

What are the opportunities for solo tourism from Europe?

The market for solo tourism products in Europe is booming. The number of singles is growing, as is the number of people that travel solo by choice. They increasingly tend to visit developing countries, seeking adventures, relaxation, solitude or connection. Self-development and unique experiences are important aspects of solo travel. Personal guided tours are especially popular.

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1. Description of the target group

Solo tourism is travel undertaken by a solo person. This person can be either single or in a relationship. They can be travelling alone, but also in a group.

Solo travellers do not travel alone because they have to, but because they want to. They may be inspired by movies like 'Under the Tuscan Sun', 'Eat, Pray, Love' or 'Into the Wild'. Solo travel can be in line with a person's way of life. It can also be a trip someone makes once in a lifetime, at a crossroads in life (divorce, retirement) or to pursue a personal dream (pilgrimage, climbing a mountain).

There are no tourism activities that are strictly limited to solo tourism. In fact, most forms of tourism are suitable for solo travellers. For example golf tourism, religious tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism and cruises. It is more interesting to look at why people travel solo and which people travel solo.

Reasons for people to travel solo include:

- being in charge of your own schedule
- solitude
- freedom
- meeting new people
- getting a sense of empowerment
- ticking off something on their bucket list
- self-reflection and 'recharging' for a next episode in life

Health and safety measures

Health and safety are important to European tourists. They often inquire about the safety of their destination. Especially safe driving can be a concern. Tourists want to know the qualifications of their drivers and how/when the equipment is tested. Unclean rooms and a lack of (or faulty) smoke detectors are an annoyance at the destination. This might result in bad reviews after the holiday.

Safety concerns are among the most important barriers to solo travel, so you will need to be clear about the safety situation at your destination. Install safety measures and talk about them on your website. You can dedicate a page to 'safety'.

Tips:

Pay attention to general safety measures. For example, tour operators should check vehicles and equipment regularly and hire experienced guides who know the area well. Accommodation establishments should have safety measures in place, such as smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, first-aid kits and 24-hour medical assistance.

Show the outcomes of safety checks and licences to your clients.

Communicate clearly that you take the safety of your guests seriously.

Make sure only staff and visitors can enter your property. Consider a curfew, a doorlock system for evenings/nights or recordable locks, for example.

Check if your local law enforcement officials can provide no-cost safety and security training for employees.

If there are any no-go areas for tourists at your destination, clearly communicate this with your guests. Also, explain why these areas are not safe to visit.

Political stability

Political stability is an important safety factor for solo tourists from Europe, especially because some developing countries are politically unstable. Most commercial tour operators don't offer holidays to countries that their Ministry of Foreign Affairs has declared unsafe. This has previously led to a drop in tourism arrivals in countries such as Mali, Egypt and Kenya.

Tips:

Keep (potential customers updated on changes in the safety situation in your area. You can do so through your website and your staff, for example. Be open and honest in your communication: explain which areas are safe or where safety might be an issue. Your customer has plenty of information sources too.

Share safety experiences from customers on your website. Let them write about how safe they felt, because tourists value the experience of other travellers.

If your region is 'unsafe', commercial tour operators will most probably not go there. In this case, focus on volunteer organisations and individual tourists. Check your country's current safety status on the websites of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in your target countries ([Ireland](#), the [United Kingdom](#) etc.).

Accommodation

Solo tourists often like to meet people during their travels. They prefer accommodation with shared social spaces, for example communal eating, a small bar, a lounge or a communal garden.

The prices of accommodation are generally based on two people. Providers often charge a 'single supplement' to solo tourists, of 10% to 100% on top of the standard rate. Solo tourists may consider this unfair and prefer accommodation that makes them feel welcome. With the increasing popularity of solo travel, more and more accommodation providers waive the supplement and/or offer single rooms.

Tips:

Provide opportunities for solo tourists to interact, via shared spaces or activities. For example, arrange a campfire in the evening. Facilitate and communicate, but don't make activities compulsory.

