

Good Housekeeping



LET'S GO AUTUMN!

- ♦ Halloween in style
- ♦ Cosy home ideas
- ♦ Glow-up coats, feelgood boots
- ♦ Curries in a hurry

Separate lives

Could being a 'semi-detached spouse' work for you?

**YES, YOU DO
DESERVE A
SPA BREAK.
BOOK NOW
ON P96**

DAVINA McCALL

'I faced my
biggest fear
- and now
I'm not
frightened
any more'



BOOST YOUR MOOD!

- ✓ Eat Yourself Healthy with Jamie Oliver
- ✓ Happy family feasts from Dr Clare Mosley
- ✓ **PLUS** Take Davina's 5-Minute Move-It Challenge



HOW TO

- ♦ Take a compliment
- ♦ Holiday alone
- ♦ Cancel plans (politely)

Going solo

More women than ever are deciding to choose their own adventures and enjoy the freedom of travelling alone. Three writers explain why it's their favourite way to escape



Everyone seemed to be showing themselves off and living their best lives, and it encouraged me to do the same. After a few days, I was even wearing micro shorts and bikini tops! The stares I'd anticipated simply didn't materialise.

I ate at some incredible restaurants: Lima Bistro, which specialises in modern Peruvian cuisine; Caya House, a street-food fusion joint; and Eduardo's Beach Shack, which serves healthy brunch dishes such as chickpea omelettes and acai bowls. My most memorable meal was fried mahi mahi (a light, flaky white fish with a mild and almost sweet taste) with shrimp, one of the island's most popular dishes.

I went trekking through the Arikok National Park and ventured into the ancient Fontein Cave without having people comment on my fitness. The incredible landscape of Arikok is straight out of a sci-fi movie: a vast expanse of red earth stretching for miles. It's isolated yet beautiful in its emptiness. I walked until I reached cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, the scene so serene that, in that moment, alone with the elements, I fell in love with my own company.

My time in Aruba was marked by a profound sense of validation. For the first time while travelling, I felt like a normal human being. I was able to relax and discover what the island had to offer without the worry of being stared at.

And while I had an incredible time exploring the island, I learned a lot about myself, too. Aruba taught me that standards of beauty are not universal and that I should not let how others perceive my body get in the way of having a great time. It taught me to live unapologetically. I don't need to dim my shine to make others comfortable. And the island's normalisation of plus-size bodies taught me to see the beauty in my own. I'll be back.

GET THERE: Kuoni (kuoni.co.uk) offers a seven-night holiday to Aruba staying at the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa from £4,299pp, based on a solo traveller staying on a B&B basis in a deluxe garden view room and including flights from London with KLM (departs 17 or 24 November).



Jo (left) felt totally rested after a stay at Soukya (above), whose devotees include King Charles and Queen Camilla (right)



'I knew I had to travel alone to help me heal'

Jo Foley found peace and relaxation in India with the help of King Charles's Ayurvedic doctor.

I first visited Soukya, a holistic health retreat just outside Bengaluru (also known as Bangalore), 20 years ago. Alternative therapy centres, Ayurvedic spas and yoga retreats were booming in India at the time, most of them housed in large, glamorous five-star hotels. Soukya was anything but.

Based on a simple Keralan village, it consisted of cottages dotted throughout a large garden alongside a medical centre, dining area and yoga pavilion. It was simple, charming and restful.

It was founded by natural health expert Dr Issac Mathai, who gave me a guided tour, and I decided that if anything went wrong in my life, this is the place I wanted to be. I knew intuitively that he, and it, would make me feel better.

Since then, Soukya has expanded and Dr Mathai's devotees have grown to include well-known faces such as Emma Thompson, as well as royalty. Dr Mathai is King Charles's Ayurvedic and homeopathic doctor and both the King and especially Queen Camilla visit Soukya frequently.

So, after finishing treatment for breast cancer a year ago, I knew I wanted to go back – and this time alone. Yet, for many reasons (including lockdowns and Covid) I'd lost my bottle and was suddenly frightened at the thought of applying for a visa, packing, planning, airports, crowds and leaving the cat – an extraordinary state of affairs, seeing as I'd spent decades travelling the world alone as a journalist, never giving it a second thought.

Not wanting to allow my fears to get the better of me, I tried to relieve them by getting myself organised. I booked a meet-and-greet service to help fast-track me through customs in New Delhi, carry my luggage and transfer me from the international to the domestic terminal for my flight to Bengaluru.

I also prebooked my car transfer to Soukya so I didn't have to barter with taxi drivers. It was dark by the time I checked in, but the place glowed with serenity and, after a fitful sleep,



Guests can enjoy yoga classes in the yoga hall (above) and treatments from massages to liver packs using herbal remedies



I woke to glorious sunshine, birds singing and the sight of a tree bearing the largest breadfruit you can possibly imagine.

My one-week bespoke programme was finalised after a thorough consultation with Dr Mathai and other experts, who also asked what I'd like to achieve. 'Please help me to relax and feel myself again,' I said.

Each day began and ended with yoga followed by a series of treatments and massages – abhyanga, shirodhara (where oil is poured gently on to your forehead or third eye), reflexology, liver packs, acupressure and foot baths.

All meals are vegetarian, with the produce grown on-site. It's not just your body and brain that get a rest at Soukya; it's also your digestion – no tea, coffee or alcohol is served. It's worth taking a tour of the gardens, which are bordered by swathes of jasmine and bougainvillea

and include neatly planted rows of carrots, leeks, spinach, amaranth and coriander separated by banana, mango and pineapple plants. There's a sense of peace and serenity, broken only by the call of a peacock or the hoot of a passing train.

I left feeling totally rested with not just my energy restored but also my confidence, which is what really mattered. Soukya had worked the magic I'd hoped for. ■

GET THERE: Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com) offers a six-day Taste of Ayurveda programme at Soukya International Holistic Health Centre (soukya.com) from £2,269pp, including transfers from Bengaluru, full-board and all massages and treatments recommended by the Soukya experts.

Jo's solo travel tips

- **Join a group of other solo travellers** – especially if it's your first holiday alone. Solo tours allow for me-time along with the security of knowing there's someone else to talk to if you feel lonely, scared or lost.
- **Keep luggage light enough to carry on your own** and don't wear jewellery or a watch, unless it's big, bold and plastic. A small cross-body bag for money, phone and passport will help keep everything safe.
- **Take an extra battery pack and keep it charged;** your phone is vital in emergencies and will help you feel connected. But try not to bury your head in it – you're there to absorb the culture of the country you're in.
- **For safety, share your phone location with someone at home** and let people know where you'll be. Invest in a local SIM if you're in a country not covered by roaming.
- **Trust your instincts.** The minute you feel uncomfortable, remove yourself from the place, the area or the situation.

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