

either. 'I'm leaving at 7.45am tomorrow,' one of my housemates texted at 11.45pm. 'Just checking that's OK shower-wise?' Sighing, I couldn't believe things had got to this stage. Scheduling a shower? Really?

I felt a sudden urge to run away. Even the places I thought of as 'relaxing' had become stressful. Likewise, the 'fun' stuff I used to get excited about had lost its appeal, with plans made weeks in advance via Doodle schedules or a million WhatsApp messages. I felt jaded, uninspired and, well, a bit sad. So the next morning, I did something reckless. Without saying a word to anyone, I booked a week's holiday to Mauritius, on my own. The lure of lolling about in sun, sea and solitude with nobody to answer to had me hooked. And thanks to a serendipitous student loan reimbursement a week earlier, I could just about afford it, too.

I'm not alone. Stats say around 38% of vacationers now holiday solo – a figure that's been steadily rising, with experts estimating nearly 60% of solo holidaymakers are female. 'We're seeing large volumes of global travellers searching for solo trips this summer,' reports Jim Brigden of Sojern. 'Almost six in 10 of our European travellers searching for long-haul summer holidays are going alone, and nearly half of Europeans planning short-haul holidays, too.'

Not all of them are lazy beach-loungers like me, either. 'We've seen a significant rise in single females on adventure holidays,' says Michael Edwards of Intrepid Travel. 'Last year, 40% of our customers travelled solo and most were women – it's becoming much more common.' So common, in fact, that dedicated companies such as Solos Holidays have reported a 15% increase in bookings this year compared to last.

So what's making so many women swap group villa holidays for single suites? Psychologist Honey Langcaster-James thinks social claustrophobia is at play. 'In 2016, most of us are constantly surrounded by people and face demands on all levels. Many women feel a sense of not being able to escape or get privacy, always prioritising other people's needs above their own. Tuning into your own needs can be

incredibly difficult while juggling a career, family or relationship – holidaying alone is a way of nourishing yourself emotionally.'

I have to agree. While unnerving at first, padding down to breakfast or for a dip in the sea whenever I wanted felt luxurious. As did devouring book after book from my lounge, or ordering late-night room service. And to my surprise, I didn't find myself bored or lonely once. In fact, as I sat waiting to board my flight home, I gave a tiny inward cheer – I really did feel calmer, recharged and rebooted. Like I was ready to throw myself back into life with gusto.

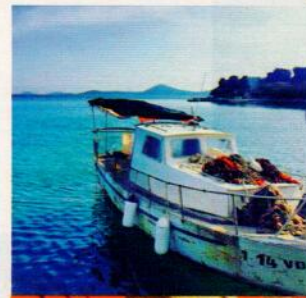
It's not only singletons who gain from alone time, either – holidaying solo can be beneficial for people in relationships. 'When we're around others too long, we crave solitude, which can put a strain on a relationship,' says Honey. 'Having time apart to prioritise yourself can really refresh a relationship – you'll find yourself viewing your other half with a new level of enthusiasm.'

It's something blogger Laura Hyatt, 24, does regularly. 'I've taken 10 solo trips without my boyfriend in the last year – most recently to Dubrovnik for 10 days. While my job enables me to take holidays when I choose, my boyfriend's job is much less

flexible. I think it's vital to look after yourself and a little distance in a relationship is healthy. Plus, we have so much more to talk about when I get back.'

Reading this and wondering whether to take the plunge? If you find yourself becoming easily (or disproportionately) irritated with people around you, you're likely to benefit. 'Retreating to quiet areas like your bedroom more often than normal, or inwardly sighing when your housemates or partner return home, are key signs that you're in urgent need of space and time alone,' says Honey. 'The same goes for fantasising about "escaping life" and running away.' In which case, a 'spacecation' could be exactly what you're crying out for. The only *teeny-tiny* downside? Dodgy tan lines. Applying sun lotion to your own back can be a bloody nightmare... ■

Have you been on your own 'spacecation'? Let us know at feedback@graziemagazine.co.uk



FLYING SOLO SAFELY

'Safety might be the furthest thing on your mind as you lay back on your lounge, but it pays to think ahead,' says independent travel security consultant **Sophie Harwood of Betravelwise.com.**

- **Be bling-savvy** 'In certain locations (Europe, North America or South Africa) I'll wear a 'wedding' band to discourage unwanted male attention. In less economically developed countries, I'll ditch prominent jewellery altogether to avoid being targeted by opportunists.'

- **Stay in touch** 'Give a friend or relative a copy of your itinerary – including flight details and hotel name – agreeing to check in once a day. While you might be dying to disconnect, it's important somebody knows where you are.'

- **Arm yourself** 'Statistics from the Home Office show carrying a personal alarm gives you a 97% higher chance of warding off an attack. Chances are you'll never use it, but the peace of mind is invaluable. (I rate safe-girl.co.uk.)'