Do not charge extra (or charge only a very small sum) for single accommodation. Advertise this clearly to appeal to solo tourists.

Traveller profile

Some general characteristics of European solo tourists:

- higher socio-economic background
- medium to high income
- strong desire to travel
- considerable interest in culture and food

Solo tourists typically make long journeys (gap-year travellers, backpackers, volunteers) or relatively short trips (for self-development, a course or relaxation). They often travel off-season. The most important barriers are safety concerns and fear of loneliness. Many solo tourists cherish their independence, but they rarely really want to be alone. So even if they like to do their own thing, they still want the opportunity to connect with other travellers or local people at some point during their trip.

Meeting new people is key for many solo tourists. Dating may be a motive for some single travellers, but most solo travel isn't specifically aimed at romance.

Although solo tourists can be of all ages, they are primarily:

- middle-aged single women
- young men who live in a multi-person household but travel alone

Older generation (50 and above)

The greatest increase in demand occurred among tourists aged 50 and above. This segment consists of more women than men. Many women solo tourists prefer exotic destinations and are looking for cultural experiences. Some are also interested in soft adventure.

Tips:

Offer packages with a wide variety of activities. For example: [culinary](#) activities, soft [adventure](#) and [cultural](#) activities.

Accommodation providers should focus on comfort. For instance, storage for medication, sufficient medical support, comfortable beds and luggage service should be available.

See our study about [senior travel from Europe](#) for tips on how to target senior tourists.

Younger solo tourists (18-35)

Young solo tourists enjoy meeting new people on their holidays. Men are overrepresented in this category.

According to [101 Singles Holidays](#), solo-travelling women typically enjoy active and exotic trips like walking holidays and African safaris. Men are more likely to go cycling and sailing.

Tips:

Offer packages with a wide variety of activities. Promote your products as an experience, rather than just activities.

Develop itineraries with a special theme, such as culinary or cultural trips, but also themes around a certain area where you are located. For example, beach (surfing, sailing, snorkelling), mountains (hiking, biking, trekking) or jungle (jungle safari, bush walks, zip lining).

Offer communal areas and joint activities where solo travellers can meet new people.

Provide a list of popular places where other solo travellers gather, such as bars, pubs, venues and coffee shops.

Make a calendar with the most interesting events, sports games and festivals in your area. Place the calendar on your website and make it available to your guests when they arrive.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for solo tourism?

Solo tourism is on the rise

The market for solo tourism is booming. Tour operators around the globe have witnessed double-digit growth in solo tourism bookings in the past few years. For example, Intrepid Travel reports a [40% increase in solo passengers on group trips over the past five years](#).

In the same period, [the number of Google searches for 'solo travel' has more than tripled](#). With a 593% increase in interest, [Pinterest's Travel Report 2018 lists solo \(ad\)ventures as a main trend](#). Mainstream media are catching on too. For example, British newspaper *The Telegraph* recently [launched a channel especially for solo tourists](#).

A third of European households are single-person households

The number of people who are single by choice at various stages in life is increasing. In 2017, [34% of European households consisted of a single adult without children](#). This is the most common type of household in Europe and the fastest-growing type since 2006.

The percentage of single-person households is highest in:

- Scandinavia
- the Baltic States
- Germany
- the Netherlands
- Bulgaria
- Austria

Even though many solo tourists are not single, singles are more likely to travel alone. Therefore, this share is a good indication of promising source markets for solo tourism.

For other statistics on European source markets, see our study on [European demand for tourism in developing countries](#).

Popular solo tourism destinations

As stated above, safety is especially important to solo tourists when it comes to selecting a destination. Married solo tourists usually often prefer domestic trips. Single solo tourists are more likely to choose international destinations. Cities and towns are the preferred locations for solo tourists, followed by beaches and mountain areas. According to European tour operators, solo tourists are increasingly looking for adventure.

