

## Lessening The Culture Shock

"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 break-

fasts (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 travel-

lers around the world. But beware of those who may be using the Net for unsavoury purposes.

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

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.