

THREE **SOLO** TRIPS FOR **GIRLS**



France

Olympic snowboarder Jenny Jones is at Ticket To Ride's week-long Girls Snowboard Camp in Meribel this April. April 2-9, £1,495, tickettoridegroup.com



Australia

Explore the Northern Territory's Larapinta Trail with World Expedition's Larapinta Goddess Walk adventure. From £1,009, worldexpeditions.com



Bali

The Bliss Sanctuary for Women promises unlimited massages and yoga, plus trips to the town of Ubud. From £1,920, blisssanctuaryforwomen.com



She who dares wins: Travelling on your own demands courage
PIC: GETTY

SPRING INTO ADVENTURE

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I'm alone but never lonely

With International Women's Day this week, **Abigail Butcher** looks back on the joys of exploring the world on her own

TRAVEL memories can fade but I will forever remember the overnight train ride from Delhi to Rajasthan in February, 2011, when England were playing India in the Cricket World Cup.

I edged my way past clusters of men gathered round crackling radio sets, some sitting cross-legged on the floor, others unpacking picnics of curry, rice and lentils while transfixed by the action unfolding over the wires. I eventually found my bed and settled in, virtually the only woman there, and read my book by the light of a head torch to the cheers around me as India inched their way to victory.

In the morning, having emerged into the sunlight, I was met at the station by the owner of Castle Bijaipur hotel, where I spent four days camping beside a lake, practising yoga and riding spirited Marwari horses around poppy fields. And all alone. Not lonely but blissfully, happily alone.

The moment I step into an airport on my own, I am a different person. I experience a heady mix of excitement and empowerment – a strong sense of purpose overtakes the barrage of questions that pervade my everyday life, such as whether I'm doing the right things and achieving enough.

As I get on a plane, settle in to a film (long-haul flights are my favourite; a time to sit still and reflect), I am focused, I have a plan. I'm not

afraid to go anywhere. I respect local customs and take the same precautions as any other traveller, no matter the gender. I walk tall and connect with people I may not have even noticed if I was with a companion.

Often, in my job as an adventure travel writer, I'm the only woman in a man's world. I felt intimidated when I started out but after years of solo travel, I am confident and strong.

In January, I found myself standing on the edge of a couloir – a narrow corridor in the mountains of Italy with a group of 15 male skiers. I had to jump into the five-metre strip of snow with absolutely no room for error.

I was first down after the mountain guide, initially jumping my turns but quickly turning more fluidly.

Finally, I saw the couloir open up into a wide snowfield, so I pointed my ski tips down and whooped all the way. I did it as well, if not better, than some of the guys behind me.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day on Wednesday is 'be bold for change', which ties in nicely with my desire for a new adventure.

I'm thinking of heli-skiing in Alaska or running a desert marathon. But whatever I choose, I know I will continue to conquer my fears and experience what the world has to offer, all by myself if necessary.



Lone ranger: Abigail on horseback

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