

If you've been around as long as I have, you remember the opening line of that great Rodgers and Hammerstein song, "You'll Never Walk Alone" from "Carousel: When you walk through the storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark. When traveling, you really should be afraid of the dark. However, if you're planning to go single, the first tip is that you never walk alone.

The world today is a far darker place than it was decades ago during your student days, when you could backpack alone just about anywhere. Remember happily traipsing through the Paris Latin Quarter, the Alps, the Gobi Desert, Greenwich Village, Shanghai's Bund, Golden Gate Park, Acapulco waterfront or the Casbah in Marrakesh.

Unfortunately, increasing street crime, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, anti-American attitudes and the world in an economic crisis have made travel much less simple and attractive as it once was. You don't have to stay home hiding under the bed, but when you do venture out, always be aware of your surroundings and be with at least one other person.

If you're planning a trip to a destination that has any hint of danger for a single senior walking the streets, take along one friend or family member. Use the old summer camp buddy system, where each senior knows where the other is at all times, including bathroom breaks. Traveling with groups is safer, so before you make plans to go as a single, check with your travel agent, church, school or other local organization to look for group travel plans that may appeal to you.

Wandering around the Casbah in a gang of 30 other tourists is a lot safer than just one little old 55-plus doing it alone. The internet is also a great source of hundreds of options for group senior travel.

Since our retirement, after at least 15 sea voyages and other foreign travels, we've found that most safest, all-inclusive vacation source is cruising. All cruise ships, which are usually chock full of seniors, have great programs for singles. Gathering at meals, social events, exercise programs, entertainment, shore excursions and other activities are natural magnets for singles to meet, greet and mingle.

Although it may not be for every single mature woman or widow, some cruises feature male ship crew members who serve as escorts at dances and excursions. If you saw the final movie by that late great pair of actors, Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, "Out To Sea", it gives a hilarious version of the shipboard male escort service.

Cruise lines don't provide the same escort service to single male travelers, because as travel statistics show, the ratio of single women to single men aboard ship is at least 75 vs 25 percent. Anyway, for some social customs, hiring women escorts for single male travelers too often has a whole different meaning.