

AS MORE TOUR COMPANIES FIND SUCCESS IN A NICHE MARKET, BRAD ELBOROUGH REPORTS ON ONE SPECIALISING IN TOURS FOR SINGLES

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IF YOU DON'T HAVE YOUR PASSPORT, WE CAN HELP YOU GET IT

WHEN you are travelling alone, things can often be a bit difficult. It is certainly cheaper and more convenient to travel in a group, or with at least one other person. Finding accommodation is one of the main issues, unless you want to spend every night in a shared dorm room. Or perhaps you might take

your chances on the honesty of a boarding house owner. But more often than not, singles who want a bit of privacy and like staying in hotels while abroad, get stuck looking out for the cost of a room at the full price that a couple would share. On tours, you are often with couples, or people traveling with

close friends, so finding someone to share the experience can also be an issue. And while some tours are marketed for singles, they are often specifically for younger people more interested in being away from home with people from the opposite sex than seeing the destination.

Even getting out of the country can be a concern for some adventure-minded travellers. While some destinations are easy for anyone to visit, some countries are not the safest to explore. Wandering the streets alone is not encouraged in some places for male or female, young or old.



BIKESWIMMERS JUST FOR SINGLES TOURS TARGET A DESTINATION, SUCH AS KAKADA, WHICH PROVIDE PLENTY OF SIGHTSEEING OPPORTUNITIES.

Justine Waddington had issues with all the accommodations, but instead of sitting at home complaining about it, she decided to do something about it. She is now the director of A Bikeswimmer just for singles that caters to some of the heartier single travellers. "As goes the story for many new businesses, my idea for A Bikeswimmer just for singles was sparked by the frustration of not finding what I was looking for," she said. "I have always been passionate about travel and over the years have crossed many borders and experienced many wonders, but as I approached my late 20s and went into my 30s and to the land of 'singletons', I started to find it

difficult to find a holiday just right for me, being single and over 20 years." Mia Waddington had a background in the travel industry — she had led tours to South America — as well as in marketing and business. "I felt I had what it took to create a business dedicated to offering holidays to the single traveller," she said. "A lot of my trips had been more along the lines of active-style travel, including the Inca Trail, trekking in Thailand, rafting it through Malawi and Tanzania and a ski instruction trip to New Zealand. I knew that if that is what I liked doing, we had to create trips like those: ones, as I knew them would be others like me."

She has been in business for just over two years and believes her launch was correct. "We've seen groups come back from Vietnam, Nepal, South America and Kakada. We make sure we only work with the best operators and because of this we get a wonderful thumbs up," she said. The itineraries are centred on the destination, with plenty of sightseeing opportunities. Travellers share a room with someone of the same sex and about the same age (there are age restrictions and a preferred age range). This keeps accommodation costs down. But those who like a bit of privacy can pay extra and get a single room on some tours.

The tours are set up to give a taste of the city being visited, but as a couple of satisfied customers can confirm, there is also plenty of time to get to know your new travelling companions a bit better. "Idea Maxwell travelled to Vietnam (28-45 years) with A Bikeswimmer and had as much fun with the destination as with the group. And romance does appear to be an obvious side-line. "Many of my girlfriends can't believe the places I go alone," she said. "In this case I went alone, but with many from all over Australia. The thought of meeting new people, not just from Sydney, was exciting to me. Plus, I knew I would be sharing a room with another female in my age group. "Most of us went on the trip with the first thought being to travel to Vietnam with a group and if you make a hook-up, well, all the better." The group spent the first couple of days exploring Ho Chi Minh, then took a side trip to Can Tho before flying on to Hoi An. "When we flew to Hoi An was when we all started to connect and have a real good time," Ms Maxwell said. "Maybe it was the nice accommodations, less crowded streets or maybe it was the shopping. What also was making the trip good were the great people and the leaders in the bunch. "Dan, from Melbourne, and Jayne, from Sydney, then hooked up. They were made for each other since they both were incredibly funny and had a low for music. It came as no surprise that they are now living together." Another couple now living together in Perth are Toni and Carl from Brisbane. "The highlight of the trip was our last night together on the junk in the Long Bay," Toni said. "It was such a beautiful boat and adding to the evening was the food, fun and scenery. At this time we had all bonded and none of us wanted it to come to an end."

"We were all surviving on such little sleep for the fear of getting out on something. We had the boat to ourselves, along with enough staff to take any request we may have. "We had a great time together as we jumped off the boat, went for a swim, explored caves or just lay around on the top deck to take in the sun. "For the last year there have been several reunions throughout Australia where we have gatherings as a group once again." Jennifer Rose recently returned from Explora Kakada and Beyond (40-59 years). "I have only been single for less than 12 months," she said. "Before becoming single I would have said that I did not like to be with groups of people I do not know, however it has been a choice between sitting on my couch (which I was doing while married) or getting out there on my own. "I am really surprised at how easily a group of people who do not know each other can have a conversation and get along. "For the trip to Kakada, everyone wanted to see it and the single thing was just a bonus."

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