



Q: After a 24-year Navy career, I spent another decade working in a defense job. I recently retired at 55. I'm in excellent health and plan to backpack travel. I want to do it alone, but family and friends are against it. What's your advice? *P.McJ., Boston MA*

A: Our immediate reaction. With world unrest, terrorism and other troubles seeming to get worse every day, our first response is: Don't do it! Consider joining a group backpacking trip. At least travel with another person. Enlist a friend or check with online websites that offer companion lists.

However, if you insist on going solo, be sure to follow five simple precautions. 1. Safety first. Especially in crowded cities, be sure your backpack and pockets are secure by zipper or buttons. Keep your eyes and mind alert at all times, and move away from potential pickpockets and other troubles.

Don't sleep alone under the stars. Check in each night at a hotel, b&b, hostel or other safe place. A small can of Mace offers protection.

2. Be electronic. Carry the latest SmartPhone or other fully-charged device. Always be an instant click away from home, hotel, police and nearest American embassy or consulate.

3. Keep in touch with current events in areas you're planning to visit. If there are political demonstrations, group violence or many crimes happening or threatened, change your plans.

4. Dress down, preferably to look local. Don't call attention to yourself with brightly-colored clothing and attitude.
5. Speak basics of the language. Be able to communicate with native people, whether for emergencies, information or just friendly conversation.