

“Are you going alone to India? But you’re a woman! That’s too dangerous!!” Too often have I heard these words – from best friends to work colleagues or even my own family doctor. In the meantime, I have already traveled seven times to India. Sometimes accompanied by friends, but very often alone. And I have had almost exclusively good experiences.

by Ulli Felber

Through India as a woman: dream destination or danger zone?

Since I have developed such a close relationship with India, the negative coverage of this unique country makes me quite sad. At the same time, it is good that all these terrible incidents were and are frequently and thoroughly reported in the media, because that has set things in motion – and there’s still a lot to be done. Rape is a horrible crime that must be punished – everywhere in the world.

The vast majority of my own personal experiences in India have been good or very good. Even more so: I have enjoyed many beautiful and surprising moments. Often, people helped me spontaneously – with honorable intentions, without someone being intrusive. The few dangerous situations in which I found myself in could have been avoided, if at the time I had been already following these tips:

My 10 Tips for women travelling alone in India

1. Dress with moderation

In India, shoulders, cleavage and knees are considered particularly erotic, as is any sort of tight clothing. There are some differences depending on the region, too. For example, touristy Goa is relatively relaxed in this aspect, while the opposite is true for the conservative and strict Muslim region of Kashmir. In principle, however, and this applies to all regions, a moderate dress is fashionable – something wide and airy that keeps your shoulders and knees covered. Tank tops, wide necklines, leggings (except when combined with dresses or skirts), shorts and hot pants are complete no-gos. Note: This also applies to yoga classes! (Even when the courageous instructor is used to it.)



Dressing moderately prevents many awkward situations. Here pictured: Ulli Felber.

2. **Just in case: avoid eye contact**

Eye contact is a very big deal in India. Strangers can start behaving in an uncomfortably friendly way (or worse, a threatening or confrontational one) after locking eyes for just a second. Whoever wants to be left alone - by pushy taxi drivers, random strangers or inquisitive (if very dear) Indian extended families - must learn to look away quickly. This is specially recommended in areas where you do not feel comfortable, or in the evening hours. In any case, never lose sight of the situation!

3. **Girls only!**

In recent years a lot has been done to specifically improve the quality of life of women in India... or at least in its major cities. There are taxis that are only for women - and have also exclusively female drivers (for example, in Delhi: "Meru EVE"). At metro stations, there are sections that are reserved for women, and the trains themselves have cars and compartments destined only to women. The same applies to buses. Wherever you may have to go through a security control (Airport, Train Station, museums, shopping centers, etc.) there is always a separate line for women and a female security officer performing the check.

4. **Be smart**

Travelling alone as a woman, one is naturally more exposed to danger than when in a group - no matter where in the world. Common sense goes a long way in many situations:

- Ideally, always research previously in which areas you will be travelling.
- Do not wander alone in poor neighborhoods and rural areas, especially at night.
- When riding taxis alone, try to do it during daytime.
- When on the (night) train, best to be seated next to a local, nice family.
- Do not fall for the lies of illegal traders, transport pirates and other opportunists that claim to offer supposedly better accommodation at train stations and airports.

5. Fake wedding ring

Those women who'd like to have peace and quiet to travel should purchase a false wedding ring. A smaller, cheap gold ring can be worth a lot! Once in India, you will be asked soon enough, and very frequently, by an endless list of suitors of all ages, eager to become husbands. To throw water on such unwanted propositions, just show your ring and tell briefly of your beloved husband at home... maybe add a few children to your story too, just in case ;-). Optionally, you can also say that your husband is already on the way "here", etc. Especially when a woman has reached the 30-year-old-limit and is "still" travelling alone, a false wedding ring can do wonders in keeping unwanted attention away - like pityful looks at you or, on the other side, well intentioned Indian families who try to match you with a relative.



Any woman travelling alone on the train is best suited next to a family. That can also be fun!

6. **Good Story**

For emergencies, a good story can always be a good deterrent. Depending on the situation: the husband is coming soon to...; the father has a high position in the government; etc. Sounds silly, but it can have a big impact.

7. **Always with you**

For anybody that doesn't want to travel without her trustworthy pepper spray on the handbag: this great defense tool is cheap and easy to find in many Indian drugstores.

8. **Don't touch me!**

From time to time one hears of travelling women that they were groped by anonymous men in the thick of a busy street. Just to embarrass this disgusting kind of man, you should scream loudly: "Do not touch me!" As my Indian friends recommend, the first step should be just verbal and without personal insults. For an Indian, this simple call to attention is incredibly embarrassing and they will usually disappear in the blink of an eye.

9. **Be calm, firm and explicit**

In extremes cases, when things go really bad, this has helped me: first, calmly but very firmly express your discomfort and anger - without being rude. Even better, follow up (always keeping calm and firm) with an oversized side-dish of lies (the best ones always include mentioning some important or famous character that we know personally!). It's worth to try... In my case, it has always worked out.

10. **Shout it out loud**

When all else fails: lash out and defend yourself vociferously. Take it all out. Just don't show any fear! Indian men don't expect such a reaction and can be easily intimidated. But ATTENTION: Here I speak from personal experience. This is not a universal panacea and can also sometimes have the opposite reaction.

To summarize: Travel smart. I feel that India is not more dangerous than other places that I have visited. Naturally, something can always happen. But for me India was and remains as worthy destination! And whoever pays attention, respects the local ethos and generally travels with open eyes and an open heart, will without question enjoy an indescribably great country and many beautiful experiences.



Ladakh is much safer for women than most other regions of India.

Alone as woman in Ladakh

Alone in Ladakh as a woman: Ladakh is culturally very different from the rest of India - here it is much safer for a woman to travel alone, and one hardly sees herself exposed to dangerous situations.

WITH US YOU ARE ALWAYS SAFE

Whoever doesn't want to travel alone in India despite the advice from Ulli Felber, is in good hands with us. We know our drivers, guides and all other staff. And if you travel in a group, you are even safer: to our [group tours](#)!