Solo tourists are often set on their destination, but flexible about what they are going to do there. This offers opportunities for operators to attract tourists on the spot.

Popular solo tourism destinations in developing countries include:

- Costa Rica
- India
- Laos
- Nepal
- Sri Lanka
- Vietnam

In 2017, [Airbnb reported trending solo travel destinations](#) including:

- Cancun, Playa del Carmen and Mexico City in Mexico
- Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam
- Johannesburg in South Africa
- São Paulo in Brazil

Tips:

Define your local culture's unique aspects. In your marketing, emphasise those elements that tourists cannot find in competing countries.

If your destination has already established a positive image, use this. Develop products that connect to your destination's theme.

Try to attract the solo tourist that is already at your destination (or close by). Leave flyers and leaflets about your tourism business in hostels or tour agencies a couple of towns away from yours. Have good advertising at your location. Mark your location with arrows (if this is allowed), to guide potential customers towards your business.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for solo tourism?

More people living alone

In Europe, more and more people are living alone. Various developments drive this trend, including:

- the tendency of women to outlive their male partners
- the increasing rate of divorce and separation
- the affordability of living alone by choice
- the gradual shift of populations towards urban centres

- a 'break' in people's lives (sabbatical, gap year - 're-positioning yourself') leads them to appreciate this new freedom

As the number of single-person and single-parent households in Europe grows, so does the demand for solo tourism.

Ageing population

Europe currently has more than 200 million citizens aged 50+ (40%). This number is rising quickly, due to the ageing population. In 2017, 19% of the population in Europe was over 65 years of age. By 2030, this percentage is expected to have increased to 25%.

People over 50 (predominantly women) are largely represented in the solo-tourist target group. This growing segment, which is increasingly healthy and wealthy, is fuelling demand for solo-tourism products.

Unique and authentic experiences

Like most European tourists, solo travellers are looking for a unique and authentic experience. They are interested in the typical local culture of their destination. In recent years, authenticity has become a major factor in tourism. This is not expected to change any time soon.

Tips:

Develop unique experiences that European tourists cannot find elsewhere.

Emphasise this uniqueness in your marketing.

Include interaction with locals in your product/service offering. For example, a visit to a local market or festival, local cooking workshops or more adventurous activities like hiking.

Self-development

Recent years have seen a sharp increase in the demand for self-development and learning holidays. This is in line with the current trend of transformative or transformational travel, which offers tourists personal growth and enrichment.

Examples include:

- meditation
- yoga / Pilates
- weight loss
- detox programmes
- cookery courses
- creative writing

Such self-development activities are highly suitable for solo tourists. Many people who are planning solo holidays consider adding self-development components to their itineraries.

Tips:

Include self-development components in your product/service offering.

Offer interactive workshops in which solo tourists can learn something while participating in groups. For example, include blanket weaving with local women, conversation lessons to learn a language or

cooking workshops.

For more information see our study on [inner wellness tourism](#), which focuses on spiritual, mental and emotional wellness.

Flexibility and variety of activities

On long-haul holidays, European solo tourists generally seek a variety of experiences. For example, they may wish to combine cultural or adventurous activities with culinary experiences. Solo tourists with a specific lifestyle (wellness-oriented, food-minded etc.) like to include this in their holiday. When it comes to activities during their holiday, solo tourists from Europe are not very different from European tourists in general. However, they are very keen to book personal guided tours.

Tips:

Be flexible in your offering and include tailor-made products and services. Give your customers the option to build their own package.

Offer personal guided tours.

Increasing use of online research

European solo tourists increasingly research and plan their trip online. To gather information and share experiences they use:

- peer review sites, like [TripAdvisor](#) and [Zoover](#)
- travel forums, like Lonely Planet's [Thorn Tree forum](#)
- social media, like [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#)

Solo tourists also increasingly use apps to plan or research their trips and meet fellow travellers.

