

From the young to businesswomen to energetic grandmothers, Canadian women are travelling like never before. They're travelling solo, in pairs, with their children and as members of interest groups. And while women travel for many of the same reasons as men do, their social concerns, as well as their health and safety needs, are very, very different.

Female travellers are directly affected by the religious and societal beliefs of the countries they visit. As they make their way around the globe, chances are they'll be called upon to adapt the way they dress or the manner in which they interact with the male population. They might even find that, in some places, it's inappropriate to be outdoors after sundown. The more that women prepare themselves for these differing attitudes, the richer and safer their travelling experiences will be.

Whether you're a breast-feeding mother, a busy executive or an older traveller, as a woman you'll have a unique set of health concerns to contend with on the road. A bit of pre-planning and

research in this area will prove to be invaluable once you're on your way.

Everyone knows that, when travelling, a woman must be extra vigilant in terms of safety and security. What steps can she take to avoid possible sexual harassment? How can she make her hotel room secure?

This publication is filled with practical tips specifically of interest to the female traveller. Its prime objective is to inform and inspire Canadian women to travel safely. For general information on planning a safe trip, see our booklet *Bon Voyage... But*, which is listed in the "For More Information" section. And bon voyage!

In Southeast Asia, signs are posted at religious landmarks asking women not to enter if they're menstruating.

"Knowledge itself is power." A smart traveller is one who finds out everything she can about the culture and customs, and the role of women, in the places she'll be visiting. It makes sense to learn what to expect and prepare yourself for as many eventualities as possible.

One of your best sources of travel information is other women. Connect with them; ask for their advice. Note their recommendations on hotels, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) and restaurants. Find out if they have friends or know of organizations or bookstores for you to contact at your destination. Tips and information from these sources can be invaluable.

Ask other women if you may read parts of their travel journals. If they don't mind sharing, this is a wonderful way of acquainting yourself with other cultures from a woman's point of view. It will also prepare you for the emotional highs and lows that may occur on your journey.

Don't count on mainstream media to present information specifically relevant to the female traveller. Instead, supplement your reading with travel books, newsletters, magazines and Web sites for women. They address, with appropriate empathy, the most important health, safety, cultural and emotional issues experienced by females on the road.

Surf the Net. Post your queries on on-line bulletin boards. You could get responses from helpful travellers around the world. But beware of those who may be using the Net for unsavoury purposes.

Canada is a multicultural country. Seek out women in your community who were born and raised in the places you plan to visit. They are the perfect guides to appropriate behaviour and dress for women within their culture. Get them to teach you a few key words and phrases in their mother tongue, too.

Consider investing in a self-defence course designed for women. You'll embark on your journey with added confidence.