

The Boston Globe

First solo trip? First time abroad? Here's how to make the most of your maiden voyages

We've rounded up some expert advice for members of the first-timers' club.

By **Diane Bair and Pamela Wright** Globe Correspondent. Updated January 16, 2020. 3 hours ago

That first trip to Europe can be memorable — for all the wrong reasons, as one of us can attest. Our rental car was towed in Rome, so we spent our precious Sistine Chapel day in a tow yard, looking for one red Fiat among thousands, trying to be understood in high school Italian (“This is a pencil!” was no help there), and forking over thousands of lira to get back a car that didn't even belong to us. Overall, it was still a great trip, but we learned a few things. We would tell our younger selves to choose an English-speaking country on that first trip abroad — and stick with public transportation, as opposed to driving in an ancient city (and braving the autostrada), especially if you can't read the parking signs.

Which got us to thinking: How can a traveler make the most of those first-time adventures? As in: Where should you go for a first trip abroad? Your first-ever cruise vacation? That first-ever solo journey? Or that all-important first vacation as a couple? Combining our own insights (based on 20-plus years of travel writing) with expert opinions, here are some thoughts. Tailor our recommendations to your own tastes (i.e., history lover, foodie fanatic, or outdoor lover) and see where it takes you.



Going solo on a small group trip? You'll make friends quickly when you engage in activities like a camel ride in Wadi Rum. This group is touring Jordan with Intrepid Travel. DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Best first-time solo trip

If you're going it alone — i.e., not bringing along your BFF or significant other — we'd suggest a small-group trip when you venture out for the first time. That way, if something unexpected happens (injury, illness, getting lost, or robbed), you've got someone local to lend a hand — or perhaps offer herbal tea and anti-nausea medication. (Thanks again, fellow Jordan travelers!) You can room by yourself (check first to see if you'll have to pay a singles supplement) and skip activities if you like, but you've got company when you want it. "People who travel on our small group journeys are more open to meeting people and making friends," says Jennifer Tombaugh, president of Tauck in Wilton, Conn. (www.tauck.com), which operates tours in 70 countries on seven continents. For a first solo trip, Tombaugh likes Morocco. "It's a great group trip. Most people speak English there, but it helps to have someone handling the logistics," for day trips and desert excursions, she says. Another place she recommends for a first-time soloist who's considering a small-group tour: Tanzania.

Best first-time family trip

Planning a trip with the kiddos in tow can be daunting. You're putting some effort into this, so make it a destination that really delivers. Tombaugh of Tauck recommends visiting a US national park for an awe-inspiring family vacation. "Every kid in America should have a chance to see our national parks," she says. Among the company's most popular family trips is the "Red Rocks & Painted Canyons" tour featuring the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and Zion National Park, in partnership with filmmaker Ken Burns. In our own backyard, there's Acadia National Park (www.nps.gov) — one of the most gorgeous of them all and quite doable as a DIY vacation.

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