahara to sleep under the stars.

Our handsome local guide Adil proudly escorted our group of eight women. Other men asked him where the men were, and they looked at him enviously when he said “there is just me!”

Guide Julie had warned us the shopping is irresistible, I said maybe a carpet... but of course no woman could resist. The bargaining began and by the end of the trip our bags were bulging, large packages had been posted home and we had contributed greatly to the local economies of every place we visited.

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These two fabulous tours were the framework around which I built my travels. I wove in side trips with friends to Prague and Rome, stayed in the fabulous Women's B&B near the Duomo in Florence, rented an apartment in Lucca through Rosanna Capatinin of Eliotropica Travels for Women and spent a week in the south of Spain in Diva Espana retreat for women.

All over the world women are not only traveling, but women are offering accommodation and tours especially for women travelers. As a born networker, I could not resist building a new website which connects these and so Women Travel the World was born. Now I have even more excuses to travel. Whoopee!

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