Some examples are:

- [btrfly](#)
- [SoloTraveller](#)
- [Travello](#)

Online research is a trend that has increased exponentially over the past years. Although growth has peaked, the use of the Internet to research tourism will continue to increase. It is predicted to remain the most important research channel for years to come.

Tips:

Maintain a strong Internet presence and online marketing strategy, including social media.

Use photos and videos to bring your story alive. For more information, watch this [webinar series on visual communication in adventure travel](#) by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Libris.

Use current customers as ambassadors for your company and area. Encourage them to share their experiences and visuals on social media, to write blogs and to review your company.

For more information, see our [10 tips for online success with your tourism company](#).

For more information, see our study on [European tourism market trends](#).

4. What requirements should your solo tourism product comply with to be allowed on the European market?

For general tourism requirements, see our study on [what requirements your services should comply with to attract European tourists](#).

In addition, there are some voluntary standards for where solo tourism meets adventure tourism.

Voluntary adventure tourism safety standards

For more adventurous solo tourism experiences, three ISO standards support safe adventure practices: [21101](#), [21102](#) and [21103](#). Additionally, some countries have their own voluntary standards. For instance, [BS 8848](#) in the United Kingdom.

Tips:

Study the ISO standards on adventure tourism. Use them to enhance your safety performance.

Check for possible voluntary standards in your target markets.

5. What competition do you face on the European market for solo tourism products?

Competition in the solo tourism market does not differ from the tourism market in general. For more information, see our study on [what competition you face on the European outbound tourism market](#).

6. Through what channels can you get solo tourism products on the European market?

Selecting smaller specialised tour operators

Smaller European tour operators specialised in solo tourism or your destination offer the best opportunities. You can identify them via trade associations, events and databases.

Some examples are:

- [Adventure Travel Show](#) - annual adventure tourism trade event, January, London.
- [Adventure Travel Trade Association](#) (ATTA) - global trade organisation for the adventure travel industry. Organises the Adventure Travel World Summit. You can [search for members](#).
- [ECTAA](#) - national associations of travel agents and tour operators per European country.
- [ITB](#) - annual tourist trade event, March, Berlin.
- [Top Resa](#) - annual tourist trade event, September, Paris.
- [Wanderlust](#) - magazine for adventurous, authentic travel. You can browse their [tour operator directory](#).
- [World Travel Market](#) - annual tourist trade event, November, London.

Another interesting option may be [Solus](#) magazine, a trade publication dedicated specifically to solo tourism.

Generating direct sales

European solo travellers increasingly book their holidays directly with service providers at the destination. To increase your chances of direct sales, you can promote your product on tourism websites/portals.

For instance:

- [Solo Travel](#)
- [Solo Traveler](#)

For an overview of the trade structure for tourism, see our study on [the channels and segments of the European tourism market](#).

7. What are the end market prices for solo tourism products?

Tourists have many destinations and types of holiday to choose from. This makes tourism a relatively price-sensitive and competitive industry. The price of a long-haul trip is determined by three factors:

1. The exchange rate between the currency of the country of origin and that of the destination country.
2. The costs of transport to and from the destination country.
3. The price of goods and services the tourist consumes in the destination country.

European tour operators are not open about the purchasing prices of their tourism products. According to industry experts, their margins vary between 10% and 25%. Prices of holiday packages vary widely as they depend on a lot of factors, such as:

- availability
- destination
- modes of transport
- travel period
- number of travellers
- length of stay
- type of accommodation (surplus for single room options)
- activities included

Tips:


Check which countries have cheap direct flights to your destination, for instance at [Skyscanner](#). This gives you a competitive advantage in those countries.

You can compare prices for solo tourism products via portals like [Solo Traveler](#).


Tourism Council WA has some useful [online tools for pricing tours and accommodation](#). These help you determine the break-even point and ideal retail price of your tourism product.

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